Black Hat Org. (trademark pending)

by FallinForAGuyFellDownFromTheSky

Summary

What started out as an impromptu coffee outing morphs into the most outlandish job offer Flug has ever gotten. What started as a simple recruitment in the quest for world domination becomes the most surprising working relationship Black Hat has ever had. One might even start thinking of it as an actual "relationship". A certain woman with two-toned hair certainly seems to think it is.

Now if only the three of them could start being honest with each other (and themselves), they might actually get somewhere.

An AU fic about the Villainous cast in college and how the Black Hat Organization came together. Changes included a cross-dressing Flug, a human Black Hat, and a Demencia with slightly more sanity. For now.

(Updated summary and warnings, is now more accurate to the plot of this story.)

This fic is currently on hold. So if you're new here, the time to binge is now!
Notes

I've changed the summary in the hopes of being more accurate to the story. As well as the warnings. It's gonna get intense peoples, I hope you enjoy the ride.
The Proposal

Chapter Summary

My first fanfic. No, not my first Villainous fanfic, my FIRST fanfic. So forgive me if it sucks

Edit Because It Took me Forever to Come Up With a Good Summary: Two guys on a coffee date, getting acquainted and plotting world domination. You know, typical things you do when you meet someone.

I swear it picks up after this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After the third time of the extremely black man (not black as in African, although maybe he was) repeating his name to the young engineering student, they had both nearly given up. The gap between them seemed too far to reach across.

The man’s skin was an ashy dark gray, so much so that it hardly looked like it could be a natural skin tone. It concerned the younger of the two, but he thought it would be rude to bring it up or even ask about. The same went for his ears and nose, which were either unusually small or completely nonexistent. There was also the matter of the man’s teeth, which if the inventor wasn’t mistaken seemed to be exceedingly sharp and fang-like. There was also the possibility that the black man (was that a politically correct term?) sitting across from him had only one functioning eye. His right eye gazed past his black coffee towards his younger acquaintance while the left was hidden behind an opaque monocle.

How the monocle stayed on his face with no nose or ears was a mystery to the nervous (and slightly irritated) man with the light brown hair, sipping anxiously from a latte with enough cream and sugar to make a chocolate bar jealous.

“I’m sorry,” he said after swallowing another gulp of caffeine and sugar. “Could you say it one more time?”

The older man (whose exact age wasn’t known, but it was unlikely he was also in his early 20s) scowled at him and repeated his name angrily. It was no use. The brunette still didn’t quite understand the sounds coming from the very annoyed and sharply dressed man occupying the seat across from him.
Perhaps it was the language barrier, this man had just recently transferred into Universidad Nacional de Estudios de Héroes y Villanos de Mexico (UNEVM) from a country no one seemed to have ever heard of. Nor could anyone besides him seem to be able to pronounce it. Or his own name. His Spanish was also very rough, and he often asked for translations in class and in conversation. Not in his native language, but in various other languages he seemed to be a bit more fluent in, such as English or Italian. He also seemed to know a bit of Portuguese.

When the younger man shook his head again he groaned exasperatedly. “For Peter's sake, it isn’t that difficult, Flug!”

“You don’t know what my name is either.” The man, whose name was NOT Flug, replied. “And I think you meant ‘Pete’s’ sake.” He added under his breath.

“Peter, Pete, it’s all the same!” The man said, reaching one hand up to ensure the top hat he wore on his head didn’t fall off from his excited movements. How he heard that with no ears was unclear, but served as more tangible proof that he could, in fact, hear him. The young man thought maybe he was reading his lips. “And what do you mean? Your name is Flug.”

“No, it isn’t.” Not-Flug responded, taking another sip. He tried to be mindful of the scars lining the right corner of his mouth, they tended to re-open if he did things like expose them to foods that were very hot or very cold. Mainly because they made him open his mouth wider, which is what REALLY opened them up again. And it was always such a mess when they did that. They’d start by splitting his mouth open, then curl up his cheek to join the crosshatch of scars near his right eye. It was somewhat hidden when he wore his goggles (prescription, much like the horn-rimmed frames he wore in his daily life), but otherwise everyone could see the light cobwebs adorning his tan face.

His companion with the garbled name cocked his head in confusion. It was almost comical. “But then, why does everyone call you that?”

He sighed. “It’s a long story.”

“I have got time.”

“Look, it’s just a dumb nickname that’s stuck with me forever ok?”

There was a pause. “A... Nick name?” the man asked. “Who is Nick?”

It took a lot of control for the man not to slap the slap the top hat off of the others head. Or slap himself in the face.

“There is no Nick, it’s a nickname. It’s a…” He figured it’d be better to use a very direct definition. “A substitute for a proper name. It’s usually meant as a sort of joke.”

“Ah, I see.” The dark man said nodding thoughtfully. “Then I have a nickname as well.”
The man with the light brown hair, known to all his classmates as “Flug”, looked up surprised. “You do?”

“Yes, after a few months in New Orleans the locals started calling me ‘Black Hat’.” He gestured to his black top hat. “Not many could pronounce my name there, either. And the ones who could were rather elderly, and had trouble being understood as well.”

“Black Hat,” Flug said, as he took another sip of his latte. He considered it, it seemed a fitting name. Even if it was a bit awkward to use English words.

He took in the man across from him again. The dark skin, the lack of facial features, the sharp black suit that looked to be hand tailored, the red dress shirt that matched well with both the black and the red band in the top hat on his head. Even the coffee, black, seemed to be right for this man.

“Ok then, Black Hat it is.” He said.

Black Hat huffed. “At least you have SOMETHING to call me by now, Flug.”

Another moment of silence. “Oh, yes, so why does everyone call you Flug if that isn’t your name?”

Damn. He’d hoped Black Hat had forgotten.

“My last name is Flugslys,” He said with a sigh. “Growing up, the other kids could only really pronounce the ‘Flug’. And it just stuck.”

“And your first name?”

“Rocinante.”

“Roc-ci...Roci-n...cin...Rocin-an...ante?” Black Hat struggled to get the syllables out of his mouth. How was it he could make that garbled mashup of his name roll off his tongue with ease but saying ‘Rocinante’ was difficult?

“Just...call me Flug.” He said.

Black Hat rolled his eyes. Flug got the feeling he was think Hey, I at least made an attempt to pronounce your name. He supposed that was fair. He didn’t have the confidence to so much as try to replicate the guttural sounds of Black Hat’s name.

“So, Flug,” Black Hat said. “Now that that’s out of the way, I wanted to talk to you about joining a sort of organization I’m in the process of making.” The “organization” was said in English, while the rest was said in Spanish. Flug guessed that he didn’t know the Spanish word was just
“organización”.

“What kind of organization?”

“Oh that’s how you say it?” Black Hat asked. “Good, good. Well I guess you could say it’s a sort of, uh... *manufacturing* and... *delivering* company.”

It was a good thing Flug knew English, because otherwise he was certain the two of them would never be able to get through a conversation.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I haven’t worked out all the details but what I’m trying to do is...uh...” He struggled to find the words. Black Hat looked at Flug with a rather odd look on his face. “You may think I’m crazy.”

“Tell me anyway.” Flug said nonchalantly.

“Well...I want to rule the world.”

It took every ounce of self control for Flug to NOT spit out his coffee in shock. He did however, choke on the hot liquid. Burning his throat and causing a few of the delicate scars near his mouth to open up. He quickly tried to look around and make sure no one else heard what Black Hat had just said. While the universidad they both attended offered studies of both heroes and villains, it was common knowledge that it was implied ALL would be future heroes. Or assist heroes. No one came in declaring to be a villain!

*Great,* he thought. *Just great.*

Before Flug could open his mouth to ask *What the hell?*, Black Hat continued. “Yes, I know, *unconventional*. But it’s my dream and no one will stop me from so much as trying.”

Flug found that admirable, despite the term “unconventional” being the understatement of the year. He had to admire the man’s resolve to achieving his goal. Even if it was world domination.

*And he wants me to join him. I’m being recruited by an aspiring villain.*

“O-ok so...you want to...rule the world?” He asked, trying to stem the blood flow from his now-open wound. Black Hat nodded eagerly.
“What...exactly...in your mind...does that involve?”

“Having the leaders of the world at my beck and call. Being able to put the world economy at a standstill at a moments notice. The power to move vast armies at my command. Have everyone so reliant on me that none dare to oppose me.” Black Hat said with a menacing grin.

*So you want to be the next Google,* Flug thought.

“And the way to do that is...what again?” He asked incredulously.

Black Hat handed him a few napkins from the table, which he accepted. “I’ve been studying the way the world works. The phrase *money makes the world go ‘round’*? You could say I took it to heart.”

Flug held the napkins to the right corner of his mouth. He felt like the blood was beginning to clot, which was good.

“I’ve come into money these past few years, and I’ve spent my time trying to learn all that I can about how exactly it works in practice.” Black Hat continued. He talked with his hands a lot, making many hand gestures.

“Which is why I’ve come to study here, as a business major. Or perhaps economics. I haven’t decided which would be more beneficial. I considered politics but few positions are as powerful or permanent as I want.”

“You could overthrow a country,” Flug mumbled. “Change the governing system.”

Black Hat gasped. “I thought of that as well! But I couldn’t do it publicly. Would be very messy and other countries would surely step in.” He paused. “Unless it started with small countries. Ones with few allies or military power…”

*Oh god I wasn’t serious.* Flug thought. *What have I done?*

“Let’s go back to your business versus economics major possibilities.” Flug said, trying to change the subject. “Studying those will help you take over the world...how?”

“It’s very simple, Flug!” Black Hat said. “I want to become the manufacturer and distributor of, well, anything. Weapons, luxury items, basic necessities, if the people demand it, I want to be the one who has it! I want to be the *Numero Uno* supplier of Villains worldwide!”

“Ok so, you want to create your own company brand-”
“Yes!”
“-dominate the black market with your wares-”
“Of course!”
“-have all other villains reliant on you for ‘everything’-”
“Correct!”
“-including basic human needs-”
“Well, yes.”
“-and then you will...rule the world?”

“Yes, Flug!” Black Hat said excitedly. “With all villains in the world dependant on me for all of their needs, I would control the underworld economy! Then none would dare compete or refuse me my demands!”

Black Hat sat back in his seat, proud of his plan. He looked at Flug with a smile on his face, like he was expecting Flug to shower him with praises and beg him for the honor of joining his team.

Flug himself chugged the rest of his sweet latte. It had a slightly metallic taste now, maybe some of his blood had mixed in with his sugary caffeine drink. He checked the napkin, nothing but dried blood, good.

“Honestly, to tell you the truth, Black Hat,” Flug said. “I just don’t see it.”

Black Hat’s face fell. “What?”

“I see where you’re going, and it makes rudimentary sense, but on a grand scale I don’t think it’ll work.”

“Rudimentary?” Black Hat asked, his face scrunched up in confusion.

“Basic.” Flug said. “On a basic level it makes sense and it could work in a small setting, but trying to do the same thing on a planetary scale, with hundreds, no MILLIONS, of competing markets and differing economies from place to place, just...no. It’s not happening.”

Black Hat squeezed his cup with so much force Flug thought he might shatter it completely in his hand. He quickly said “B-but it has potential!” in the hopes of calming him down.

It wasn’t calming him down. He thought quick.

“Um, uh, oh! Y-you said you h-haven’t worked out all the d-d-d-d-details yet, right?”
“Riiiiight,” BlackHat said.

“Well, well, that’s just it! The details! If you figure those out, that’ll s-surely fix all the problems I c-ould find!”

Black Hat stopped gripping his cup so tightly. “You really mean it?”

“H-honest!”

The man in the top hat and black suit seemed to think about this for a few seconds. He lightly stroked his chin with his thumb and looked at Flug. Really looked at Flug.

It made Flug self-conscious. He was always embarrassed by the scars on his face. They did nothing but remind him of his past failures. But there were other things. His one crooked tooth, that they’d never had the money to fix when he was young. The splotchy splatter of freckles across the non-scared side of his face, which popped up in between the scars on the other, where they could. He even felt awkward about his clothes. He wasn’t from money, but it wasn’t like his family just barely made enough to get by. Black Hat, though. He was dressed sharply, smartly, and suavely. Who wears a suit and top hat anymore anyway?

And seeing him so visibly angry, literally shaking with anger, it had made his stutter come back. He thought he had finally kicked the embarrassing quirk after high school. That certainly wasn’t helping his self-esteem.

Black Hat spoke after what seemed like hours, but was probably only a few seconds. “I think you’re right, Flug.”

“Huh?” said man asked in confusion.

“My plan is far too...rudimentary, to succeed.” He admitted with a defeated sigh. He eyed what remained of his black coffee and gulped the rest of it down in one go.

“Black Hat, I’m sorry.” Flug said. “I didn’t mean to insult you or your dream. I was just-”

Black Hat held up a hand, looking very angry again. Flug quickly shut his mouth.

“I know it’s too semplice e basilare to attempt at a large scale right now.” He said, breaking into Italian for a change. Flug could only assume he meant he understood how his plan was flawed. “That’s why I’m here. I know I can’t just jump into my plan of world domination. But-” Black Hat broke off here, bringing his hands together on the table in front of him. “-we all have to start somewhere, no? I have chosen to start here. With you.”

“With...me?” Flug asked. Oh, that was right. That was the entire point of their coffee...date? No, no, no, this wasn’t a date. This was just two men, in college, getting coffee together at (what time was it?) 9:00 at night, discussing their plans for world domination.
“Sí, Flug, you.” Black Hat said. “I mentioned that I was in the process of creating my dream organization, right?” Flug nodded.

“Well, the thing is…” He trailed off, wringing his hands. “I’ve really only just started and...thereisnooneelse.” He said quickly.

Flug stared at him. There is no one else? ¿Nadie mas? It’s just us? Us two? The two of us against the world?

Flug must’ve been making a really stupid face because Black Hat got angry again. “Well, it’s just me right now!” Oh, right, I haven’t said yes yet. I don’t count. Flug thought.

“But, if...you wanted to join me or whatever that’d be fine, I guess…” He mumbled, playing with his fingers.

Flug quickly looked away, hoping he hadn’t been blushing as hard as it felt he was. Maybe his scar was still bleeding. Maybe it would stop the blood from rushing to his cheeks. Maybe.

“So, uh, Black Hat,” He mumbled, trying to pass it off as a cough. “W-what is it you w-want me to do for you?” Oh jeez his stutter! And why did he phrase it like that!?

Flug had a quick flash of himself, blushing like one of the girls in the animes he watched, with one hand up to his cheek, his eyes half lidded. In a maid outfit. What would you like me to do for you, Master? He said in a soft and delicate voice.

OH GOD WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?!

Flug felt him face heat up. If Black Hat noticed or thought anything of it he didn’t bring it up.

“Well, the best way I can think of to dominate the black market is to drive my competition out of business. How I plan to do that is by offering equal quality items at a cheaper price or superior items at the same price. Only when the competing brand is taken out will we be able to raise prices.” Black Hat said pragmatically.

“Well, ok, that makes sense.” Flug said, hoping his blush had gone down. “And I come in…?”

“You!” Black Hat said pointing to him dramatically. “You are the one I want to design my wares!”
“...Me?”

“Yes, you!” Black Hat said, like it should be obvious. “You’re a genius inventor from what everyone says, you’ve been participating in the Engineering Club here since before you were even enrolled, a machine you designed as a high school freshman got you a scholarship, and from what I gather the only reason you do not advance in your field is because you make no attempt to! You are my first and only choice as head scientist!”

“Head...scientist?” Flug asked.

“Yes,” Black Hat said, looking like the devil about to seal a deal with an unsuspecting mortal man. “I mentioned I’ve come into money, ¿sí? I can fund anything you wish to research, any resources you need to make my products better, I will give you. Whatever workspace you need in order to maximize productivity, I’ll get it. It’s an investment to BOTH our futures, no? I’ll pour as much as I feasibly can into you.”

Flug’s head was swimming. It was like this man he barely knew was offering him the world on a silver platter. All he had to do was help him rule it. And if he did? If Black Hat ever did actually achieve his dream of controlling the world? What would Flug be? His head scientist? Most Valuable Employee? Some huge and important position with a title that gave him power and status?

“So, Flug, what do you say?”

It was all too much.

Far too much.

Too much to take in at once.

“B-Black Hat?” He said, feeling faint.

“Yes?” Said man asked excitedly, hoping for a more positive reaction this time to his proposition.

“Can...can I think this over?” Flug raised a hand to his forehead, brushing against more of his shameful scars. “This is...a l-l-lot to take in. A lot to consid-d-der.” His head began to twitch and shake from his stuttering.

“Flug, are you okay?” Black Hat asked, looking genuinely concerned for the young man. “You look malato.”

Flug didn’t know what “malato” meant but he assumed it meant he looked like trash. “I-I-I’ll be f-f-f-fine.” Both his stutter and head-jerking were getting worse. “Let me j-j-just g-go home and rest a b-b-bit. I’m sure I’ll be fine in the m-morning.”
“Sure thing,” Black Hat, getting up from his seat to help his new acquaintance to his feet. “You can give me an answer tomorrow, here,” He pulled out a pen and scribbled a bunch of numbers onto Flug’s hand. “Do you need help getting home?”

“N-n-n-n-no, tha-a-nks-s.” Flug said, trying and failing to sound convincing. “I s-should be able to w-wa-wa-wa-walk.” Those damn w’s. They were always the letter he had the most trouble with.

“If you’re sure.” Black Hat said.

With that, the two men parted ways from the coffee shop. Rocinante Flugsly made it home with minimal stumbling and was able to get in without dropping his apartment keys a million times. He made it to his room silently and stripped until he was in nothing but lacy women’s undergarments from the waist down. He put on an old t-shirt to cover his bare slim chest and fell into bed, completely drained.

Chapter End Notes

Hi. I'm Fallin. I'm going to explain what you just read.

In my mind, they're both speaking Spanish throughout all of this. Except when certain words are in bold, which is usually when Black Hat breaks into another language because his Spanish isn't perfect at this point. Mainly here he breaks into English and Italian.

Translation:

semplice e basilare = simple and basic (Italian)
malato = sick (Italian)
Universidad Nacional de Estudios de Héroe y Villano de Mexico = National University of Hero and Villain Studies of Mexico (Spanish)
¿Nadie mas? = No one else? (Spanish)
The Day Senpai Noticed Me

Chapter Summary

Flug deals with his sexuality. And family baggage. And a man who is perfection personified. Sadly, we're not talking about Black Hat.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rocinante Flugslys moved out of his parents' house the moment he was legally able to. There were just certain things in his life that his parents simply could never accept, and he’d come to terms with that. He’d come to understand that his mother and father would not tolerate him under their roof if he came out and told them the truth about himself.

So he didn’t.

He never told them about his fascination with Japanese anime, he never told them about wearing women’s underwear, and he CERTAINLY never told them he was gay.

The anime was probably the least of his worries. He was just a bit embarrassed by all the absurdist and sexual humor. He doubted his strict Catholic family would approve.

Although in hindsight, it might’ve given a better explanation as to why he spent so much time locked in his room.

The real reason for that was the other thing he kept from his parents. His preferred undergarments.

His mother had made him go to the mall for her once while his father was at work and she was stuck cooking dinner, and she’d asked him to pick her up a pack of panties. Nothing gaudy or revealing, she was far too modest for that, even in marriage. But Rocinante felt the odd urge to wear them himself. So, he paid for the extra pack and snuck it in with a bag filled with chips and magazines. Typical teenage treasures.

He slipped them on nervously, confused as to why he felt the need to wear them. But he found them very comfortable. Much softer than his usual briefs. The lack of space didn’t bother him, if anything it made them feel snug on his body. He started to take over laundry duty so that his mother never came across them. She seemed to appreciate one less thing on her plate. His father rolled his eyes and called it “women’s work,” but it was obvious he was also grateful that his son took up a household chore without even being asked.
Now that Flug was out on his own, he’d taken things up a notch. Instead of just plain panties from
the mall, he would sometimes go into lingerie shops and pick out things that caught his eye. He
found a particular fondness for lace, and even broadened his horizons by adding stockings, garter
belts, and one or two corsets to his wardrobe. Bralettes, as well as anything else that wasn’t waist-
level or below, just didn’t have the same appeal.

The final divide between his parents and himself, the thing they’d never in a million years accept
from him, was his sexuality.

There was no sudden moment where he realized he wasn’t attracted to girls. No gay experience that
turned him queer. No mistaken moment of passion that felt so wrong but so right.

It was just...he noticed a boy in gym class. Noticed him as if he had never seen another male before.
And then another. And a few others. Nothing like a crush, it was just Rocinante taking notice of the
other boys around him.

He noticed how the girls were changing. But they stirred nothing within him. But the boys…

They made him...warm.

It was like being wrapped up in an electric blanket. It was a warmth that started at the very core of
his being and spread its way throughout his body before finally reaching his arms and making his
hair stand on end.

Like being struck by lightning and not getting hurt.

His strict Catholic parents would never have it. They most likely wouldn’t even consider it an
experimental phase, but as a sin worthy of kicking out and cutting off their one and only son.

So he never told them. He focused on his studies, rolled his eyes at his father’s playful jokes about all
the college girls looking for a smart young man, and acted like he was no different from any other
straight male.

At his new home, the cheap little apartment he afforded with the help of his parents and part of his
part-time salary, he walked around leisurely in panties, stockings, and occasionally, when he was
feeling daring, something even closer to lingerie. Or all of it. It wasn’t like anyone was going to stop
him in his own home.

No one ever stopped by or visited either. Rocinante Flugslys had the social life of a hermit crab. He
went to class, he stopped by the Robotics Lab as often as he could, he went to work his part-time
shifts, and he went home.
The extent of his social interaction was his Engineering Club. He was one of their chief inventors after all. He tried to show up whenever he could for as long as he could. The club was always trying to come up with new inventions to aid their fellow heroes in the fight against the forces of evil.

Oh yeah, Flug thought groggily. The forces of evil just offered me a job in their start-up company last night.

Flug walked around his kitchen in nothing but an old oversized T-shirt and his typical undergarments. The shirt was a faded blue with the remnants of an airplane design on the front. His choppy light brown hair was sticking up in odd places all around his head, as if he’d been tossing and turning against the sheets all night.

“No more coffee before bed,” He mumbled to himself, while he put in seven scoops of coffee grounds into his coffee maker.

It was safe to say he was developing a caffeine addiction. He could barely function a day without having at least a cup of the stuff in the morning. And maybe a few more cups throughout the day...And it was steadily taking more and more coffee to have any sort of effect on him.

While he waited for his morning cup of Joe he actually got dressed. Switching the black lace panties for a satin red pair. And switching to red fishnet stockings that he clipped up to his thighs with the garter belt.

Then he put on his ACTUAL clothes. Which were the normal jeans and a T-Shirt.

But having his panties and stockings on under when no one was the wiser made him feel alive.

The majority of the rest of the day was a blur. Morning shift, go back home to get his books, coffee break, afternoon class, quick lunch (with espresso), next class, and then he could finally rest and relax for the evening by going to his favorite place on campus; the Robotics Lab.

The Robotics Lab of UNEHVM (just rolls right off the tongue, doesn’t it?) was the primary meeting place of both the Robotics and the Engineering Clubs. They tried to alternate the days they’d be in there, so that they had the lab mostly to themselves and it wasn’t as hectic, which didn’t always work out but for the most part it was a system that worked.

Today the Engineering Club had the lab(along with anyone who needed to work on a class project), and according to the schedule posted by the door they had claimed it for the next two days as well.
Noice! Flug thought. *We could actually make some real progress!*

Flug didn’t work well with what he called “rented space”. It was hard for him to focus when he knew he could only stay in one place for so long. He really hated packing up projects and moving them. It was such a hassle.

Oddly enough it was the exact opposite with deadlines. Having an limited time for his project was no problem as long as he didn’t have to move. He was perfectly capable of sitting in one spot for hours to get something done in time. He’d even started timing his bathroom and coffee breaks to ensure the majority of his time was spent working. If his memory was right, his smallest total break time was about seven minutes out of ten hour work session.

Some would call this insanity. Flug called it his work ethic.

He really couldn’t stand to leave things unfinished. He only stopped working when the project was done or he’d made a breakthrough big enough to justify a few hours sleep.

There were also the times where he passed out, but that’s besides the point.

The current project of the Engineering Club was their collaboration with the so-called “Gifted” program. One Flug had no problem with, except for one man.

Aurelio Cruz.

Lio, to his friends.

Flug was not one of his friends.

Cruz was someone Flug had known (or rather, *known of*) since middle school. That was when the “Gifted” people started to really show off.

To be blunt, Aurelio had an ability. A superpower. A Gift.

And boy did he make sure everyone around him knew it.
He was the kind of guy who walked around like he owned the place, no matter where he was. The kind of guy who thinks he’s God’s gift to women. The kind of guy to put #bendito on every one of his selfies unironically.

Not that Flug looked at his selfies. Or even followed him. On social media, that is! He didn’t follow him around in real life either! He was sure Aurelio Cruz had no idea he even existed!

Until, of course, the Engineering Club Jefe announced their collaboration with a few of the Gifted students. And he just happened to be one of them.

The project itself was actually something Flug was interested in. During the Fall semester, their goal would be to design a device capable of subduing at least one of their fellow students. Flug made it his personal goal to subdue at least five of the twenty subjects who were participating.

Did devices made to subdue individuals with gifts already exist? Yes.

Had anyone in the club built one from scratch before? No.

And that’s where the intrigue and the fun came from. They would actually get a chance to build something really significant this time! Flug’s mind was flooded with ideas of how to incapacitate his fellow students. As they filed in one by one the day their little project was announced, he was already taking mental notes of them and the best ways to counteract their gifts.

Oh her, that’s...that’s Natalia! Her gift was super speed, wasn’t it? Maybe something that wraps around her legs, trips her up...or something like oil slick. But sticky! So she can’t move her legs! Actually why stop there? Something to totally bind her body...

Oh uh, Rodriguez! Invisibility! That’ll be tricky. I’ll need a proper way to locate him first, infrared? And then, what, cover him in flour? No, no, no, not good enough.

Ok I actually don’t know her, or her gift. Nice shoes though.

Jason Mendez, controls wind. Maybe studying his winds like a tornado will give me some- no wait that’s it! Something he picks up using his gift (like a tornado ) that traps him. And it should also be airtight, so that he can’t use his winds to escape!

Don’t know her name, but going from all the hair and the spots, I’d say she’s a cheetah hybrid. So she’s most likely very fast, but also has very low stamina. I should take advantage of that.

And then HE strutted in. Like he was walking down the damn red carpet.

Thick, jet black hair that was oiled and slicked back except for that one bunch of curls that seemed to
dangle just perfectly right at his eye level. His chiseled face with deep green eyes that contrasted marvelously with his deep tan, the long eyelashes, the perfect shape of his lips, and the stubble on his chin that was just the perfect middle ground between being well-kept and rugged, that lined his jawline that was so sharp it COULD CUT THINGS!

His body, although not flaunted (as much) that day, was also clearly as chiseled as his face. Maybe more so, if that was even possible when you have the face of Narcissus.

Ok it was possibly. The man had the body of Adonis.

Even beneath a plain black dress shirt and dark blue jeans, he just seemed so...large.

So intimidating. So masculine.

So... HOT.

Flug stopped paying attention to their subjects after that. There were a few more people whose names and gifts he knew, but he hardly noticed them. Just a very short note in his mind.

Monica, anti-gravity.

Stephanie, light manipulation.

Eric, acidic fluids. Messy.

Nothing was taking away his focus on the man who waltz into the peaceful lab Flug spent his free time in. Nothing.

Aurelio Cruz.

His gift wasn’t telekinesis. But then again it kind of was.

His Gift was the ability to control another person’s body through touch. It was like once he touched you, it didn’t matter what else happened. Your body was his. He touched you, it didn’t matter where or how or for how long as long as it was skin on skin, and he could move your body with his mind.
The only surefire way people knew to counteract this was to get out of his range. He had a relatively low sphere of control, only about five meters, so he couldn’t do things like amass an entire army or send someone to attack another person.

Well, not if the other person was far away enough. And Aurelio didn’t go as well.

All of that was a few weeks ago. While Flug still loved going to the Robotics Lab and still loved working on their big project (it wasn’t coming very smoothly but hey where would the fun be if it did?), knowing that Aurelio might be there always made his heart beat about 6000 times faster than usual.

He wasn’t always there. In fact, he was hardly ever there. He had things to do, apparently. Things that were more important than participating in a project he signed up for and agreed he would be a part of.

But sometimes he was there. Sometimes he even took notice of Flug. Nothing special. Nothing more than a casual “Hey, hermano” or “How’s it coming?”, but he did it. He actually spoke to him.

Usually Flug would mumble a response or wave at him, hoping he didn’t look weird your face is covered in scars and you have dorky glasses of course you look weird, and Flug thought maybe things weren’t so bad.

Today, he was there.

Today, he was using his gift.

That wasn’t odd, they’d been having their volunteers use their gifts all the time. To get a better understanding of how they worked, it was best they saw them firsthand.

Or in Aurelio’s case, experienced.

It was another member of the Engineering Club. Tesoro. A bright and bubbly girl with curly auburn hair with streaks of blonde. She didn’t seem bubbly now. Now she seemed almost scared.

Aurelio was clearly too close for comfort. Her panicked expression as he closed the gap between them slowly was evident. No one else did anything. They all seemed frozen in place, transfixed on the scene before them.
Flug didn’t think. He just blurted out “Aurel-l-l-li-o!”

The man in question lifted his head, a look of confusion and mild irritation on his face.

*Oh geez he heard me stutter.* Flug thought, covering his mouth. *Wait, never mind that! Do something!*

“U-u-um, since y-you’re finally sho-w-w-w-wing us your gift...could I be next?” He meekly said, his voice squeaking embarrassingly at the end.

Aurelio stared at him for a second, apparently trying to process what this skinny little man was asking, before grinning widely, like *Finally someone gets it.*

“Well of course you can hermano.” He said, releasing Tesoro. Tesoro immediately ran towards the Jefe, Manuel, who seemed still stuck in place gripping his notepad weakly.

*Madre de Dios, ¿por qué dije eso?* Flug thought.

Aurelio swiftly walked towards him, quickly closing the distance between the two of them. Leaving Flug very little time to ponder this actions, his mental health, or what his next move was.

Aurelio took it upon himself to make the next move, grabbing Flug by the wrist and swiftly pulling their bodies close together.

*Por favor Jesús déjame pasar este día.*

And then Flug was left staring up into his green eyes, noticing the occasional hues of blue in them. The self assured grin that screamed *I’m the best thing in this room right now, and I’ll continue to be until I leave. Then I’ll be the best thing in that room.*

“*Hermanito ,”* Aurelio said with a voice of gold. “I don’t believe I ever got your name.”

“Roc-Rocinante Flugslys.”
“Rocinante,” it spilled from his mouth like a velvet curtain. “Very nice.”

Flug swallowed deep. *I’d like to swallow something else if you know wha-* STOP STOP STOP

Flug swore that if all the blood in his body wasn’t headed south, his face would be as red as a tomato.

“Tell me, Rocinante, do you play?” He asked.

“Play? An instrument? No.” Flug replied between gasping breaths. It was getting harder and harder to breathe the longer he was so close to him. Seriously, why was he so close!? Flug was certain that all it took was the faintest bit of skin contact and his gift could take effect.

Wait, was it working NOW? Was the pressure in his chest (and parts beyond) Aurelio’s doing?

Aurelio himself nodded. Then let Flug go. Flug noticed that he still could not move. He was frozen, like a statue. A very sweaty statue.

Aurelio took a few steps towards the rest of the group. The very useless group of people who did nothing against this man when he was CLEARLY making a woman uncomfortable, and had left the meek Rocinante Flugslys to step in alone.

*Seriously people,* he thought. *I gave you a distraction. Couldn’t one of you do anything? Some back-up would be nice.*

Said Flugslys found his legs moving of their own accord, trailing behind Aurelio like a lost puppy. Making sure he stayed within range, he guessed.

“Tomas!” Aurelio called, gesturing to the telekinetic boy floating himself and his guitar about two meters above them. Tomas was a musician deep down, and always brought his guitar with him wherever he was able. It wasn’t a hassle, in fact it was quite nice having some soothing acoustic ambience music whenever he was around.

“What Lio?”

“Toss me your guitar.”

“You break it you buy it.” Tomas said seriously. Flug got the feeling he would hold every person in
the room responsible if anyone so much as chipped his guitar.

And Flug had a sinking feeling that it would be him.

“I’ll barely touch it.”

“Hmph,” Tomas launched his guitar towards Aurelio and Flug. Flug’s body moved him in front of Aurelio in seconds. Flug had a brief moment of panic and thought that Aurelio was going to use him as a human shield against the musical missile. Hey, it actually wouldn’t have been the first time he’d done that with someone.

Not that Flug knew anything about that.

Instead of taking a guitar to the face, his arm whipped out and caught the instrument by the...whatever the part with the strings was called. The neck? He didn’t know. What he did know was that his palm hurt like hell and the strings were digging into his fingers.

Flug let out a brief yelp of pain, and only NOW were people starting to look like maybe they should intervene.

“Relax, hermano .” Aurelio said, patting him on the shoulder. “I’ve done this dozens of times.”

Yes, I know. This and things way way worse.

Flug took one end of the guitar in his left hand and started strumming the thing. He couldn’t say what notes or chords or whatever it was he was playing, he’d never been interested in learning about music, but it sounded good.

“Aurelio?”

“Yes?”

“D-do you know how to play the guitar?” Flug asked even though he already knew the answer.

“Yes, I do. I played for many years. It never really leaves you.”

“I-is that how you can make me p-p-play it? Since you know how?”

Aurelio paused here. He looked at Flug quizzically. “What do you mean, hermano ?”
“I mean, c-could you make me play an instrument you don’t know how to play?”

Another pause.

“I...actually don’t know.” He finally answered. “Tomas! Do you have any other instruments with you?”

“No, I don’t.” Tomas said, lowering himself to the ground. “And can I have that back now? His fingernails are going to wear out the strings. No offense, guy.”

“None taken,” Flug said.

Flug’s hands stopped playing the guitar. *Another observation, Aurelio can control people and hold conversations at the same time. So he might be able to do certain actions subconsciously* and he held it out loosely. It was picked out of his hand by an unseen force (Tomas) and Flug was left standing empty-handed.

“Anyone else?” Aurelio asked the room. “Anyone got an instrument with them?”

The girl Flug didn’t know at first, the one with the nice shoes, spoke up. “I got a flute.” She held up the black instrument case. “Do you know how to play the flute, Lio?”

He smiled. “I do not. Bring it here, bring it here!”

The girl (who Flug had been introduced to but for the life of him he couldn’t remember her name) made her way over and assembled her flute. He noticed that she took extra care to wipe off the mouthpiece. Flug was thankful for that. While he wasn’t a germaphobe he didn’t want to go swapping spit with some stranger.

The girl handed the flute to Aurelio, trying her best to stay out of his range. Flug was pretty sure she was still in it, though. Five meters may not be all that far, but it was more than enough for a man who knew how to use it. Aurelio took the flute from her gracefully (because this man could trip on a banana peel and it would still look like something out of a ballet) and placed it in Flug’s open palms.

Flug’s hands moved around the thing, trying to figure out where they were supposed to be and what fingers were supposed to cover what holes. He couldn’t move them of his own free will but he still felt them. The hand that had caught the guitar was still sore, and it wasn’t doing him any favors to just move it willy-nilly like it was.
Hurt someone, then move their body. They feel the pain but can do nothing to stop themselves. Diabolical.

At last his hands seemed to have found a position they were comfortable with. Or rather, Aurelio figured that it looked alright to him.

Flug raised the flute to his lips. His lips puckered a bit and…

...nothing happened.

After a moment of silence, Flug himself gave an experimental blow. A horrible screeching sound came from the instrument. Everyone covered their ears, including Aurelio, who had the misfortune of being right next to Flug.

The flute was lowered from his lips. Aurelio grabbed it from his hands and went to give it back to the girl. Brenda? No, that’s not right.

Flug felt himself become in control of his body again. He wasted no time in running away from the spot in front of everyone and finding solace in retreating to his work station.

Well, not his work station specifically, it wasn’t like he owned it or it had dibs. Well, he kind of had dibs. It was his favorite desk in the lab. Mainly because it was out of the way of all the other desks. It gave him a bit of solitude, which he worked best with.

He jotted down notes rapidly. Notes always calmed him.

*Effective range: 5 meters.*

*Extent: Movement. Bodily functions questionable.*

*Limits: What he can do/knows how to do*

*Method: Skin-skin contact.*

*Counter: Cover skin. Block contact. Stay 5m away. Do not enter range.*


Ok the image of Aurelio Cruz in latex was NOT one Flug needed at the moment! If it came to him at
night in bed however, that was no ones business but his own…

“I see you waste no time, eh?” said a voice from behind him.

Flug nearly leapt to the ceiling (which would’ve been impressive seeing as it was ten meters high), and given the owner of the voice, he might’ve been safer if he had.

Aurelio was looming behind him. He was smiling, but it wasn’t a nice smile. Nothing like the faux friendliness or relaxed easy going nature of his usual smile. It was the kind of smile that said _You made me look bad. I will not let that stand._

“O-o-o-oh u-u-um, y-yeah I guess so,” Flug muttered back. Oh god he was making a complete fool of himself! Why was it so hard to form a coherent sentence?!

It had started in high school. Freshman year to be exact. While he had never been a popular guy, he had never really been picked on before. He supposed he’d blended into the background during elementary and middle school. Wasn’t worth noticing.

For whatever reason, that changed as early as the first day.

That’s when his speech impediment began. There was nothing physically wrong with his body or brain, it was something more mental. Psychosomatic. All in his head. He could speak perfectly fine. Until he couldn’t. Which was usually when he was nervous or scared or anxious or around people he wasn’t comfortable with or-

You get the idea.

And he had stopped it. For two years he had gone without a single stutter! Two years! He had stopped talking completely because of his accident (the one that gave him the scars), and when he finally felt comfortable enough to speak, it was clear. Concise. Smooth. Easy. And he’d felt like he had finally kicked it for good.

Until the man called Black Hat had randomly asked him out for coffee (not in that way!), gotten pissed when Flug insulted his “take over the world!” dream, and caused a relapse.

_God why? What did I do to deserve this? Is it because I’m gay? Was it Julio? I’ll have you know I didn’t go far with Julio not after-
“You really get straight to the point, don’t you?” Aurelio asked, shaking Flug out of his thoughts. He realized he was reading his notes from over his shoulder.

“Huh? Oh, w-w-well, yeah. I mean, if I spent t-time on w-w-w-w-writing it would just be less time act-t-tually working, yeah?” He rambled on in his typical way.

“Mmm, I see.” Aurelio said. That predatory look in his deep green eyes was still there. “Latex, though? You’re more kinky than I thought.”

Flug probably turned bright red. Probably. His entire body went numb so he couldn’t really tell. “O-O-OH! No! No no n-n-not at all!” He shook his head vigorously. “I’m not i-into anything like t-that!”

Yeah I’m into wearing fishnets and sexy underwear. Latex isn’t really my thing.

A thought popped into his head. A question about Aurelio he honestly didn’t know for a change.

“Aurelio?”

“Yes?”

“When you take control of a person, is it...does it only…” He struggled to find the right words to describe what he was trying to ask. He figured maybe explaining it further would help.

“You touch a person. As long as they’re within your range you can control them about as much as you want, right?” Aurelio nodded. “When they get out of range, they get control back.” It wasn’t a question, but Aurelio nodded again to confirm. “If they get within range again, can you still control them or do you have to touch them again?”

The reason that Flug didn’t know the answer to this question, was actually very simple if you think about it from the point of view of someone who’d been controlled by Aurelio. Which he now qualified as.

People who Aurelio had controlled tended to never get within range again. Going to extremes to make sure they were never so much as in the same room with him, if it was possible. Seat changes, class transfers, school transfers, there was even a rumor of one kid who up and left Mexico just to make sure he was never near him again.

Of course, no one could prove that last one. Except for those select few who were either dumb enough or insane enough to qualify as his friends, no one stuck around him for long.
And unlike the instrument test, which was something Aurelio had never tried to do, Flug was sure he had tried to control people again.

The man in question gave Flug a puzzled look. Like the question was something kind of weird and odd. Like Flug has done something out of the ordinary. Had no one asked him this before? Was Flug the first to work up the nerve?

Flug could feel himself begin to sweat under the pressure of his gaze. He unconsciously shifted back and forth in his seat.

“You didn’t stutter.’ Aurelio finally said.

“H-huh?” Flug asked, stuttering again.

“You didn’t stutter.” He repeated. “Not even once.”

Flug thought about it. No, as a matter of fact he HADN’T stuttered. Not once! He had said complete sentences! Multiple!

“W-well the stutter is j-just like my nervous tick, I guess you could say.” Flug said, rubbing the back of his head awkwardly. “I actually haven’t stuttered in a while, till recently.”

“Hermano,” Aurelio said, taking his hand. “You don’t need to be nervous around me.” He winked.

Flug thought he would faint, what with every drop of blood rushing either to his cheeks or down his pants. But then Aurelio stopped for a second, noticing something on Flug’s hand.

Huh, what was that? It looked like a phone numb-

Oh. Black Hat.

Black Hat’s phone number.

It occurred to Flug then that he hadn’t showered that morning. As a matter of fact he wasn’t certain when his last shower was. Oh God what did he smell like?

And now Aurelio Cruz, the hottest thing to grace the Earth since magma first flowed on the surface,
is staring at some random phone number on Flug’s (probably sweaty) wrist like Flug actually has a
date. Or a social life. Or does anything besides work, study, and continue working.

Well ok, he goes out for coffee with future supervillains but that was just a one time thing!

Or was it?

Crap, Aurelio is still staring. And it looks like he wants some kind of explanation.

Uh…

UH….

UHHHHHHH…!

“Uhhhhh oh! Oh I almost forgot!” Flug practically screamed, trying not to look like he was fleeing
for his life. And failing miserably. “I was supposed to meet one of my, uh, friends! For coffee! W-
what time is it?” He pulled out his phone dramatically. “Oh, w-would you look at that? I’m late! I
better not keep him waiting! S-s-see you guys later!”

And with that Flug damn near sprinted out of the room.

Leaving everyone in it incredibly confused.

His fellow club members were confused because they knew he would often spend hours longer than
anyone else in the lab. He never made plans to be elsewhere.

The Gifted students were confused because the weird little guy who’d been quiet until today had
suddenly, in the course of a few minutes, made the biggest scene since the great Paper Plate Incident
(which will be mentioned later).

And Aurelio. He was confused because, well, that boy just RAN from him.

Usually people did not flee so quickly. Or openly.

He wanted to spend more time with that one. He was smart, but unsure of himself. He asked all the
right questions, the ones others were too scared to. Like a clever insect. He went in, got what he
needed, and fled.

Oh, and he never did answer his last question, did he?

Yes, they would have to spend more time together, he and this Rocinante Flugslys.

After sprinting halfway across the campus, only stopping there to catch his breath, Flug began to think.

Why on Earth did he do that?
Why was Aurelio Cruz paying attention to HIM of all people?
Why did he do THAT?
Did he really just let someone chase him out of the Robotics Lab? His favorite spot on campus?
What was he going to say to everyone next time he saw them?
Could he really bring himself to show his face back there?

Also, where was his book bag?

After a brief moment of panic, Flug rationalized that he probably left it in the Robotics Lab in his hurry to escape.

Well, now he HAD to go back. Eventually.

It was only about a quarter to six, still early.

Not a bad time for a cup of coffee.

Which reminded him…

After checking that he still had his wallet with him, he went ahead and dialed the number scrawled on his hand. He hoped he hadn’t misread it, or it was going to be an awkward night trying to explain that he got stood up within the span of two minutes.
Oh goddamn it did Black Hat have a class right now?

“Hello?” asked a familiar raspy and garbled voice.

“Black Hat. It’s me, Flug.”

“Oh Flug!” The dark suited man said enthusiastically. “I was starting to think you wouldn’t call! So, have you thought over my offer?”

Flug could practically hear the man’s excited grin through his words. “I’ve thought about it yes,” he said, lying. He’d honestly tried all day not to think about it, but it would pop up then and again in his mind. Like an essay you try desperately to put off until the last minute. The more you try and get your mind off it, the more you worry about it. It didn’t make him any more sure of his ultimate decision.

“Oh bene bene!” Black Hat exclaimed. Flug had...absolutely no clue what it meant. He sounded happy though. “So, tell me, will you accept?”

“Before I do, I want to see you again.” Flug said. The one thing he was sure of was that this needed to be done in person. “Same coffee shop as before?”

“Sure, sure!” Black Hat responded. “Just give me a few minutes, I’ll be there soon! Get me my coffee, black!” He then hung up.

Flug sighed. His heart felt heavy in his chest and his feet felt like lead. His hand was still sore, too. But no matter what, he was seeing this man again. And he would get answers from him.

He needed to be sure he knew just what it was he in for, should he agree.

Translations:

#bendito = #blessed (Spanish)
hermano = brother (Aurelio is like that one frat guy who calls everyone "bro")

Madre de Dios, ¿por qué dije eso? = Mother of God, why did I say that? (Spanish)

Por favor Jesús déjame pasar este día = Please Jesus let me get through this day (Spanish)

bene = good (Italian)
Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Black Hat showed up within fifteen minutes of the phone call. He thanked Flug for the coffee, which was thankfully still warm, and gave an oddly optimistic grin. It was strange to see a man who could be so menacing in Flug’s mind look so giddy.

Flug gulped down his mocha macchiato, slightly burning his throat. It was a good burn, though. The burn of a warm beverage going down your esophagus and into the pit of your stomach. Nothing like the stinging burn of alcohol, like broken glass being poured down your trachea. It was worse the morning after. Like all the glass shards had decided to travel back up and lodge themselves in your larynx.

“So, Flug,” Black Hat said, finally getting the conversation underway. “You said you wanted to see me in person?” He looked giddy with anticipation. Like, Oh boy! The first henchman in my eeeevil black market Amazon!

“Yes. Yes I did.” He took another swig of macchiato, relishing in the faint taste of chocolate it always left him. “I want to make sure I have everything you’re asking of me perfectly clear. You mind if I ask?”

“Oh no! Ask away, please!”

“Ok, just to get in out of the way,” Flug said. “You’re aim is to be a villain, correct?”

“Not just any villain, Flug. The greatest villain in the-”

“Not so loud!” Flug whisper-yelled. “You’ll be caught before you have the change to actually do anything!”

“The greatest villain in the world!” Black Hat whisper-yelled back at him. Holding his fists up a little high, for dramatic effect, Flug guessed.
Why am I not refusing this moron right here and now? I need more proof of this being a terrible decision?

“Yeah ok, ok. And you want me to help you accomplish that, by designing…” he trailed off, leaving Black Hat to fill in the blanks.

“Weapons, tools of destruction, I’ve been thinking security systems and the like would be a good service to provide, perhaps luxury and comfort items if you can. My main focus would be in the weapons department. I feel like that is a market where there will always be a buyer. I also feel it would be good to expand into as many demographics as possible to maximize profit.”

“How do you plan on getting your name out there?” Flug asked, accepting what he would be asked to do.

“Hmm?”

“I mean, you’d be a newcomer. A complete unknown. Do you already have potential buyers in mind?” Before Black Hat could open his mouth he interjected. “I mean specific people.”

“As a matter of fact, yes.” Black Hat said. He paused as he took a sip of his own coffee. “I wasn’t traveling the continents just to expand my worldview. I was also working very hard to form connections and pacts with other villains.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. Many wrote me off, yes, but I did find a few willing to take me into consideration. I still keep in contact with them. Mainly small talk, since I’m not doing anything right now.”

Flug considered this for a moment. Black Hat spoke again. “So, yes, I do have clients in mind already! All that’s necessary is for us to begin production and start getting our name out there, as you put it.”

“Ok, ok,” Flug said, putting his hands up as a calming gesture. “Sorry for doubting you, I just w-wanted to be sure.” Damn it…

“Flug, are you gonna freak out again?” Black Hat asked. “You did this last time, and you did not look well.”

“No, I’m n-not going to freak out. It usually doesn’t get that bad.”

“Is it the coffee?”

“What?”

“Is it the coffee that makes you freak out like that? The caffeine? Should we pick a different meeting spot? Would you prefer tea?”
“No no no the coffee is f-fine.” Flug spoke slowly to minimize his stutter. While the caffeine may be making him more excitable and more prone to “freaking out” as Black Hat put it, it was in no way the cause. “Trust me, my stutter is something I’ve been dealing with for a long time. It’s not the coffee.”

Black Hat looked at him skeptically.

*Hat Man you will have to pry my dark bean life-juice from my cold, dead hands.*

“It’s a response to stress, or anxiety.” Flug went on. “Yeah, maybe coffee could be making it worse, but it’s not the reason it happens. See, not stuttering.”

This seemed to relax the man in the dark suit and red dress shirt. And what seemed to be a light grey vest underneath. Wow, what workmanship. Who was this guy’s tailor? For that matter, did this man own any other clothes? He’d only see him around a few times before he’d approached him, but Flug wasn’t convinced he’d seen Black Hat wearing anything else besides this same suit and top hat.

Maybe he just owned multiple sets of the exact same outfit??

“So, Black Hat,” Flug said, getting the conversation back on track. “It would just be you and me.”

“So far, yes.” Black Hat said, looking away a bit. Maybe he was embarrassed about his glorious future empire of villainy only having one member; Himself.

And Flug, if he accepted. So the boss plus one.

Totally worthy of taking the underworld by storm.

“Do you have anyone else in mind to join?”

“Not really.” Black Hat admitted. “No one else seems likely to join. No villainous tendencies in any of them.” He said disdainfully.

“Really?” Flug asked, mildly surprised. He could think of a few people he could see turning to the dark side. No way was everyone in their school completely morally good.

“It’s not enough to just be in the morally grey area, Flug.” Black Hat said, like he had been reading his mind. “I’m talking real evil intent. Truly malevolent, deep down. Deep in one’s heart and soul.
Naturally, without having to think about it or consider their thoughts before they become actions. Pure *villainy* .”

Both men sipped their cooling coffees while Black Hat’s last statement hung in the air like a dastardly set of laundry.

What the hell kind of analogy was that?

*Pure villainy…*

“It cannot be taught. Cannot be learned. Or unlearned.” Black Hat continued. “As I’ve heard it said, you either have it or you don’t. Naturally, I have it.”

*Well I would hope so, Flug thought. Or else we aren’t going to make much headway with your little plan of world domination.*

“And you, Flug. You have it.”

Flug tensed a bit, taking care to not do something stupid like choke on his coffee or almost do a spit-take.

“W-what makes you say that?” He asked. “I’m just...an average guy.”

“Oh, is that so?” Black Hat asked, grinning widely. Stretching his lips further apart than any normal man should’ve been able to. His teeth were sharp, fang-like, almost needle-like. He asked in a mocking tone, “You’re just an average person?”


He was genuinely surprised he didn’t stutter through every word, even those as short as “yep” and “yes”.

Black Hat fixed him with that mocking stare. The eyebrow raised so far it was nearly hidden by the
brim of his top hat, the slight smirk that just begged to break into a full blown smile, and the unmistakable body language of someone trying very hard not to laugh.

This man was showing all the signs of knowing something that someone (Flug) wanted to keep secret.

But what? Flug’s mind raced through the possibilities. What could there possibly be that was incriminating? Or maybe just something embarrassing?

Black Hat had only appeared in his life no more than a month or so ago at most. And that was just passing by each other for the most part.

Unless...Black Hat had... stalked him?

Ok, factoring in that as a possibility, what could he have found? Flug had no close friends to be off spouting dirty secrets about him. He wasn’t even that close to his parents anymore after moving out. He didn’t do much that made him stand out, let alone anything an aspiring villain would think noteworthy.

Why was this man even interested in him?

Oh yes, that was right, pure villainy. Which he apparently thought he had.

“Look, I hate to break it to you, but I think you have the wrong guy.” Flug said. “I mean, I’ve never done anything evil in my life.”

“Really, Flug? Never?” Black Hat asked, his smile never wavering. He leaned over the table, getting his face as close to Flug as he could. Flug was too transfixed to lean back. Something about that look in his eye made his body freeze.

“Not even back in flight school?”

All the color drained from Flug’s face.

“Have you really never done anything evil?”
Black Hat leaned back down in his seat and finished off the rest of his coffee, black as his hat. Leaving Flug in his own personal bubble to rack his brain.

*He knew.*

*How did he know?*

*How did he find out?*

*Who was left to tell him?*

*Julio would never-*

“Hey, boys!” A cheery female voice called from above, jarring Flug from his internal mental collapse. “Looks like you’re done!”

A waitress, who seemed around Flug’s age but with skin much lighter, stood above the two men. Her hair was dyed two tones. Her bangs, which were cut chopply and covering her right eye, were a bright fuschia color. The rest of her hair seemed to be a sort of neon green pulled back in the longest ponytail Flug had ever seen. How long was this woman’s hair?

The waitress picked up Black Hat’s and Flug’s cups, only then noticing then that he still had a bit left. “Can I get you two a refill?” She asked with a large peppy smile. Flug caught a brief glimpse of what looked to be sharpened canines.

“No thank you, just the check please.” Black Hat said, morphing his face into a calm expression of relaxed elegance.

“You got it! Be right back!” the woman said as she turned. The skirt she wore with her uniform was a bit short. Flug noticed it flitted up a bit as she eagerly strolled away. He faintly wished he wasn’t thinking about how he’d look in a skirt that length.

*Please, can I just be satisfied with my panties?*

Flug stared back at the man across the table from him. He decided he would feign ignorance, to see how much he really knew.
“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He said, putting on a brave face. As if that helped when his face was as white as notebook paper. He decided to start cleaning the lens of his glasses, it was casual enough and he could do it through muscle memory alone, so his hands hardly shook. Even with doom on the horizon.

Black Hat looked back at him with an expression of mock sympathy. Like a parent who caught their child lying and was about to give them their punishment. “You don’t?”

“No, you’ll have to tell me.” He said, laying the bravado on thick.

“Why, the incident three years ago, Ro-ro...Rosh- no that’s not it, Ros-Rosi...Rosin…” He tried in vain to form the syllables of his potential compatriots name. “Roshin...Flug.” He gave up. “What happened back at the air base, Flug.”

*Oh God he DOES know! How did he know about that? How did he find out? I thought I’d been able to erase all data of my involvement as anything else except an unwilling participant. There shouldn’t have been anything available proving me to be responsible.*

For the death of thirty people.

“Flug,” Black Hat said, extending his hand across the table to grab ahold of his. He held it firmly, but not painfully. Flug didn’t have the willpower to wrench his hand free. He kept his eyes downcast, so all he was looking at was his hands on the table the table. He could vaguely see Black Hat’s hand clutching his own, the one holding his glasses. He was holding them so hard he was scared he might accidentally break them. Black Hat was stroking that hand with his thumb, like he was actually trying to help him calm down and loosen his grip.

It was at this moment that Flug realized that Black Hat was wearing gloves. They were almost the exact same ashen grey color as his skin. Not unlike the soot of a fireplace once the fire burned out. The fabric felt soft on his bare skin. He was stroking gently, like one might stroke a small animal to coax it into relaxing. It must’ve helped, as Flug’s death grip on his lenses released and he allowed Black Hat to continue stroking his limp hand.

“It’s ok. I know what happened. I know what you did.” He grinned. Flug didn’t need to see it to know. It was something that made itself known audibly. A grin far wider than should’ve been anatomically possible. He sounded pleased. Like his pet had just performed its first successful trick.

“So, what?” Flug asked, he was too drained for his throat to be able to constrict. He didn’t have the energy to be afraid. His body was too numb to react. “You’re going to blackmail me into working for you? Why’d you even ask me if that was the case? You like seeing me squirm?”
“I admit, I’m starting to.” Black Hat said, that grin never leaving his face (probably). “But no, I am not blackmailing you. I have no intention of ever telling anyone, in fact.”

He pulled his hand away, sitting back in his chair. The grin had gone down to a simple smirk on his face, but that pleased look in his eye had not faded in the slightest. Flug caught a glimpse of it as he put his glasses back on.

“Just thought you might want to know that I knew.”

“How did you find out?” Flug asked, peeking up at the man across the table slightly. “I had gone through the files myself. No one should’ve known.”

“I believe I mentioned that I have been making connections with villains?”

“Yes.”

“Well, one of them happened to be a bit more experienced than you.”

Flug almost laughed at that. “And what? They just did that for you? As a favor?”

“A favor I had to pay back.” Black Hat said darkly. Flug could practically hear his scowl.

“How? You promise them a discount once you get me to work for you?” He said sarcastically.

And in that moment, Flug knew he had said the wrong thing. It was like the air itself changed and shifted with the mood. Like right before lightning strikes, when you smell the ozone and everything else seems to slow as pure energy streams down towards the Earth. That’s similar to the feeling Flug got. Although it wasn’t lightning he was feeling, it was definitely some sort of energy barely being constrained.

His eyes went back to the table. Flug heard Black Hat get up from his seat. Although he tensed, he made no effort to move. He felt Black Hat’s presence looming over him, like a dark malevolent force just waiting to be unleashed.

“Don’t mistake me for some powerless peon from some backwater country of ******. ” He whispered into Flug’s ear. Most of what Black Hat spoke was English, which Flug took to mean he was too pissed to even bother with Spanish, except for that last phrase. That, Flug assumed based on the guttural sound of it, was something from Black Hat’s native tongue. He didn’t know what it was but it probably meant something insulting. “Just because I favor working from the shadows doesn’t mean I’m incapable of stepping into the limelight myself. I am not to be taken lightly .”

“Alrighty boys, here’s your check!” the same voice from before rang out. Their waitress plopped a piece of paper down on the table. If she found anything odd about the scene in front of her she didn’t show it.
“Hope to see you boys again real soon!” She called as she made her way to her next table.

Black Hat stood up so he wasn’t bent over Flug anymore and tossed something onto the table. From the sound of it, Flug assumed it was money. Black Hat grabbed Flug’s arm tightly and pulled him to his feet. Flug did not resist.

Black Hat led the young man with light brown hair and spiderweb-ing scars out of the coffee shop and out into the street. Flug still did not look at him. He kept his head down and focused on not stumbling, lest the suited man before him become angrier.

They stopped abruptly about halfway down the block, causing Flug to nearly crash into the villain. *No need for the “aspiring” anymore, he’s clearly already committing crimes.*

*And so have I. I’m a murderer.* Flug thought.

Flug raised his head a bit, and found himself at the passenger side door of a shiny black car that looked a little too much like a compressed hearse for his liking. As Black Hat pulled out his car keys and unlocked it, he realized that it was HIS car.

He opened the passenger door. “Get in.”

Flug obeyed, and immediately put on his seatbelt.

His top-hatted companion (not his boss. Not yet) got in shortly after, and began driving. Where it was they would be driving to was a mystery. One Flug didn’t think he could handle knowing right now.

So he mainly stared out the car window. The tint making everything seem hazy and dark.

“Flug,” said the man Flug was trying to avoid talking to. “Look at me.”

The scarred man turned his head meekly, facing the driver. His eyes were focused on the road, and he was speeding. Flug wondered vaguely what would happen if they got pulled over.

“Do you have anymore questions?”
It took Flug a moment to respond. “No, I think I’ve questioned enough for one night.”

Black Hat nodded. “You are uncomfortable that I know about the plane crash.”

“I didn’t want anyone knowing.”

“You may find it very hard to keep things from me.”

“What, I still have a chance?” He asked in a rare moment of confidence.

“Well, you still haven’t given me an answer.” Black Hat pointed out. “If you say no, I’ll have no reason to check up on you.”

Crap. How long was this going to go on?

Flug knew he should say no immediately. Why had he even had to consider it? It was villainy! He was no evil genius! He wouldn’t even say he was a genius. That was what everyone else thought of him.

Another opportunity to let those around him down.

Seriously, where was his future if he said yes? Working for a crazy supervillain who aims to take over the world? Shut away building weapons of mass destruction (oh and luxury items, because this man wants ALL the bases covered!) for the evils of the world to buy and use on innocent people. Like the innocent people he mercilessly killed for petty revenge against only eleven bad seeds.

“Also,” he said. “I do not appreciate being lied to.”

Flug felt tired. These last few days had been an unwanted rollercoaster of turmoil.

“I’ll let it go this time,” Black Hat continued, talking to his unresponsive passenger. “But, even if you say no, I would...appreciate it if you were honest with me.”

Flug didn’t respond. He was too focused on not being a part of this conversation.

This man, Black Hat, was a villain.

He was a villain, and he wanted Flug to join him.

And he had very obviously done some digging into his past, and if was able to find out about the plane then who’s to say he didn’t know other things?

Whatever those could be.

The thought terrified him.
Wait, does he know that I’m gay? And that I like to wear women’s underwear? Oh sweet Jesus, did he look into my search history?!

It was at that point, Flug attempted to turn off his brain. He refused to give the thoughts swimming about in his head even a moment of his attention.

Unfortunately, he became aware of a matter that demanded his attention. One that couldn’t be put off.

“Uh, s-s-sorry to bring this up,” he awkwardly said. “But I left my bag back in the Robotics Lab. Can we go get it?”

The driver grunted in annoyance, but he turned onto the road that would lead them back. The sky had gotten dark since Flug had called him, hard to believe they had only been talking for such a short amount of time.

Actually, what was the time?

As they pulled into the student parking lot, both men exited the vehicle. No words were exchanged as they walked briskly down the path to the Robotics Lab, Flug in the lead.

They made good time, what would ordinarily be a peaceful eight to ten minute stroll became a five or six minute fast walk. Flug’s sneakers were largely silent on the stone path, while Black Hat’s white wing tipped shoes (which were really nice, not that Flug was looking) echoed loudly throughout the mostly empty pavilion.

Another question occurred to Flug. Even though he had sworn he wasn’t going to be asking anything else tonight. He stopped walking in the middle of the walkway to ask it. Black Hat looked annoyed as he stopped next to him, but Flug didn’t let that stop him.

He shouldn’t ask this out loud in such an open space. There was a greater chance of being heard. Even when no one’s around, someone’s around.

“Why are you here?” He asked in a low voice. It still sounded loud to him. It echoed off the bare walls threefold with no students to muffle it. “Why enroll in a school for heroes?”

“You think there’s one for villains?” Black Hat asked in a monotone drawl. “I am here to study. Learning about my adversaries first-hand is primordial to defeating them.”

“Is that Portuguese?”
“Yes, why?”

“I think ‘primordial’ has a different meaning in Portuguese than it does in Spanish. In Spanish it means old. Like, since the beginning of time old.”

Black Hat sighed in aggravation. “What I mean to say is important, supreme, paramount.”

“Ah, the word is importante.”

“Ah, importante. First-hand knowledge is importante if I am to succeed.”

Flug nodded, and resumed walking. “I know what you mean.”

“Hmm?”

“In my Engineering Club. Our project right now is to design a device capable of trapping some of our Gifted volunteers.”

“They have gifts?” Black Hat asked in confusion.

“Yes, Gifts. Things like that already exist, yeah, but we’ve never done it before. As we met our subjects all I could think of was how to use what I knew about them against them, and we’ve been having them show us what they can do so that we can capture them even easier.”

They reached the Robotics Lab, and Black Hat suddenly grabbed onto Flug’s shoulder. Tightly. Flug turned, alarmed at the sudden sensation.

Black Hat was grinning again. Apparently Flug had gotten him back into a good mood.

“Flug, you really mean to tell me that your first instinct in meeting your subjects was to devise ways of defeating them based on what you already knew, and you’ve had them show you the extent of their abilities so that you could bring them down even easier?”

Flug’s face fell as he began to understand what Black Hat was getting at.

“And you say you don’t have pure villainy in you.”

He chuckled darkly as he gave Flug’s shoulder a few light pats. Then walked past him into the Robotics Lab.
Flug followed slowly behind.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, It's Fallin again! Are you enjoying my story? I think it's good to have a balance between humor and actual plot development. Do you guys prefer to laugh or feel? Wow, not as many translations needed for this chapter.

Translations:

primordial = paramount (Portuguese)

importante = important (Spanish)
Black Hat's probably horribly incorrect origin story. Now I see why everyone chooses to go around this, it's hard trying to come up with a backstory for him. Especially having him as a human.

The man called **Black Hat** came from a small country in a remote region of the Earth. A country with a long history of being conquered, occupied, enslaved, subjugated, and perhaps worst of all, forgotten.

It’s people had constantly been stolen and sold throughout their history. Their land always taken, their works always credited to the **masters**, nothing left to call their own. Not even their own bodies. Their language was mangled and rough, shifting and changing each time a new power dominated them. As such it was difficult to learn, even as a first language, and the many dialects and variations did nothing to make it any easier.

The one thing they could possibly hold onto as a nation, and they themselves were barely holding on by their fingernails.

There was never any question of ancestral purity. The inhabitants, the ones not sold off or escaped, had not had any racial purity in hundreds of years. Always being under the foot of another will do that. Everyone had a mixed background, if for no other reason than their grandparents never had the right to say “no”.

The individual himself was likely no different.

Although an orphan, he doubted his lineage had been spared the humiliation of being defiled by wicked outsiders who felt it their right to take from a people with no means of fighting back.

He had had parents before, or so he was told. As he heard it, they’d both died when he was roughly two years old. Perhaps even younger. Too young to have any clear memories of either mother or father. He’d had no relatives to take him in, so he became a ward of the land and placed in something like a foster home.

He had no keepsakes from his old life. No photos of the family he’d supposedly had, no toys or heirlooms to hold onto, nothing to tie him to the life he might’ve led had they survived the terrible
fire.

It used to upset him, not having anything to connect with.

Used to.

As he matured, it bothered him less and less until he felt next to nothing for his deceased family. There was little more than a dull ache of disembodied longing, and even then that was something he was able to desensitize himself to, in time.

Parents he had no recollection of, and a family that for all intents and purposes did not exist. He had nothing to hold him to them.

Growing as a parentless waif in poverty, he learned basic street survival. Child labor was common in his homeland and he was just another of the hundreds of children, either orphans or poor boys and girls trying to help their family meet ends, working the heavy machinery under the hard gaze of men with whips.

Even that wasn’t enough to live on. The ones with parents managed to get multiple jobs, working themselves to death in the process. He, and his fellow borderline homeless peers, took to alternative methods of survival. Stealing, smuggling, robbing, even framing the other children. He was by no means the best, he knew being recognizable was akin to being caught red-handed, so he scraped by on mediocrity as long as he could. Remaining just one of hundreds of impoverished children living off of scraps in the gutter.

As he developed, and reached puberty, that became harder.

The closest translation for what his people called it would be a curse.

There was a legend he remembered, a legend of a man who tried to fight back against whoever it was dominating their land at the time. He made a deal with creatures of darkness to give him the power to fight off the invaders. Which they did...by turning him into a beast, like them. While he was indeed powerful, powerful enough to defeat his enemies, his own countrymen shunned him and chased him away. Calling him a monster unfit to walk among men. The man fell into despair, and spent the rest of his days doing as the creatures of the night did.

It went on to say that his children also felt the effects of his curse, and they passed it to their children, and theirs, and so on and so on until present day. Innocent people punished with the curse of their ancestor because he had been foolish enough to so much as wish to fight.

He supposed the moral was that they should never even try to fight back against the people who conquered them, because it would taint them and their family for eternity.
It was not a moral he agreed with. But it was abundantly clear that his opinions on the matter, didn’t matter.

As his body began changing, and not just from a boy into a man, he too was rejected by his peers. None wanted anything to do with him. All avoided him and tried to pretend he didn’t exist. It made him recognizable. Being recognized was the same as being caught. His meager way of life was ending, before it could ever truly begin.

So, he hid his changes. He did his best by day to appear no different than any other orphan scraping by on trash. And he was able to claw his way back into the small crevice he’d carved for himself in this world.

By night, he practiced.

He practiced his changing body, seeing what was possible, what could be accomplished with the new form he was taking.

What new doors would be opening up.

By his adolescence, he had a decent enough grasp of his new abilities. Decent enough to step up from petty swindling and stealing from his fellow impoverished men working while on the verge of death by exhaustion.

He stepped up to become something akin to Robin Hood. If Robin Hood took in children off the streets and put them to work peddling stolen goods and breaking into houses.

Totally Robin Hood.

It began with just stealing. From the more well off, naturally, no one down in the lowest of pits with him had anything of value. Steal, sell, buy, gain followers, and repeat because nothing cements loyalty more than providing for your subordinates.

He often worked alone, not wanting any to see exactly how he accomplished as much as he did. He had his followers handle the more stable aspects of his “business”, such as distributing and accounting. They pulled their weight, of course. A dozen people breaking and entering get more done than just one man, after all.

Was he stolen from and ripped off? Yes.
Were the perpetrators ever seen again? No.

His first kill had been a trifling thing. He had figured the best way to preserve his way of living was to never be seen or witnessed when committing his crimes.

Then, he was witnessed.

He had to silence the woman, did he not? He couldn’t risk being found out. Not as being cursed, not as the boss of what was becoming the largest crime ring of their slum of a district. Couldn’t not risk it. Not for anything.

So she died.

He thought he would feel more regret. More humanity. More sadness. Any sort of remorse for the life he had just taken. Or more or anything really. He’d always figured it would come to this eventually. Everyone was driven to it, why would he be any exception?

But...he thought he would feel.

He didn’t feel much of anything as he saw his many arms, or the appendages he referred to as his arms, tear into her. Sending her blood flying out of her body and onto the tile floor. A decent amount should have gotten on him. His hands should’ve been bloody from squeezing her organs.

They weren’t. When all was done and she remained little but a pulpy stain on the floor, he looked to himself and found that for the most part, he was clean.

The only residue on his was a bit of blood smeared on his face, around his lips, and a copper taste in his mouth that he didn’t want to think about.

His first kill left him with an odd sense of satisfaction, in truth. Like his body was grateful to finally be using the muscles he’d neglected for so long. The burn of a long awaited workout.

Her screams were heard, people came to investigate. Our man had two choices; stay and give his curse the release it so desired, or leave with his work unfinished and his life intact.

Prioritizing his life, he concluded his business and fled the scene.

As he went on, and he began to flex his muscles more regularly, it seemed people began to talk.

Funny thing, when no one who betrays you is ever seen alive again and rumors begin to circulate that you may be one of the poor souls who’s been cursed to walk the land as a demon, people tend to
try their hardest not to upset you. Which leads to people upsetting you far more often, he found.

This, and the strain of keeping the truth to the rumors a secret, resulted in giving the man a very bad temper.

Maybe it was how he was constantly holding himself back nearly every hour of the day. Maybe it was the pressure to keep his true self hidden, lest he be thrown out of the meager group he’d worked so hard to build up. Imagine, giving all these souls a place to work and earn food, and they turn on you! Ungrateful!

Maybe it was just in his nature. Maybe he was just a naturally easily-angered person.

Whyever it was, he had a temper. A rather explosive temper. And while he made an effort to keep himself and his curse under control publicly, he completely let himself go in private. He held nothing back. Which often resulted in nothing being left of the person in question.

Thankfully, he calmed down rather quickly.

Then, at around age 20, his life turned around.

The absolute dumbest, most asinine, comically stupid, most astronomically astoundingly ridiculous to the point of laughing out loud circumstance befell our incredibly dark skinned man;

His rich uncle died and left him his fortune.

Yes, he too thought he was being scammed. It was the literal oldest trick in the book, not that he read much, and he was determined not to fall for it.

Until he actually looked into things and found that it had some actual legitimacy.

He looked through the records as best he could with his minimal literacy, and it seemed that very recently a man had died. An old man with no living children and a young vulture of a wife. Who it appeared even he knew was only using him, because he expressly wrote in his will that she was not to inherit a single penny of his fortune unless they could find no living blood relatives of the old man.
The old man, through a series of twisting family trees and birth records that our current protagonist could only just follow, was a very distant cousin of man who’d died in an unfortunate house fire man years ago along with his wife. Leaving only a son behind.

Our man.

The very distantly related nephew of the old millionaire.

The same nephew that he refused to take in nearly two decades ago in his infancy and left to survive on barely edible garbage, would be the one to inherit his vast wealth.

Seemed improbable, even to a young man in the trash, that he could be lifted to the heavens so easily by some mistake of family connection.

But, he was able to claim it for himself. The wife fought it tooth and nail, loudly objecting to this gutter rat standing to inherit the fortune she’d been gunning for since the day she walked down the aisle.

One visit in the night, and one missing widow later, it seemed his only obstacle was taken care of.

He didn’t know what to do with himself at first. A man who’d lived his life having absolutely nothing suddenly found he could have absolutely anything. What does one do when their life changes so suddenly?

He knew what he would not do, at least. He was not going to waste it.

No sir, not a single franc would be wasted on some frivolous thing. He absolutely refused it. No one could persuade him otherwise.

“C’mon, you have the money for it! It’s high time to upgrade this place!”

“You know, we could use some new cars.”

“Hey, why don’t you toss some of that dough my way, eh?”

“Boss, I think it’s time we talked about a raise.”

“Sir, all the finest men are wearing this!”
“Hey! You! I will sell you my daughter for 7,000 francs! I promise you, she’s the most beautiful thing you will ever lay eyes on! She’s a terrific cook, she cleans the house, she will bear you healthy children, I assure you! I also have a younger daughter, if that’s more to your liking. But I must ask you give me 10,000 for her. Or, perhaps, we could agree on, say, 15,000 for them both?”

He hated them all.

Upgrade? As if he would be spending anymore time in this place! He would only need one car, for himself! The nerve, to ask for handouts! A raise? As if anyone did anything worth what he was already giving them! As if he cared about fashion or status!

Also, he was not at all interested in taking the daughter of some beggar man for his wife. Certainly not for thousands for francs! What could any woman offer him that would ever be worth thousands?!

It disgusted him, old men trying to sell him their young girls. Some as young as 12. He considered buying them just to get them away from this country, perhaps he would take them with him once he finally left this forsaken land.

Ah, that was it.

That was what he would use his money for.

Escaping this prison he shuddered to call a home.

It was something he had always wanted to do. Now that he found himself with a nearly bottomless pit of financial support, it seemed like he could finally get around to doing to.

He just had to take care of a few little hurdles that kept him from packing up immediately.

One, he had to actually pick a destination. No point in packing up and leaving if he was just going to come crawling back.

Two, he had learn to read and write at an adult level. Skills that had seemed trivial and redundant before, but were clear even to our man at age 20 to be unfathomable necessities.

Three, he would need to learn the language of the land he would be going to. Probably even more than one, he intended to travel around quite a bit.

Four, he would need to ensure his finances never ran out. While he wasn’t planning on wasting his finite finances on frivolous things, there was no doubt that he would be spending A LOT of his money just getting around and living comfortably.
He was determined to reinvent himself, and part of that would be new clothes. Another thing to look into, just how much was he willing to spend on a new wardrobe? No way would he allow himself to start his new life looking like he crawled out of some sewer. Also it would be a good idea to find out how much his money was worth in other countries.

Five, he was going to need a more permanent plan.

While leaving, never coming back, and spending the rest of his days exploring the world sounded like a fantastical plan, it was clearly not something meant for long-term.

Our man was going to leave this old life behind for the promise of something new. Something better. While he had no idea how he would accomplish that, he knew he wasn’t going to find the answer sitting around his filthy living space as he continued this decrepit waste of an existence.

He figured the best place to start was to get himself an education. Somewhere in a different city, in an entirely different section of the country. His first steps away from his old life.

The offered a course in the English language. Being one of the most common languages spoken around the world, to his understanding, he figured it was his best starting point.

One day he was calmly taking a walk on one of his few free days. It felt a bit like he was being lazy, time spent not improving himself was time wasted after all. But his otherwise peaceful stroll through a quaint neighborhood was interrupted. By a man. A man with lasers coming out of his eyes.

This man called himself The Judge. He said he killed everyone he saw as being unfit to exist in this world.

He gave a long and arduous speech (in the middle of the damn street, mind you) about the state of the world, of this country, of the filth that was humanity and how it was a plague upon this society. How the ones in power used their influence to keep all the wealth and food for themselves and left their fellow men to wallow in garbage and shame and sell off their children for a days worth of bread.

Nothing our man didn’t already know.

Said man watched all this with a sort of childlike fascination from a concealed spot he’d found. This Judge character paid him no mind, not even noticing his presence among the terrified populous. He’d never seen another person with a curse. Another person like him. He knew he couldn’t be the only one but to see another so clearly.

And to see in him the very same ideas and thoughts that he himself had had, but had never done anything about. It gave way to a rising heat deep in his core.
This guy was clearly an idiot. Why go through all this trouble and then choose some residential area instead of a busy shopping mall or news station? If you wanted attention you got it by going OUT where people were unguarded and suspicious, not to their homes where they thought they were safe.

That was one of the things he’d learned in his life living on the streets. How to avoid attention.

As is the case with many new showboating villains, he was gunned down once law enforcements arrived on scene. Which was fairly quickly, considering traffic at that time of day. Our man only left after the ambulances had all driven off, carting the injured and deceased off to their respective destinations.

Much like with his first kill, he had thought it would affect him more to see such brutality. To see innocent lives lost to a clearly disturbed and misguided individual. He used that term sincerely, anyone making that many mistakes in their debut had obviously not thought it through AT ALL.

Why a peaceful neighborhood? The body count wouldn’t be all that big compared to what could be possible at a more populated location such as a shopping center or an office building. Even someplace with more security such as a hospital or school would’ve been a better choice. People tended to pay much more attention when the weak or young were at risk. Attention was clearly what The Judge was after, going from that overblown speech of his.

Why not hold up a public place, or go straight for a TV station? Make your sentiment heard by all? Now all anyone would have to go on would be word of mouth. From survivors. Of which there were many; another flaw. Large body counts led to large coverage, it was why our man chose to stay in the shadows rather than go straight for the kill. He was rarely noticed and when he was, he left none alive. He wasn’t after notoriety.

Not yet, at least.

The story made the news, local only. By the next morning on his way to his English language class (which he was making large strides in, he was proud to say), everyone had heard.

Everyone was talking about it. Everyone had mostly the same thing to say. How that disgusting cursed thing had had the nerve to waltz in a residential neighborhood in this cultured city and dare to lecture them on the evils of society. How he had dared to step out of the trash can he was born in and beg for their attention. Most thought that being shot to death was too good of a death for him. Especially after he had had the absolute gall to go so far as kill normal human citizens such as them!

It filled him with disgust and rage to hear these things. As well as a sick sense of satisfaction knowing that he was only one monster among many. They were all sickening creatures of ego and vanity, filling their hollow elitist lives with extravagance and flamboyance to distract themselves from the terrifying truth:

There was absolutely no difference between them and the lesser beings.
None.

Just as there was no difference between them and he himself.

Not even with all the darkness pouring out of his soul was he any different.

It was around this time that his grand plans took root in his mind. Plans to climb to the very top of this hierarchy that was the world around him. Crush everything in his path till there was nothing left but him, standing atop the ruins of this planet he knew. Ruling it.

Not benevolently, oh no. He’d rule cruelly and viciously. He’d step on the heads of newborn infants if it got him towards his goal. He’d break down the steps leading the top until it was but a half-step away from him. And he’d take that step. Take it and raise himself even higher than any other ruler before him.

It was decided. He would become the villain that would conquer the world.

He would remain in the shadows until he felt he was strong enough to take on the entire planet, by himself if need be. Only stepping into the public eye so his anxious audience could see the face of their new master.

It would be glorious.
Absence

Chapter Summary

Fun fact: This chapter title was originally "A Series of Snippets of the Weekend." But that was too long for FanFiction.net so I changed it to "Absence" and I'm keeping it that way for consistencies sake. It actually is a bit more poetic.

I just realized that wasn't much of a summary. Ok here: Flug gets separation anxiety over the weekend.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The fact that Black Hat didn’t need directions to Flug’s apartment building was concerning, to say the least.

The fact that Black Hat insisted on walking Flug to his apartment door was the icing on the cake on concern. All it needed was for Black Hat to invite himself into Flug’s home and that cake would be iced, lighted, and ready for the birthday party of worry Flug was mentally throwing himself.

Thankfully it never came to that. The two men arrived at the door, Flug was cordially wished a good night by his top hatted companion, and said man left without anymore ominous words.

Leaving the poor Rocinante Flugslys alone in his apartment to mull over things.

Ok, Black Hat knew about the incident back in flight school. Ok, fine. He knew that contrary to official records and even first-hand accounts, Flug had been responsible for the death of thirty people.

Most of them had been his fellow cadets, eleven of which had made it their hobby tormenting Flug and another man, Julio.

Oh, right, Julio. Black Hat probably knew all about him too. Him and what their relationship had been.

Fourteen of the dead had been innocent people. Innocent people who’d done nothing to him or his boyfriend. They were just caught in the crossfire. Fourteen men and women who died for absolutely no reason.
The remaining five people were academy officials and investigators. People who knew the truth of the matter. Flug had taken it upon himself to silence them. Permanently.

Perhaps, if he hadn’t done that, he’d be able to lie to himself. Tell himself that Black Hat was wrong. Tell himself he didn’t have a villainous bone in his body.

But he killed 25 people. Actually, almost 27 people died that night. It was a miracle both he and Julio survived the crash. And even after that, after the murder of 25 of his fellow students, of people he knew and had sat next to and eaten with, he went and killed five more.

To cover his tracks.

And yet here he was, three years later, carrying on as a student at the Universidad most can only dream of attending, as if nothing had ever happened.

And Black Hat knew all of that.

To most people, without the scars on his face and his ruined eyesight (hidden by the prescription lenses, very well I might add), it would seem that nothing HAD ever happened.

He hadn’t had a nightmare about it in over a year. Hadn’t even had a conscious thought about it even longer.

Flug had a sinking feeling those waking nightmares would rear their ugly head soon enough.

It was Thursday. Usually, Flug would pass by Black Hat on the way to his next afternoon class. He had considered taking an alternate route, but decided that he had to face him again.

If he wanted an answer now, in front of everyone, he’d give it to him.

But, oddly, Flug didn’t see him.

He shrugged it off, guessing he must’ve missed him, and went about his business.
It was getting late, he’d spent hours in the Robotics Lab with no results and decided to stop by for a late night drink. Flug was sitting at a table alone in Cafe Triste, the same place he and Black Hat had visited twice before. Together.

Now he was by himself. Striking up a conversation with the same waitress he’d seen the night before.

According to her name tag, her name was Demetra.

It was pretty dead inside, which meant it was perfectly fine for the employees to be chatting up lonely customers.

She was just as bubbly and cheery as he remembered. Very talkative.

He got a hot chocolate this time, remembering how hard it was to sleep with caffeine in his system.

He offered her a seat at his table, but she just waved him off. “Hey, I’m still on the clock, buddy. Take me out after hours.”

He wasn’t much of a conversationalist, and he didn’t think the two of them would have much in common. So he asked her about the one thing she may actually know about.

“H-has the guy I was with last time come in today?”

She thought about it for a second, tapping her index finger on her chin and gazing up at the ceiling with her tongue stuck out. Like a young child might.

“Hmmm, nope! Not that I’ve noticed! And I think I would notice.”

Flug nodded his head. He stared down at his cup, unsure of why he felt his heart sink a bit.

“Hey, hey, what’s up?” Demetra asked, leaning over to look him in the eyes. “You two have a fight
or something?"

“No, no. N-nothing like that. I just...didn’t see him at all today.”

Friday, Flug had a free day from his class schedule. In his hubris, however, he had agreed to back-to-back double shifts at his part-time job. He figured he had the time, so why not?

Hunger, apparently, was why not.

He ended up scarfing down two burritos in record time, regretting the damage he would be doing to his toilet later that night.

He considered going down to the Robotics Lab, seeing if anyone had made any progress on their individual pieces, but ultimately just wanted to go home.

It was roughly 6:30 when he reached his bus stop. He played with the idea of walking over to Cafe Triste for a bit, until he found himself standing in front of his apartment building.

Well, he was already home. Why make plans to be out now?

Once safely inside and behind locked doors, he promptly threw off his pants and shoes and let his thighs feel the cool air of his apartment.

The stockings he wore were a soft blue, which clashed against the velvety red panties he was wearing. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, and struck what was meant to be some kind of seductive pose. It ended up looking pretty ridiculous, and he lightly chuckled to himself.

He looked pretty silly, even to himself. Who was he ever going to seduce like this? It wasn’t like his lithe torso was all that attractive. His glasses made him look like a dork, which he was. He had good legs, he supposed. The soft womanly garments did almost give the illusion of curves in places most men had none.

He spun around, trying to get a good look at his backside.

Well, okay, that was one thing he could safely say he was happy with.
He pulled the stockings up a bit higher on his thighs, playing with the dark blue ribbons at the hem. They, at least, went with the small bow on his panties.

Red and blue, he mused to himself. I almost look like that superhero.

Oh yeah...heroes.

And villains.

He stopped smiling and checking out his reflection.

I’m a villain.

Having nothing else to do he got himself a fattening snack and turned on the TV. He watched anime in his underwear until the wee hours of the morning, when he finally fell asleep on his couch to the sounds of giant robots destroying each other.

The rest of the weekend was spent in much the same way. Flug went to work, he went home, and he did everything possible to avoid thinking. So lots of internet, television, and homework.

He did end up going back to Cafe Triste Sunday afternoon. Demetra wasn’t there, he guessed she got Sunday’s off, so it was an uneventful time.

Flug stared at his phone in his hand while he absentmindedly sipped at his coffee and nibbled on the small pastry he had gotten on impulse. It tasted sweet, almost too sweet even for him, but he was glad he got something else besides just a drink.

It was so awkward just sitting here alone sipping coffee last time.

He couldn’t even pretend he was busy with his phone! Not convincingly, at least. He was mainly
staring at it, half-hoping that someone - ANYONE - would call or text him right now. Just anyone. To give him a tangible reason to avoid thinking about himself.

The other half was praying that he never got a call from anyone ever and was able to resume his school life in peace without anyone bringing up mistakes from his past or mistakes he’ll potentially make in the future.

The very near future in fact. Like if he ever gets a call and accepts a job working for a villain in a top hat.

You know, the insane part of his mind whispered. You could always, and bare with me here it’s a crazy thought but...you could, oh, I don’t know, CALL HIM?

Flug gulped down what remained of his coffee.

You’ve done it before.

With nothing else to do he focused on finishing his little cake-thing. It was like eating raw sugar. Jesus, what was in this?

The number is in your phone.

He finished his Death by Sweetness (Hey, not a bad band name), paid, got up and left.

11:56 pm. Sunday night. Rocinante Flugslys was doing the one thing that was sure to get his mind off his situation. He was desperate. He had sworn he was going to stop doing this to himself. He hadn’t wanted to, in his mind it was like sinking far, far, far down into a hole of shame that he thought he was capable of stopping himself from going down.

But, the pictures on his computer screen were more than willing to throw him down. Hard. Hard enough to get him to forget about his life for one night, he hoped.

Aurelio Cruz.
Photos from his most recent beach trip.

Because unlike Rocinante, Aurelio had a life. He had a circle of friends that hung around him. He was a person who went out and actually lived. He wasn’t just sitting around, he left the house and actually experienced things. He had an aura that drew people in and spat them back out once he became bored. A presence that radiated absolute energy, like the sun.

A sun which Flug was staring at on his computer screen in awe at how such a man could existence in the same universe as him.

He wanted to think there was some trick, some falsity to these images. Aurelio Cruz simply COULDN’T be at this level of perfection naturally. It had to be photoshop, or some other kind of image editing, something! Or maybe he had plastic surgery! There had to be some kind of explanation for just how just...everything about his body was perfect!

People don’t...they just don’t look better than your fantasies! People aren’t supposed to look even better than you could possibly imagine! What...what was this?

He dropped the pretenses. That wasn’t what he was focused on.

What he was focused on was keeping his eyes on his screen while his hands moved to take care of the ache between his legs.

Rocinante felt his breathing hitch as he grasped himself fully. His head automatically tilted back, as if he was offering his neck up to be bitten and claimed. His eyes, though half lidded, were trained on the body of his desires.

It was a bit awkward, with his glasses, but without them he wouldn’t be able to see the dark bronze flesh he pretended was on display just for him.

He moaned through pursed lips, trying to stop himself from rocking his entire body in his chair. As it was, he was barely able to maintain control of his hips, which still longed to buck and grind against that darkly tanned flesh he was imagining.

He wanted to imagine other hands touching him. Bigger, stronger, more masculine hands dark from so much time spent out in the sun stroking him as he sat in a mewling mess on his lap begging for more. But he wouldn’t give it, would he?

No, Aurelio wouldn’t just simply jerk him off. No no no. No, he’d play with him, wouldn’t he. Yes he would. Start off with that fast and firm grip from shaft to tip, then slow it down and go gently gently gently to the point where it was almost painful to be touching so slightly. And then back to
gripping him hard and pulling like he was going to rip it off. Pressure exactly where it was needed in order to send him off the deep end, stopping right when he was about to come undone. Just so that he could start it over again and again until he final broke

And Rocinante would love all of it. Love how he’d know exactly how to touch him to get him worked up and when to stop to bring him back down just to launch him back up and-

He wanted more. It made him ashamed but he wanted more of his fantasy.

He wanted to imagine Aurelio pinning him down and strippin- NO! He’d make Rocinante strip for him! Yes! He would! He’d force him to take everything off and leave him naked and vulnerable and and wanting and oh OH OOOHHH THAT’S GOOD!

What else? What else?

He’d...he’d...oh Rocinante would be begging him to stop, to let him go, to get away from him, but would he? No! Aurelio would not leave him be! He’d just get closer and touch him deeper and move his own body against him and spread him- NO NO you’ve got that wrong he’d make Rocinante spread himself! Yes he’d make him his greedy little whore, just for him to fuck at his leisure begging and begging and begging for his-

Roci.

It was just one word, one little pet name, but it stopped Rocinante. Right on the precipice of his release, he was stopped.

By the pet name Julio would call him.

Roci.

He felt horrible. Whenever he broke down and did this he ended up thinking of his former love and that usually left him too guilty to finish. It was a toxic cycle, much like his own pattern of bringing himself up to the edge only to deny himself until he simply couldn’t keep it up.

But this was worse. Now he felt guilty, ashamed, unclean, and there was still the raging erection in his hands that he kind of wanted to be done with already.
He was trying to NOT think about the past right now, thank you very much.

Putting those thoughts aside to harass him in the morning, he tried to get back to what he was doing.

Where were we? Aurelio. Yes that’s right. Flug scrolled through the pictures on his screen, trying to find one that put him back into the mood. Here was one, Aurelio and some girl (flavor of the week) in a cabana. She was sitting on his lap and they were both striking poses that on anyone else would have looked cheesy.

But lo and behold, once Aurelio did it it became artwork.

Flug remembered how he’d grasped his wrist a few days ago. How he’d pulled their bodies together right in front of everyone.

*Right in front of everyone…*

How differently could that have gone?

He could have kissed him. Could have forced him to kiss back. Could have outright groped and molested him in front of everyone. His fellow club members, the guys, the girls, suppose a teacher walked in.

And no one would do anything. No one ever did anything. They just let Aurelio have whatever he wanted.

If he had wanted Flug, they’d have just let him take him. Right there.

They’d have let him grab his ass hard enough to leave bruises. Let him force Rocinante to move his body against him and rub together like some horny teenager. As Aurelio stuck his tongue into his mouth and ripped the air out of his lungs until he couldn’t do anything but allow it to go on because let’s face it there was no fighting it. No fighting him.

*No fighting, no fighting, just let him take me…*
Without all that energy put into struggling against the inevitable he’d moan loudly like a wanton whore for him. His voice getting higher and breathier as Aurelio forced pleasurable sounds from him. His mind would scream that this was wrong, it was rape, he didn’t want it, but his body had already given in the moment their skin had touched so it was pointless to do anything but ride it out.

And ride I would.

On top of him, clad in nothing but fishnets and a lacy skirt because Aurelio liked seeing his little slut dress the part he’d ride him. Shoving his hips down to get Aurelio deeper inside him while Aurelio himself thrust upwards hitting all the right spots to have him screaming out his name like it was the key to salvation YES YES YES FUCK ME AURELIO PLEASE I WANT IT SO BADLY I NEED IT I NEED YOU AURELIO I NEED YOU TO-

RING!!!
RING!!!
RING!!!

Who the fuck was calling him?

He didn’t want to stop not now not again right when he was getting so close again someone had to go and FUCK IT UP because God forbid he get any of this built up tension and sexual frustration out. He couldn’t keep his concentration with that annoying sound.

That damn ringing was still going on. Flug didn’t even bother checking who it was he just rejected the call, his breathing was still heavy he was panting loudly his heart was thumping against his ribcage AND BY GOD HE WAS GOING TO FINISH TONIGHT IF IT KILLED HIM!

With the latest distraction taken care of, Rocinante regained his focus. It was a bit difficult, but he managed to return to the mewling state he so desired to be in.

AURELIO

OH PLEASE

YES

YES

AAHHH YES YES
He came hard against his knuckles, some reaching to splash across the table. It was promptly wiped away. He cleaned himself up, undressed, and decided he would sleep in the nude tonight. He didn’t want anything spoiling his post-climax high.

Monday morning, Flug became aware of two things.

One: His alarm hadn’t gone off.

Two: He hadn’t charged his phone last night.

He scrambled around his apartment racing to finish his morning routine before his 10:00 am class. Damn it, he’d slept in till almost 9:30! He was going to miss the bus!

He put on the first garments he could find, they probably didn’t go together but he was so beyond caring right now as long as his underwear wasn’t on the outside he was sure he could live with it.

He raced down without having a single thing to eat OR his morning coffee, and just barely made it before the bus pulled out of the stop.

He managed to make it to his morning class, thankfully had all the notebooks he needed for the day, and besides his bad case of bedhead and drowsiness from lack of caffeine, it was a normal morning.
After class, he was free for a few minutes. So he plugged his phone into one of the power outlets in the hallways to get it some power.

He noticed he had one voicemail message. Oh, that call last night! Wonder who it was? He didn’t recognize the number-

“Flug!” came an all too familiar raspy voice.

“I meant to call earlier, I’ve just been extremely busy. There’s something I want to show you! Are you free next weekend? I think you’ll really like it! We’ll make a road trip of it! Call me back!”

Flug was frozen for a few seconds.

He could barely handle being around this man for a few minutes at a time. And now he wanted to take a weekend road trip with him?

He needed coffee.

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter where I don’t need to translate anything! Cool!
So yeah, I just moved this series from it's original place on Fanfiction.net to AO3, which is why this was all published on the same day. (night) Now, I will resume my usual update schedule of twice a month. And try to balance the weird things I want to write with the weird things that will actually move the plot forward.
The Cafe Triste Peanut Gallery

Chapter Summary

Once upon a time I wrote an unusually long chapter and I was worried that it went on too long and got boring. So I split it and ended up with a pretty short chapter. This is that short chapter. It consists mostly of lighthearted humor and then delves into angst, because I had to lengthen it to meet my standards somehow.

Or: Not Yet-mencia and her coworkers ship PaperHat before PaperHat is even a thing, and take bets on their relationship. Someone should totally make one shots out of all the insane theories here.

Chapter Notes

Edit: had to update this chapter, I noticed some of the words weren't showing up in italics. Should be fixed now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was Friday, and there had been radio silence between the two men.

Flug had still not called Black Hat back, and Black Hat had not called him again. As a matter of fact, where has Black Hat been? Flug typically saw him in between classes Tuesday and Thursday, that was fairly usual. He wanted to rationalize that he’d just been missing him, a few seconds too late or too early for their paths to cross.

But even ignoring those days, Flug still used to see Black Hat around.

He used to see him in the library, sitting on the tables while he read. He would see him out in the benches lining the campus walkways, staring menacingly at passersby. He had once or twice seen him in the cafeteria eating some disgusting looking sandwich (and from the looks of the other students, he wasn’t the only one who thought so), but no! He hadn’t seen top hat or coattail of the man in an entire week!

He had asked Demetra, the Cafe Triste waitress who’d seen them before, if he’d stopped by. He had asked her this every time he’d been in and seen her. So much so that by Wednesday afternoon she just immediately greeted him with “Hey Flug-Bug! Still haven’t seen your man-crush! I’ll keep my eyes open, though!”
“He is not-” Flug stopped himself before he could scream at her. “It’s not like that.”

“Then what’s it like?” She asked, twirling her long ponytail around. She must’ve thought the whole thing was pretty ridiculous, given that snarky grin on her face. “You come in everyday asking if he’s been here. And then you just mope around with your coffee when I tell you he hasn’t. You should’ve asked for his number last time you saw him.”

Flug wasn’t even going to begin to get into that.

“It’s...complicated.” Well, how else do you phrase He’s a supervillain that approached me about a job building weapons and security systems for other criminals and then popped out with the fact that he dug into my past and taunted me with the fact that I killed thirty people three years ago, which to him apparently means I have pure villainy in me, and while I was masturbating late Sunday night he called to ask me about spending the weekend together, which I still haven’t gotten back to him on, without giving away the supervillain-ness, the murder, or the fact that they’ve sort of exchanged numbers already?

Yes, very complicated.

“Oh, what’s complicated about it?” The perky neon haired woman asked.

“Is it like you’re childhood friends who did everything together, but you buried your deeper feelings for him down until your eventual move and separation for years? And now that he’s resurfaced and is even hotter, you can’t bear to be apart even though you don’t know if he feels the same way about you as you do him? Is that it?”

Flug blinked. “Not...not even close.” Was that a show? A movie? A book? It sounded so much like the plot of some gushy romance aimed at lonely teenagers.

Wait, did she say Black Hat was hot?

“Damn, I own Marietta ninety pesos.” She said, looking disappointed. “Ok how about this, this was her theory, is he the new guy in your class? Your study-buddy? He struggles in the subjects you’re good at so you’ve been spending more and more time together trying to help him, which became romantic at some point, and now that he’s disappeared you feel an emptiness in your life that can only be filled by…” she paused dramatically. “Caffeine?”
Is she getting these from shoujo animes? Flug thought.

Wait, did she say that was someone else’s theory?

ARE THESE PEOPLE TAKING BETS ON OUR RELATIONSHIP?!

Flug shook his head slowly. “No, that’s... that’s actually farther from what’s actually going on.”

“HA!” Demetra laughed. “So she’s wrong too! Perfect! Now she owes me ninety pesos back! We’re even.” She said with a grin.

Flug would’ve loved to hear more about what the cafe staff thought of his and Black Hat’s relationship (and for the record, they didn’t have a “relationship”!), but Demetra really had to get back to her job. That thing Flug was constantly distracting her from.

Come Thursday, he learned that the girls on shift with Demetra, Marietta and Esme, started a betting pool to see just what the deal was with the two of them. Apparently ALL THREE saw it as romantic! How? They showed up twice, and since then it’s just been him asking obsessively if the other’s showed up at all!

Not to mention one time ended with Flug having a mini-panic attack from this guy offering him the damn world on a silver platter and the other ended with Flug being dragged out by a very angry Black Hat.

Where does anyone see any romantic connection in that?

The baristas on duty around the same time, Mike and Samuel, got in on the betting pool as well. Apparently nothing else is going on here and they have to entertain themselves betting on other people’s love lives!

Which is NOT what’s going on!

Anyway, Esme’s theory was that they met through online dating, chatted a lot together online and just barely met in person for the first time. Flug fell in love, Black Hat didn’t, they met a second time where Black Hat broke things off, and Flug, heartbroken, has been drawn back time and time again
hoping to see his “love” (gag) one last time and try to make things work.

Mike bet that they were exes and one of them (Flug), wanted to get back together but was rejected. While in the gripes of depression he’s been returning to the last spot he saw him just to catch a glimpse of his lost love.

Samuel bet that Flug just owed Black Hat money and was way behind on his payments, so he’s been asking about him to see if the cafe is still “safe”.

Apparently Samuel thinks Black Hat is into some shady business.

Well, he’s not wrong.

Oh but that’s just the afternoon-to-night crew! The rest of the staff, who have never even seen either of them, have a whole OTHER slew of theories they bet on!

Flug guessed that Demetra spread the word around to get as many people betting as possible.

And, wouldn’t you know it, everyone was wrong.

Kim (who works the opening shift), theorized that they went to high school together and were besties while Flug hid down his deep, repressed, romantic feelings towards his friend. He recently confessed to him and was shot down, and Black Hat hasn’t been answering his calls. He’s asking if Black Hat’s been around so he can tell him in person he understands and hope they can still see each other around without it being awkward.

Sofia thinks Flug and Black Hat work together, no clue as to what they do, but their relationship became more than just friendly coworkers recently and they’ve just sat down to have the talk. Do they continue their work relationship while also dating? Do they break it off before getting too serious in order to maintain their coworker-friendship? Does their job not allow employee dating and they risk losing their jobs? Sofia thinks Black Hat decided to end things for some reason like that, and Flug was far more attached than he let on, so he’s been sulking around, hoping that out of work they can at least hang out.

Hector, morning barista, theorizes that they witnessed the end of an on-going one-sided relationship. Flug was an obsessive boyfriend, Black Hat finally decided enough was enough and broke up with him. And blocked him on all social medias along with his cell number. So Flug’s been stalking the Cafe since it was the last place he saw his ex-boyfriend.

Maya’s big theory is that Black Hat is a new foreign student at the Universidad that Flug has been showing around recently. They’ve been getting close and Flug made a move. Black Hat wasn’t interested, which Flug could handle and accept, but now he’s disappeared and Flug is trying desperately to keep hope alive by frequenting this Cafe they went to twice before in as many days!

Slightly close to actual events, with Black Hat being a foreigner, but still wrong.
Josue, one of the few male waiters, seems to be the only one who thinks the roles are reversed. He bet over 300 PESOS that Black Hat was the one who was into Flug, and that Flug was the one who shot *him* down, and that since he broke his heart he’s been asking about him just to make sure Black Hat didn’t kill himself.

What the hell.

The only other employees for Demetra to get in on this were the part-timers. They come and go doing menial work like cleaning and restocking, so no one goes out of their way to be friendly. Except Demetra, of course. So the three of them, Brian, Paola, and Esteban came together and worked out a theory that encompassed all their collective ideas:

Friends with benefits. The three of them put their heads together and came to the conclusion that Black Hat and Flug screw each other casually, but now one of them (probably Flug) wanted to be exclusive and have a serious relationship. Which Black Hat refused.

Demetra mentioned that she’d tried to get the manager, a large woman named Consuela, in on this whole fiasco as well. Her response was something like “Stop meddling in the lives of the customers and get back to work!”

Flug didn’t even know the woman and he already liked her.

Demetra told Flug that when the guys who deliver the coffee beans show up next, she’s getting them in on the betting pool too.

Flug had no idea how it worked in betting where absolutely everyone loses. Usually there’s some kind of dealer or bookie who would handle all of that and keep the money, right? It didn’t seem like they set that up.

So, does everyone just keep their money? No one won, so technically no one lost either.

How could so many people see them as romantically involved? They had no chemistry, at least none from the two interactions they’d had so far. Black Hat seemed to be only interested in him for his scientific skills, and his possible villainous alignment. Flug certainly wasn’t interested in him! Not in a romantic sense. Or a physical one! Not at all! The guy was unsettling, Flug couldn’t tell what his motivation was, he seemed to get off on his fear, he saw him as a pawn to take for his team and use, and he clearly had no problems snooping around in his past just to tease him!
And, oh yeah, HE APPARENTLY WANTED A WEEKEND GETAWAY TOGETHER! So there was that.

What was up with that anyway? He wanted to spend the weekend together to...show him something? That would apparently take two whole days? Is it just really far away?

In other news, Flug was right. His nightmares of the night he crashed the plane and killed 25 people reared their ugly head once more.

He didn’t like to think about it. He liked dreaming about it even less. The nightmares were so vivid, it was like lucid dreaming without the control. It was as if he was actually reliving that terrible night. As if he could feel the plane shaking again as it braced for the crash landing he was going to force on the old model. As if he could feel the hot metal against his back. As if the glass was shattering in his face all over again.

As if Julio was shielding him and taking on the damage he deserved all over again.

He hadn’t seen Julio in years, but his face was still fairly clear in his mind. When it wasn’t being tainted by the wreckage that comes with being in a plane when it goes down, he was just as handsome in his memories as ever. Flug wished he had a picture of him. Or that he could just call him. Just hear his sweet voice. Just once more. So that their last words to each other weren’t so cold.

It couldn’t be helped. Flug crashed a plane with the both of them on it, people died, they both ended up in intensive care, and then he killed a man in front of him.

Not the best scenario for, well, either of them, but there was no changing the past.

And as long as that was true, it seemed there’d be no changing his new sleep pattern of waking up at five in the morning in a cold sweat either. Feeling the ghost of Julio’s body protect him from the worst of the wreck.

He wished he could just forget. He wished he could look at his face in the mirror and not see the shards of glass coming towards him again. He wished he could look at the small scattering of cuts on his arm and certain areas of his chest and not think about how Julio’s body protected him, saved his life, kept the damage as minimal as possible.

Most people never saw the tiny scars. So small and insignificant they might as well not exist. But he saw them. He felt them. Thin but just deep enough to scar him all the same.
And he wished he didn’t remember his last thoughts so clearly before he blacked out from the smoke inhalation. They most of all haunted him in his night terrors, where he couldn’t drown himself in work until the thoughts went away.

When he wasn’t dreaming of plane crashes, the one fear that kept him from so much as attempting to pursue his love of flying again, he dreamt about hospital beds.

Hospitals. They themselves didn’t faze him. He was not scared of the sickness nor the doctors. The strange medical equipment was odd but it gave him no reason to feel uneasy.

It was the beds.

They reminded him too much of the same one he awoke in following the incident. Lumpy, cold, not at all comfortable, and his leg, one of his worse injuries, was suspended in the air by whatever the sling-looking contraption was called. He couldn’t remember the term the doctors had given him but he remembered the purpose. It was to minimize the amount of blood circulating in his leg, which not only helped prevent clotting of the veins but helped it to heal faster.

Given how mobile he was, it was a wonder his leg healed as fast as it did.

But he never forgot the fear he felt, lying in the bed at all hours. Not being able to tell night from day due to the lack of windows, trying to figure out the time; was it 11 pm, or 5 am? It was quiet, so it must’ve been sometime in between. A time when even the staff was too exhausted to be keeping up with patrols and patient checks.

Noting that simple fact might’ve just been what saved him.

A new development, his dreams had been disturbed by different invaders this past night.

There was no fire, no impact, no broken bones, no scratchy sheets digging into his wounds, no pain as he stumbled around on one good leg, no body shielding him for wreckage, but there were hands on him. Holding him in a strong but gentle embrace, soft fabric brushing and caressing his skin. A dulcet voice lulling him, he couldn’t make out any words but he was soothed all the same just by the sound.

He dreamed of dark skin and red and black fabric holding him tight.

He woke that morning hard, and confused.

While he was glad to not be ripped from his peaceful sleep by the guilt of his past, this dream left him feeling...weird.

He wasn’t sure exactly who it had been in his dream, he had seen no face nor recognized the voice, but they seemed familiar. And their touch sent waves of calm down his body. He felt he needed calm more than ever.

Best not to look a gift horse in the mouth.

But it was weird.
Well, he couldn’t dwell on it for long. He still had that big project in his Engineering Club to work on.

And for the first time in his life, he was struggling.

Chapter End Notes

Next one will have more plot, I swear. Consider this a (hopefully) humorous filler chapter. Especially since nothing that happens in it effects the plot, really. It was written because it made me and my friend who reads everything before I post it (my beta reader I guess) laugh. If this were YouTube this would be the part where I tell you to Like, Comment and Subscribe. Even though it's not, it would be awesome if you did any of those things. Or just leave Kudos.
A Fateful Encounter

Chapter Summary

Flug stresses about his inventions, he feels uncomfortable in the presence of (perceived) greatness, he calls Black Hat for a ride home. Somewhere in there is sexual tension and someone owes someone a favor.

Also Flug is a broken record allergic to confrontation and will ask everyone else he comes across about Black Hat before he just talks to the guy himself. Don't worry, it's called character growth and I can for sure write it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Flug was in the Robotics Lab late Friday night, he felt like he really needed to get back into his normal swing of working until he collapsed from exhaustion. He was not alone in this, as a few of his fellow workaholics kept him company. Or as much as they could, with his antisocial nature.

There were about eight of them there, three of them their Gifted subjects.

On the Engineering side were Manuel, the Jefe who did nothing and just allowed Aurelio to do whatever he wanted last week; Tesoro, the girl who was harassed by said man; Luis, the guy who blended into the background most of the time; Donny, the guy who was in the Robotics Club last year but was kicked out for reasons unknown; and Flug himself.

The three Gifted students were Patricia, the cheetah hybrid; Natalia, the speedster; and Tomas, the telekinetic musician.

Flug’s ideas hinged on turning their gifts against them. While Patricia had speed, it was nowhere near Natalia’s level, she had a much lower stamina and tired out quickly. So if he could just get her in the proper spot (Heh, cheetah. Heh, spot) standard bonds should be enough.

While she had the claws and teeth of a cheetah as well as the speed, she kept them short and filed down. Probably so that she didn’t scare her fellow classmates too much. Shame, if she kept them long she could use them to escape the simple rope trap he was planning.

He heard something about her apparently having dental surgery to reduce the size of her naturally impressive canine teeth. He wished she hadn’t. If she truly had the teeth of such a beast he would’ve loved to have seen them in action.

Natalia on the other hand was your typical average speed demon. She used her speed all the time, for
trivial things. She was cocky and arrogant at times, thinking that she could out run (and hench escape from) anything they threw at her.

Which, so far, she had. All the test traps she had escaped from before they had even snapped shut.

See, everyone else’s problem was they were thinking too straightforward.

Which is where Flug’s design would come in.

He had a plan. Not just a trap, a whole plan.

Natalia’s problem was her first response. To anything. No matter what happened, her first reaction was to run. More often than not, she ran directly towards whatever it was that had gotten her attention. So all Flug needed was a lure. Bait for the trap, if you will.

See, no one else was thinking of bait! They were so wrapped up in building something that they weren’t thinking of who would use it or how it would apply in the real world! People don’t just wait patiently for you to trap them! You have to trick them into it!

Flug’s favorite thing about being lost in his work was that he didn’t have to think about how downright malicious his thoughts were.

Tomas was not as simple as the two ladies were. On the one hand, his physical body seemed weaker than average. He had very low physical education scores all throughout his middle and high school life (Flug MAY have done some digging of his own...), and he usually used his telekinetic abilities to float himself around rather than walk. Or pick up objects. Or do much of anything.

Tomas was a really lazy guy.

The one thing he actually seemed to want to use his body for was playing the guitar. Other than that his body was thin and weak. Not unlike Flug’s.

His mind however, was strong. As it should be. The brain was a muscle, the more you flexed it the stronger it became.

And Tomas had been flexing his like an oiled up gym rat since he was a baby.

The most obvious maneuver would be to nullify his telekinesis. How Flug would go about actually doing that remained to be seen. Not strictly because it was complicated to create, no Flug was sure that if given enough time he’d been able to do it, but because technology like that was heavily
Many of the world’s heroes had abilities. Someone with the power to counteract them garnered a lot of attention. Especially some 20-something-year-old who makes a dampening field capable of containing a telekinetic out of materials found in a Universidad laboratory.

Which he would not be able to keep. Due to it being made with school materials on school grounds by a student and because it would be incredibly dangerous in the wrong hands. Since Flug was just some guy (as far as anyone knew), he probably qualified as such.

Which left the only option to capturing Tomas to be something more...physical. Which was difficult for the twig of a man. Tomas could destroy anything they could ever think of keeping him in to capture him.

Flug wondered if Cafe Triste did deliveries…

He stared off into space, trying to think of something Tomas potentially couldn’t break with his mind powers. Maybe they could catch him off guard and just go with a classic knockout dart. Oh wait, where are they getting the darts? Would it count as incapacitating if you just knock out the subjects? Didn’t seem very sportsmanlike.

Hmm, were they any situations where telekinesis DIDN’T make life 20 times easier? Flug guessed that sports probably frowned upon them.

Ok not helping.

Pressure? Does telekinesis work on air? Would it be possible to get him into an airtight box and increase or decrease pressure to the point where he wouldn’t be able to use his telekinesis to escape? Did telekinesis work that way? Or would he only succeed in suffocating Tomas to the point he lost consciousness and or died?

It would not be good to kill Tomas with so many witnesses.

Maybe it would be better to stop over complicating things and just electrocute him.

Just then, Flug realized he got slapped about 12 times in 2 seconds.

His first thought is that Natalia should be faster than that.

The second thought was Wait, why did she slap me?
He finally focused on the slap-happy speedster, and became aware of the other six people in the Lab that evening all staring at him.

He awkwardly shifted under their gaze. “Uhhh, what was that for?” He asked while he rubbed his sore cheek. Thankfully, she had slapped the left side, his unscarred side.

“Oh, finally!” The woman in question shouted. “We were trying to talk to you!”

“You...were?”

“Yes!” She said exasperatedly. “We tried yelling, and poking, and waving things in front of your face, and-” she snapped her fingers “-nothing!”

“So, you slapped me?”

“Well, we were running out of ideas!”

“How many times did you slap me?” he asked. Oh boy the sting was setting in. Oh ow ow ow ow ow-

“About...18?”

“In what, two or three seconds?”

“Two, two and a half?”

Flug nodded. “So, what’s up?”

“What’s up?” Manuel asked from the back. “What’s up is one of our best guys is spacing out in the corner mumbling to himself like a crazy person. Are you ok Flug?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m-” He stifled a yawn. “I’m fine. Just...thinking.”

“Well, would you like to share your thoughts?” Manuel asked. “We’ve hit a block.”

Flug rubbed the sleep from his eyes. *C’mon, Flug! You got this! You’ve worked for longer with less caffeine in your system!*

Speaking of, did Cafe Triste do deliveries? He’d have to check with Demetra next time he went…

“Oh ok ok ok,” he said, trying to get back to where his thought process was. He shook his hair and ran his fingers through his hair. “Um, ok, Tomas? Do you know if your telekinesis is at all affected by the air pressure around you?”

Tomas perked up his head. “What?”
“Like, you can move objects and stuff here at this pressure, but like, can you as easily or easier depending on the amount of pressure?”

Tomas still gave him a blank look. “...what?”

“I don’t think that’s how it works, Flug.” Tesoro called from the table she leaned against. She looked tired.

“Well ok, how about if we knock you unconscious?”

“Dude.”

“Ok, can I electrocute you?”

“Dude!”

“What? Did we get a list of restrictions I don’t know about?”

“That’s just bad sportsmanship, man.” Tomas said.

“Well whatever.” Flug said under his breath. The ideas he had floating around in his burnt out brain were never all that great once he got past a certain point. He was starting to give in to his exhaustion. And he fought it as well as any stressed out man can fight off the onslaught of the tiger army that is sleep.

Flug pulled out his phone, which was on 15% what the hell?! How long had he been zoned out!?

As he hooked his phone up to his charger, he noted the time. 11:24 pm.

Wow.

He also noted that his phone had been on silent, which would explain the multiple missed calls from a number he didn’t recognize right away. Whoever they were they didn’t leave any voicemails. Looks like they sent a text, though.

**FLUG I KNOW THIS IS YOUR NUMBER ANSWER ME**

And this was sent...an hour ago.
Looking at the text gave him that same dark feeling. He’d felt it a bit the first time Black Hat had gotten mad, and it had been even stronger the second time. Because for whatever reason he’d REALLY hit a nerve there.

Somehow it was even detectable via text.

“Uh, hey, guys?” he asked the room. “Do...do any of you know Black Hat?”

They stared at him in confusion. “Black...Hat?”

“Dark skin, wears a suit, top hat? May or may not have a nose? He came in with me last week to get my bag?”

“Oh that guy!” Natalia said. “Wait, his name is Black Hat??”

“I thought he had some really impossible to pronounce name.”

“It’s like his nickname.” Flug explained. “I actually couldn’t pronounce his real name, either. So he said to call him ‘Black Hat’.”

Everyone nodded in understanding. A few piped up.

“I’ve seen him around, don’t really know him.”

“He’s in the Spanish language class, I know that. He’s like, an exchange or transfer student or something right?”

“Guy sits behind me in government class. Sometimes. He moves around the room.”

“Yeah but, does anyone actually know him? Like, talk to him?”

Mostly everyone shook their heads.

“When he sits near me he’ll sometimes asks me to translate some words he doesn’t know, or like a joke he didn’t understand. That’s about as far as it goes.” Tomas said.

“I think the whole thing of hybrids is new to him or something.” Patricia said. “I keep catching him staring at me and some of the others.”
“No, he does that to pretty much everyone.” Natalia piped up, zooming next to Patricia. “I’ve seen him do it out in the courtyard.”

“No, I mean a different kind of staring. Not that creepy stare, like a stare of someone expecting something from you, you know?”

“Like at the zoo when you’re trying to see if the animals move?” Luis said. Flug had completely forgotten he was even here.

“Ugh, please don’t mention zoos.” Patricia said with a groan. “I hate those places.”

“Maybe they don’t have many hybrids where he’s from?” Tomas suggested. “Maybe he never actually saw any in person before? And he can’t help but stare?”

Flug didn’t share that Black Hat mentioned visiting several continents, or the fact that he speaks at least three other languages pretty fluently. But taking those into consideration made it unlikely that Patricia was one of the first hybrids he’s witnessed. Even if his native country didn’t have many hybrids, he’d certainly traveled around enough to see some.

“Hey, maybe he’s a hybrid himself?” Natalia said jokingly. “And like Tomas said, there aren’t many where he’s from? So, he’s like, ‘OMG, someone else like me!’”

“Actually, that’s relevant to why I asked if any of you knew him.” Flug said. “I was gonna ask, do any of you know if he’s got a Gift too?”

They all thought about it.

“He’s in my government class, but that’s a mixed class. Gifted and Non.” Tomas pointed out. “I personally haven’t seen him do anything.”

“If he’s a hybrid like me, that might explain the dark skin.” Patricia said. “But he doesn’t look like any creature I know. Typically hybrids are mammals.”


“I think he’s just a guy from a different country who hasn’t quite learned how to fit in here.” Manuel said. “But then again, I don’t know the guy.”

“So, why’d you ask, Flug? He your new friend?”

Flug hesitated. “Kind of. We’ve been...hanging out, recently. And I’ve been getting kind of a weird vibe from him sometimes. Guess I was just curious.”
“Weird how?”

“Like…” he struggled to put it into words. What was that analogy he came up with before? Something like lightning?

“Energy.” he finally said. “It’s like feeling a massive build up of energy that’s about to break loose.”

The three Gifted students in the room looked confused at his description. Huh. Flug would’ve thought they of all people would have felt something like that. His fellow club members however, nodded thoughtfully.

“I know what you mean.” Manuel said. “I used to go to school with this guy. Had electricity powers. Cockiest son of a bitch you ever met. He got upset, and you just felt it in the air. Hardly mattered what it was; bad grade, picked a fight, whatever. You knew when he was gonna throw a hissy fit.”

“Oh, my neighbor said something kinda like that!” Tesoro said. “She has this older sister, see? And she was dating this hybrid guy. I think he was a bear, or something. Something big. He was a big hairy guy.”

“What taste.” Donny commented.

“Shut up, ok? I’m trying to tell a story! So anyways this guy, usually real nice and sweet, real gentleman like. But protective as hell. I think her sister had a thing for hybrids, because her exes were, like, ALL hybrids, and whenever they would run into each other Bear-Boy got crazy paranoid! She said she was around it once and it was like you just felt it in your bones that something was going to happen.”

“What you’re describing is our more…animal traits being displayed.” Patricia said, with audible distaste. “Our ‘animal instincts’, you could say, coming out. Some people let them get out of control.”

“So, Manuel’s electric boy?”

“Something different.” The cheetah woman said shaking her head. “Probably you just felt the electric discharge given off by his body.”

Flug nodded, that was similar to how it felt to him. But for Black Hat it wasn’t electricity he was sensing. He knew what that felt like and that was not it. He felt something being radiated from that man, no doubt, but it wasn’t exactly electrical energy. It wasn’t heat or cold, like one would expect from someone with an elemental Gift. It was something far less tangible.

A form of energy he couldn’t identify just from being near it.

“So, when you got this weird vibe from him, what was going on?” Tomas asked.
“Well, w-we were talking, I guess I said something to make him mad and-”

“Ok, what specifically happened?”

“Uhhh…” Well I said his “take over the world” plan was too simplistic to work, and he got pissed. Then I guess I offended him by making some off-hand sarcastic comment about paying back a villain to dig up the skeletons in my closet.

“I said...W-well, he was telling me about his plans for the future. I told him they were too simplistic, and he kinda got mad at me.”

“His plans for the future?” Natalia asked.

“It’s like…” Oh damn how to put this? “He wants to start up a successful business, kind of, I guess that’s the best way of saying it? Problem was he was oversimplifying the differing market places and pricing and the competitive nature of the open market.”

“Ok ok Flug we got it.” Manuel interrupted. “And he got mad at you for this?”

“Yeah I guess he kinda took it to heart.”

“What, was it his lifelong dream or something?”

“I don’t know. He did mention it’s what he’s been working towards for a long time, and I guess he’s put a lot of money into making it a reality. He was actually asking for my help.”

“Who wants your help?” Asked a new voice. One Flug recognized. One he imagined in his ear late at night. Deep as the ocean and smooth as desert glass.

Aurelio Cruz.

Flug had honestly been avoiding him since last week. Going so far as peeking into the Robotics Lab to see if he was there before going in. He’d made it a point to make most of his longer visits at night, when Aurelio was typically out doing...whatever popular people did. Party? He probably went to parties.

He hated that he was letting this man keep him out of his favorite place, but he just wasn’t ready to be near him again.

He’d thought late night on a Friday was safe.

That was when TONS of parties were going on, wasn’t it?
Why was Aurelio HERE?

It seemed everyone else was as eager as Flug to see him again. He could see the nervousness and borderline distress on their faces. Natalia, naturally, sped over in the blink of an eye.

“I thought Paola was having that keger this Friday? You said you were busy!” She said with a stomp of her foot.

“It was a bore,” The walking artwork said, rolling his eyes and making that one curl that dangled near his eye bounce. It drew Flug’s attention back to his eye color, that deep green with the little specks of blue he noticed back when Aurelio had been so close.

Those were something not captured by the low resolution cell phone cameras. Those were only seen in the flesh. Or, maybe with a professional camera.

_Just stop this_, He thought to himself. _He’s a human, just like you._

A human with a terrifying Gift and the body of a God. The insane part of his mind answered back. _But yeah, other that that JUST like you._

“So, hermana, who wants help?”

“You know that guy, dark, kinda creepy, pretty good fashion sense, has a really heavy raspy accent?”

“No, actually. What’s his name?”

“We don’t really know.” Luis spoke up. Aurelio seemed like he had to do a bit of searching to figure out who just said that. Flug was mildly amused that Luis was so below everyone’s notice that people just kind of forgot about him until he spoke up.

Kind of like Flug, in a way. Aurelio never really paid him any mind before last week.

“Apparently, his nickname is Black Hat.”

“Oh wait, the one in the hat?”

As everyone focused on getting Aurelio up to speed, Flug tried to figure a way to get out of this conversation. Which wasn’t going to be possible, it was going to lead back to him eventually.
He looked at his phone, trying to pretend he was busy.

Oh God why did this have to happen now? He was so close to just ignoring all of his problems until they went away and now-

A light bulb went off in his head. An idea that was probably terrible but would get him out of his current situation.

He texted Black Hat.

**Robotics Lab. Urgent. Come now.**

It was vague, and the man probably deserved at least a *Sorry I’ve been ignoring you* first, but Flug was desperate. It was between dealing with his unwanted physical attraction and his supposed denied nature.

He found he’d rather deal with the devil than with cupid.

“Why does he wear a top hat?” Aurelio asked.

“How should I know?” Natalia said with exaggerated arm movements. Lots of waving and gesturing about. In super speed, it kind of looked like a giant wind propeller around her. “I just know he does!”

“I thought you said he had *good* fashion sense.”

“Oh damn, shots fired.” Tesoro mumbled from the back of the group. Far away from Aurelio. Flug didn’t blame her.

Finally, a response:

*I’m busy. Can it wait?*

*NO IT CANNOT WAIT YOU DAPPER DASTARDLY EVIL DOER!* Flug thought. *I NEED AN IMMEDIATE ESCAPE ROUTE AND I’M NOT THAT GOOD A LIAR!*
Instead of sending that, he settled for the more sarcastic: **I don’t know, can that weekend trip you mentioned wait?**

Flug guessed this meant he was agreeing to go. Oh boy.

Wait, was it going to be an overnight stay? Were they getting a hotel room? Was he going to have to bring his own food? Was it like they were driving somewhere or what? Should he bring gas money? Would he need an overnight bag?

Goddamnit did he own any normal male underwear anymore?

No way was he going to let Black Hat see him in his panties. Even if he already knew, which Flug couldn’t say for sure and sure as hell wasn’t going to ask about, that didn’t mean he had to go and show him.

**Oh so you’re FINALLY getting back to me about that?**

Well okay, he had a right to be mad about that.

**So you’re in?**

Flug responded quickly: **Yeah I’m in. Now can you please come get me?**

Think, think, what sounded casual and plausible?

**I need a ride home.**

Nailed it.

“And Flug-” Flug perked up at the sound of his name. “-Flug was thinking maybe it was his Gift. If he has one.” Natalia said. “Say, you wouldn’t happen to know if he’s in the Gifted program would you Lio?”

“Sadly no, I am no help in this endeavour.” God why was he so eloquent?

“Well damn,” Tomas said. “Does this guy have friends? Anyone else we can ask?”
“I don’t really see him talking to people.”

None of your friends can give you a ride?

WOULD YOU STOP MAKING THIS SO DIFFICULT!?

Look can you please just do this for me? I’ll owe you a favor, okay?

Flug hoped that would sweeten the deal.

He got the fastest reply he had gotten from Black Hat thus far.

Okay fine. Be there soon. Bringing company.

Flug reread the last two words. About four times. He did this until it finally clicked in his mind what they meant.

Black Hat was... bringing someone else?

Who? Ok he mentioned he was “busy” but what could he be doing right now, of all times? And with who would he be doing them with?

Wait.

It’s Friday night. It’s ungodly late. He’s a man. With all of the same urges Flug has, presumably. And with company.

Oh shit did I just cockblock the guy?

“Hermano,” a familiar voice said into his ear.
Flug resisted the urge to jump up, run off, and start a new life in America.

*Relax. He told himself. You’ve done this before. Just stall until Black Hat comes and you can leave.*

Actually, why didn’t he just go wait outside for him?

Yeah that made sense! He felt tired and texted a friend to give him a ride home, and was just going to wait outside for him! Perfectly reasonable! No one else had to know he a) Had pretty much no friends, at least none close enough that he’d text for a ride home after midnight; or b) had no clue exactly how long it was going to be until Black Hat showed up.

Hopefully he had just been up late with homework, or he had a night shift job (please don’t be murdering people, please don’t show up covered in blood), or some other reason that didn’t involve his personal life.

Seriously, if it turned out Black Hat had a date that Flug had dragged him away from, he was sure he was going to have to deal with more Angry Black Hat.

He doubted the man would be forgiving that Flug pulled him away from his date just because some guy made him uncomfortable with his unholy hotness.

And, oh yeah, he now owed him a favor! Just peachy!

“*Hermano*, you look overworked.” Aurelio said, dragging him away from his thoughts to stare deep into those smooth green orbs he had in his skull where most people would just have eyes. “All work and no play makes a man dull, no?”

He said it kind of playfully, and Flug actually felt himself relax a bit. He let out a soft chuckle, even though he really did want to correct that movie quote.

“Heh, y-yeah I guess.” He awkwardly rubbed the back of his head. His hair felt stiff and a bit crusty. Also it felt like it was sticking up in odd places around his head. Dear God did he forget to shower AGAIN?

“It’s not healthy to push yourself so hard, *Rocinante.*” *Oh madre María* his name sounded perfect when it was HIM saying it!

Flug turned his head down, hoping he wasn’t blushing as hard as he felt he was.

“I-I know, force of habit. I, uh-”

“You should come out with me sometime!” Aurelio said, cutting him off.
“H-huh?”

“You should let me take you out sometime!” He said again, putting a hand on his shoulder. Flug’s eyes went wide for a moment before remembering Aurelio had to have skin contact with a person in order for his powers to work on them.

Saved by the polyester T-Shirt.

“Let me introduce you to some people, show you a good time.” He went on, casually invading Flug’s personal space. “You, *mi amigo*, are in desperate need of a night out.”

Flug never went out to parties or did anything social. He’d never been a popular guy. Maybe a night out of his comfort zone would do him some good. Help him take a break from all the pressuring thoughts swimming around his head.

A night out with AURELIO CRUZ of all people, promised that nothing else would be on his mind.

Wait did he just call him his friend?

“M-maybe you’re right…” he admitted. “Maybe I need to take a b-b-break.”

“Ooh come on, *hermano*, give me more enthusiasm!”

“Uuuuh…Y-yeah?” he said awkwardly holding up a fist like that meant something.

Aurelio stared at him for a moment.

“You don’t go out much, do you?”

“N-no…” Flug said, downcast again.

“Oh, don’t look so sad *hermano*,” He said, getting down on one knee to cup his face in his hands. “I didn’t mean to make fun, I just think going out and having a fun time could do you some good, that’s all.”

*HE’S TOUCHING MY FACE HE’S TOUCHING MY FACE HE’S TOUCHING MY FACE*

...Wait…

*Oh shit he’s touching my face.*
Skin. On. Skin.

Oh no.

Flug’s eyes went wide. Aurelio noticed. Apparently he took offense to the semi-horrified semi-aroused look in his eye because he gave him sort of a unimpressed look. Like, *I thought maybe you were different from everybody else. Oh well, guess I was mistaken. Only lust and terror in you.*

As he went to pull his hands away, Flug reflexively reached out and held them. Aurelio gave him a surprised look. Flug would’ve given HIMSELF a surprised look if he was able to.

*Why am I doing this he was pulling away he was going away like I wanted why am I here holding his hands?!*

Flug’s eyes flitted from Aurelio’s eyes to his lips to his facial hair to this hands, which he was still holding onto for reasons unknown to even him, and struggled to find some way to explain himself.

“Rocinante?”

“I-I-I...” he fidgeted as he tried to form some magic sentence which would explain away everything. “I’m sorry. I don’t m-mean to be so skittish and awkw-w-ward.” Oh geez, he fumbled right in the middle of the word. Just kill him now.

“I’ve n-never been good at talking to people.” He faintly realized he was slowly bringing Aurelio’s hands back towards his face. More specifically, to his lips.

*NO NO NO THIS IS WEIRD ABORT MISSION ABORT MISSION*

Flug released Aurelio’s hands, flopping his own down into his lap. He hoped it hadn’t been *too* weird and creepy.

Aurelio stared at him with an odd look of expectancy on his face. He was clearly trying to keep his features neutral, trying keep a sort of blank look on his face, but his eyes couldn’t hide the truth. They looked expectant. They looked like they, HE, was waiting for something.
Flug tried speaking again. “But I t-t-think you’re r-right. I think I need a b-b-break.”

Aurelio smiled. Widely. Showing his blindingly white and perfectly straight teeth.

“Great!” He said, jumping to his feet. “You, me, and a wide array of magnificent ladies!” He said seductively. Flug wondered if it was appropriate to say he was gay right now. Probably not, it would probably just makes things awkward.

Admittedly not as awkward as trying to hit on women would be, but whatever.

“Saturday night, clear your schedule!” Aurelio said pointing to him dramatically. Like he was copying a pose he’d seen on TV.

He felt his heart, which was beginning to go all aflutter at the thought of spending a night out with Aurelio Cruz; man of his wet dreams, sink back down into his chest. Actually he swore he could feel it sinking down lower, down into the pit of his stomach.

“O-oh, um, t-t-this Saturday?” He asked tentatively. “I, uh, I actually already agreed to s-something this w-w-weekend.” He began playing with his hands, like a child might when telling his parents bad news.

Aurelio raised his eyebrows, surprised.

“Wait, you have plans this weekend?” Luis asked. “Since when?”

Damn it Luis can you just blend into the background and stay there?!

“I,uh, just recently confirmed I-I’m going.”

“Going where?” Manuel asked. “Since when do you go out?”

Since today, apparently. Flug thought.
“I’m, uh...um,” Oh god this was beginning to sound like an excuse. “I’m-”

“We’re going out drinking.” A new, raspy, guttural voice said from the entrance.

All heads turned. Most in surprise and confusion. Flug in mild relief.

Then in confusion as he saw who Black Hat’s “company” was.

It was like, *Ah, Black Hat is finally- WAIT WHAT?*

They made a very odd looking pair, he in his dark suit and coat looking ever so menacing, like a shark had learned how to put on a tie. She with her neon rainbow bright ponytail and mismatching outfit.

Seriously, the hoodie was fine, lizard head hood and all. It kind of blended into her hair but that was beside the point. The dark blue of the shirt clashed with the bright green but whatever, that was the least of his concerns.

Did she only own one of those long gloves that went up past your elbow? It didn’t even have fingers, her fingers were completely bare! On her right side was just a plain black fingerless glove, like the kind a biker might wear. It looked so odd to Flug.

Did she only have one stocking on? Or was that half of a pair or leggings? A legging? Singular? Sounded weird.

The asymmetry of, well, every part of her outfit was just so bizarre.

And let’s not forget, this confirmed Flug’s suspicion that Black Hat was busy with -ahem- personal business.

Ok so he probably cockblocked Black Hat. Well, Flug guess he *really* owed him in that case.

But still, Black Hat and Demetra? Didn’t see that coming.

She herself seemed very in good spirits, just as bubbly and perky as the last time he saw her. Which wasn’t too long ago but still.

She was clinging onto Black Hat’s arm like a punky piece of arm candy. He honestly looked a bit annoyed but far too...chivalrous(?) to say anything.
Was chivalry something a villain would concern himself with? Even one attending a school for heroes?

The man himself strode into the main hall, like he was taking a leisurely stroll with his lady friend through a messy unkempt college laboratory. Flug guessed it didn’t make for a very romantic atmosphere.

Demetra didn’t seem phased or even bothered at all, really. She hung off him like a technicolor coat and was constantly turning her head and body to “ooh” and “aah” at all the machinery. Never breaking physical contact or releasing her grip on his arm.

He seemed to be doing his best to keep his composure, though it was clear she was far too mobile for his comfort. His calm smile never left his face. Flug was good at reading people though, so he could see even through his smudged glasses how forced it was.

Upon finally getting within a more reasonable distance to Flug, they stopped. Black Hat paid absolutely no attention to Aurelio, much to the confusion of...well, everyone, and addressed Flug solely.

“So, are you ready to go?”

Flug really hoped that he just meant he was driving him home, not that their little vacation was starting now. “Y-y-yeah, I’m ready.”

Flug picked up his bag, rechecked that he had everything with him and stood up to leave. Then realized he was abruptly leaving everyone with pretty much no explanation.

“I-I, um, I was feeling t-t-tired so I called a ride to take me home.” He said awkwardly fiddling with his frames. “And, Aurelio,” He said facing the man himself. “Th-th-th-thanks. I think a weekend out is j-j-just what I need.” He felt himself smile, actually genuinely smile, towards this man who usually filled him with nothing but arousal and anxiety.

As he was just turning to walk towards the couple (was that what they were, a full-fledged couple?), he felt a hand on his shoulder.

For once, the sight of Aurelio touching him hardly made him jump at all. He actually felt...a little more relaxed from the hand on his shoulder. His mind was still a bit freaked out, but his body seemed to lose some of that ever-constant tension.

Aurelio gave him a smile that could end wars. “I didn’t mean to put you on the spot Rocinante. We’ll
get together another time.”

He then brushed past Flug towards Black Hat and Demetra.

“I don’t believe we’ve been properly introduced.” He said, hand already extended. “Aurelio Cruz.”

Black Hat introduced himself, in his impossible to replicate language. Which it seemed he was accepting no one else could pronounce. “But you may call me ‘Black Hat.’” He said as he extended his own gloved hand.

The two men shook hands firmly, and if Flug had been able to see his face he would’ve noticed a very subtle change in Aurelio’s demeanor.

As it was, neither Black Hat nor Demetra knew the man’s face well enough to be able to pick up on his change.

“Demetra Yashchirkaova,” said woman said holding out a hand herself. “Charmed, I’m sure.”

Yashchi-what now?

Flug wished he could say something to stop this. But he was afraid “Stop, he’s a human puppeteer!” would come off as rude. Especially since Aurelio had been acting so friendly towards him.

Said man took Demetra’s hand in his and gave her knuckles a light kiss. She seemed charmed, that’s for sure. Black Hat didn’t have any visual reaction that Flug could see from where he stood frozen.

Maybe it was their first night out together? So he didn’t have any real strong feelings towards her? He really didn’t seem at all interested in her from what Flug could see.

Wait, why did Flug care? It’s not like it was any of his business how they felt about each other! That was between the two of them!

Now if only the Cafe Triste employees would learn the same…

Black Hat gave Flug an impatient look, which prompted him to get his ass back in gear and give another awkward and stilted goodbye to everyone in the Lab. They all saw him off and the trio left in
“Oh HOT DAMN Flugster who was that tall order of man meat?” Demetra asked. “If I’d have known college men were so hot I would’ve graduated high school!” She said as she gave Black Hat a sultry look.

Flug noticed she really piled on the eyeshadow. Jesus how could she lift her eyelids?

Wait...high school? Just how old was Demetra?

“T-that’s Aurelio C-Cruz.” He said. Wait he already introduced himself to the both of them why was he saying his name again?

“So I heard,” Black Hat said, kind of distastefully. “Truly thinks a lot of himself, doesn’t he?”

“Y-yeah.” Flug said. “He can be k-kind of f-full of himself.”

“Hmph.” Black Hat huffed. “You know him well?”

“Huh?! Oh, n-n-no! Well, n-n-n-not per-personally no! I’ve j-ju-just known OF him for a-awhile. We didn’t r-r-really meet until this past ye-year.”

“Flug-Bug,” Demetra said teasingly. “It’s okay to be flustered. That guy was seriously ripped. Not nearly as hot as you though!” She said poking Black Hat lightly in the chest.

Black Hat slapped her hand away and muttered something Flug couldn’t make out. They all got in his familiar intimidating car and he drove them out of the school parking lot. Demetra called shotgun so Flug crawled into the backseat. In all honestly it wasn’t very spacious. It made Flug think of his first thought of it, a compressed hearse. Emphasis on the compressed.

Black Hat dropped off Flug first. Whether his home was just the closest or Black Hat and Demetra still had plans he didn’t know and wasn’t about to ask.

But, some parting words.

“So, I’ll see you tomorrow morning?” He asked awkwardly as he got out of the backseat of the car.

“Yes, 10:00 am sharp.” Black Hat said seriously from his spot in the driver’s seat. Demetra was preoccupied on her cell phone.

“Do I...do I need to bring anything?”
“A change of clothes and gas money.” He said. “Expect to stay the night.”

“Ahhh, ok.” he said, defeated. “Have a good night.”

“Nighty night Flug!” Demetra called out in a sing-song voice. Black Hat just grunted a reply and drove off.

He was sure he was never going to get used to those two.

And he was spending the night with one of them tomorrow.

It was going to be a long weekend.

Chapter End Notes

Hey there, it’s Fallin again! Which is kind of a joke since it's raining as I write this. I feel like I haven't written as much as I wish, writing fanfiction has been slow ever since school started back up. And I should really be writing that research paper instead of gay fanfiction of a cartoon. Priorities amiright? Remember, this gets updated twice a month! I'm looking forward to April *rubs hands together like a cliche cartoon villain* mwahahah

Translations:
hermana = sister (Spanish)
hermano = brother (Spanish)
Oh Madre María = Oh Mother Mary (Spanish)
mi amigo = my friend (Spanish)
Answers

Chapter Summary

Flug got up at 8:00 on a Saturday for this.

What follows is a lot of road rage, a lot of questioning, a lot of answering (shocker), a tale that will be it’s own chapter someday, and Flug finally makes up his mind about what he's going to do with his life.

And Black Hat has great appreciation for the Italian language.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Flug got up at 8:00 on a Saturday for this.

He really wished he had just broken down and agreed to go earlier in the week. It would’ve saved him having to fake being sick this morning in order to get out of work. He did the classic “hang your head off the end of your bed to sound congested” trick. He added in a few coughs and nauseous sounds for dramatic effect.

It worked, probably because his manager was an idiot, and he was off for the day.

If they called Sunday, he was just going to text back that he was worse. “Hopefully” it would clear up by Monday.

But still, he woke up at eight in the morning on a SATURDAY.

He quickly took the shower he desperately needed, packed a few essentials into a duffel bag, searched in vain for briefs or whatever typical men wore, and brewed a pot of coffee. He packed nothing but jeans and T-Shirts, his typical outfit, and felt he was ready.

He decided to abandon his stockings and girly thigh high socks, just in case. Black Hat would NOT be seeing him in his usual feminine attire. He did, thankfully, have a fair amount of regular white tube socks.

Black Hat showed up at 10, almost exactly. Flug had to hand it to him, that was amazing punctuality. He got into his car and noticed a large cooler in the backseat along with a good-sized suitcase. Black Hat’s change of clothes, Flug guessed. But that cooler, it looked too heavy for just one person to carry.

Shrugging it off, he tossed his bag in the back along with the mystery cooler.
What followed was a drive.

Actually no. Calling it a drive made it sound leisurely and pleasant. Like two guys going off for a relaxing weekend trip. Just pallin’ around and...I don’t know, bonding?

That wasn’t what Black Hat’s driving was like. It was like being stuck with an angry toddler in traffic on the way to said toddler’s favorite fast food joint and the kid had been refusing to eat all afternoon because his mom told him not to spoil his appetite and now we’re in bumper to bumper traffic without the kids pacifier. If the toddler was also in the driver’s seat and unloading all of his crankiness and bad temper on innocent car drivers, then you’d get an approximation of Black Hat’s road rage.

No one was crashed into, mostly because Flug pointed out that it’d be a bitch to try and flee the scene in this traffic, but there were a few close calls. And, okay, Black Hat brought some snacks and there were sodas in the cooler. There was also beer (a lot more beer) but alcohol was not something Flug was going to bring to this equation. Having something to eat on the way did help with keeping the trip endurable. They did not, however, stop for any actual meals. The both of them mainly made due with gas station and convenience store snacks.

So yeah, not a leisurely drive to a relaxing, fun weekend. More like blazing a trail through the highway to hell. Unsurprisingly, the highway is packed with sinners and it wasn’t so much blazing a trail as it was a slow burn towards the next freeway off ramp.

Oh, and to add to the suspense, Black Hat still hadn’t fully explained where they were going or why.

Black Hat told everyone they were going out drinking, which was most likely a lie (even with the keg’s worth of booze in the cooler), so what would this weekend actually entail?

And why in the name of hell did it require an eight hour drive?!

The sun was going down by the time Black Hat finally stopped the car. Flug was a bit confused when he did, they’d made pit stops before for bathroom breaks and snack refills, even refilling their gas tank once, but there wasn’t anything around. No gas station, no convenience store, and they’d just passed a town not too long ago.

So that would mean they were finally at their destination, yes?

Well, where was this?! The literally middle of nowhere?! Some random isolated spot in the Mexican desert?
Oh shit is he going to harvest my organs?

Flug wanted to think he was overreacting. He wanted to. But, well; out of the way spot in Mexico, suspiciously large cooler, Flug wasn’t the most popular or noteworthy guy. It was possible that he could go missing and only a handful of people would really notice. He supposed his parents would notice, eventually. He didn’t keep in touch that often so it might take them a while to notice he was missing. His paranoia only skyrocketed when Black Hat turned off the car, turned to him and said, “Ok, we’re here.”

He blinked. “Um...h-here?” He said, pointing down, as if here could mean something else.

Black Hat rolled his eyes. “Yes, here! Come on!” He got out, Flug followed suit.

Black Hat motioned for Flug to follow him a ways in some seemingly random direction. They walked for a bit in the darkness, mostly silent except for their footprints, muffled still by the dirt and sand of the land untouched by civilization.

Flug looked up, and found himself staring into the eyes of the cosmos.

Stars, tons of them. More than he’d ever seen in his life. Whole constellations! If he didn’t know better he’d think he was seeing complete galaxies! It was actually hard to remind himself that wasn’t the case. His inner childlike wonder was greatly overpowering his rational adult mind. The moon was larger than it had ever seemed to be, like it had spontaneously moved through space closer to the earth. It’s luminescence was grand, it lit the night so wonderfully that Flug’s eyes barely had any darkness to adjust themselves to. He almost thought he could count the craters in the big beautiful moon he stared at.

It was so glorious.

He’d never had a huge interest in space. In his mind the open sky of the Earth was as far as he needed to venture to find beauty. What lay beyond their humble planet’s atmosphere was of no concern. But now, seeing it, seeing it without the interference of lights or the pollution of humanity, he felt he finally understood what held the astrologers heart.

It didn’t replace his old love of the sky, but it gave him a new appreciation for what was millions of lightyears away but still visible to an insignificant speck of life like him to gawk at.

“He?! A familiar voice called to shake him out of his thoughts.. It seemed to be happening more
often as time went on. “Flug, keep up!” He noticed he had fallen behind as he stargazed.

“Oh! Sorry.” He squeaked as he jogged up to join the man. “I-I’ve just never seen so many stars so
cl-clearly.”

He thought he saw Black Hat grin at this. “Mesmerizing sight, no?”

“Yes,”

He nodded as he kept walking. “It’s one of the reasons I brought you out here.”

Flug paused a bit at this. Not physically, he still kept pace with Black Hat, but it made him stop and
think.

Black Hat likes to stargaze?

It seemed like something so...normal. Just an average, normal, ordinary interest. He wouldn’t think
someone aspiring for world domination and selling weapons of mass destruction would find pleasure
in something so simple as taking a look at the night sky. That was something your typical nature-
loving hiker did, not some super villain!

Well, Flug supposed that villains were people too, and could enjoy more than one sort of thing.

Tonight, stars. Tomorrow, terrorism.

Flug was strangely okay with that.

“A-and the other reason?” Flug asked. “The other reason you brought me out here?”

Black Hat stopped as if on cue. Flug’s eyes left the man’s face and he stared out in front of them.
They seemed to be on a ridge of some kind, looking down at what Flug guessed could be some kind
of construction site. It was large, like something pretty big was planned, but it seemed that work was
just starting.

The machines lay empty and the work site deserted (or so Flug assumed). Like a child’s set of toys
left out for the night, leaving the game to resume the next morning.

“Wh-what is that?” Flug asked, sounding a bit awestruck. He didn’t fully understand what this was
or why they were here for it, but Black Hat had his full attention.
Black Hat crawled down the ridge so that was now standing below Flug. He reached out and offered his hand.

“Come,”

Flug took it and allowed himself to be guided down the ridge, sliding for the most part, until they were on flat land again. The two men walked in a comfortable silence, neither wishing to disturb the peace of the moment. Black Hat didn’t let go right away, he held his hand as he led Flug towards the empty construction site.

There was a fence surrounding it, mostly likely to keep out trespassers like them. Flug looked up at the fence, about two meters in height, mostly likely going around the entirety of the work site with the exception of the gate. There had to be a gate, right? The workers needed some way of getting in. It would be locked, of course, but Flug doubted that would be keeping them out tonight.

Black Hat led the way as they followed the fencing to what Flug assumed would be the gate entrance. Flug still didn’t understand why exactly Black Hat had brought him here or what this was supposed to mean, but he wasn’t ready to break the silence just yet. He would allow Black Hat to reveal it himself.

The reached the gate. As Black Hat fiddled with the lock and Flug couldn’t tell what he was doing (How could he even tell what he was doing?), he looked around. This place was, as Flug guessed, in the absolute middle of nowhere. There was a road leading up to it, all that machinery got here somehow, but nothing to give clues as to what was being built.

There were signs on the gate. The standard “KEEP OUT” and “NO TRESPASSING”. Flug didn’t know much about construction equipment, so peeking at the machinery from the other side of the fence wasn’t telling him much aside from the fact that construction was, in fact, ongoing.

It seemed like maybe they were just getting started on the actual building of...whatever this was going to be? Like they had finished the landscaping (that’s what they did to the land before they started building, right?) and were just getting to putting down the foundation for buildings.

Flug heard some kind of metallic crack, which he assumed was the lock being busted open. Black Hat stood up from his crouched position and opened the gate as swiftly as if he was merely opening the doors to his own home.

He almost expected Black Hat to try and hold his hand again, but no. He just walked through the open gates and Flug followed closely behind.

Black Hat strolled through the site with ease, while Flug was tripping and stumbling on the uneven ground pretty much every other step he took. Which made no sense. Even if Black Hat had trespassed here before the work was still going and the dirt was probably not remaining constant during that time.
Flug didn’t know if there was some certain spot they were going to or if Black Hat was just roaming around aimlessly, but he was able to admire the equipment to a great extent. He might not be familiar with any of it, but he could still appreciate complex machinery when he saw it.

Without warning, Black Hat stopped. Flug unceremoniously crashed into his back. Which was really firm and solid, as it turned out. Black Hat didn’t even budge from the weight of Flug walking into him.

Black Hat turned to face him, not even fazed or the least bit angry. Odd, he thought he’d at least be annoyed from that. Not that Flug was gonna complain. Angry Black Hat was frightening. It convinced him all the more that he had sharp teeth.

“Flug, do you know what this place is?” He asked, a slight smile on his face.

“Um, a construction site?” Flug asked.

“Yes, yes, but a construction site for what?”

“I, uh, I don’t know.” The site was large, and it was clear they were laying down the groundwork for... something ...but nothing gave him any clues as to what.

Black Hat seemed a bit disappointed at that. Flug struggled to come up with a guess.

“Um, sorry but I haven’t taken an architecture course, or studied construction machines. I don’t know how to figure this out. I-I-I can learn those th-things!” He said suddenly. He had no idea why he was offering to study things that had nothing to do with his field of study just to try and, what, impress this guy?

Black Hat just kinda shrugged. “They’re building a new town.”

Flug blinked. A...town? They came all this way to see a new town in the making? Why? I mean it was kind of cool and interesting and certainly wasn’t anything he would’ve even thought to go do on a Saturday.

But...why did they drive for eight goddamn hours for this?!

“A new town?” he asked.

“Yes. They’re, ah, they’re just finishing the foundation but, when that’s completed they can get around to actually laying out the townplan. Where the houses and shops and roads will be and all that.”
“Oookaaaay…” Flug really didn’t see where this was going.

“I wanted you to see this because…” Black Hat paused, seeming to struggle with getting the words out. “Because, well, I want this to be my base.”

“Your…base?”

“Base. Headquarters. **Lair**. Base of operations. I want it to be here.” He said.

Before Flug could open his mouth to comment Black Hat spoke again. “Hear me out, listen. It’s a brand new town. A small town. Isolated. Away from prying eyes and **under the radar** of heroes. They always look in the big, populated cities, not small town communities like this will be. We set up here, we could stay unnoticed. **Innoservato**. Free to do as we wish until our big debut. Hidden in plain sight until we finally step out of the shadows. By that time, we’ll be strong enough to take on **any** who dare attack our home.”

*Our* home?

“Right here.” Black Hat said, stomping down a foot. “My future lair will be right here. It’s gonna be a big place, the future world tyrant wouldn’t have anything less, but I’m confident in my choice of location. It’ll be **perfezionare**. Perfect. I’ve already put in the paperwork to purchase the land. All of it. This entire town will be belong to me.”

Flug was mildly impressed that Black Hat just translated that on his own. And that he was putting more thought into the logistics of how to actually make his plans reality.

“It’s...it’s going to take years before it’s finished, of course.” He continued. “Towns don’t just spring up like weeds, after all. But, when everything’s settled and done and I move here…”

Black Hat looked Flug dead in the eyes. Flug looked back, too frozen to flinch or squirm at the uncomfortable unblinking gaze.

“Will you be here with me?”

Flug supposed that this was it. It was time. This was the final last chance to back out now or live with the consequences. It was time to stop avoiding it and make his choice.

Black Hat said he had no intention of forcing him or blackmailing him, and he’d stuck to that so far. All he’d done was make him an offer, give him an explanation as to why he’d approached him, and
brought him out to show him just how serious he was.

He’d offered him the world, all he was doing now was showing how he’d get them there.

“How would this work?” Flug asked. Always questioning, wasn’t he? “Is there like a contract I have to sign? A non-disclosure agreement?”

“I did draft up a contract.” Black Hat said, pulling a rolled-up piece of paper out of his coat. Did he have that with him the entire time? Was it all sweaty and gross from being in his coat all day?

Flug took it from him. No, it didn’t feel sweaty or moist or anything. Just ordinary paper rolled-up and tied with a small red ribbon with black lining.

The man had a color scheme and he was sticking to it.

Remembering he was dealing with a villain here, there was a burning concern in the back of his mind. Black Hat said he wouldn’t force him to join, and he was keeping his word there.

But would he force me to stay?

“What are the terms of this contract?” Better to ask now than find out years later. He couldn’t read it for himself in this light, and he wasn’t going to waste anymore time. “Is it a lifetime commitment?”

“If I sign this and agree to work for you, will I be allowed to quit?”

Black Hat kept his eye trained on Flug’s face. His eye narrowed and his voiced went deeper, but he never looked away, never broke his gaze, never fidgeted or played with his hands. He was a stone statue.

“No. If you agree to this, you’re agreeing to spend your life working for me.”

There it was. The ultimatum Flug had been anticipating. The true moment where he had to choose what he would do with his life.

That was quite the statement. Not to mention a lot to ask of your employees. Especially ones you barely know personally and all you have to go on is the dirty secrets you dug up. How was he even
If he agreed, he was literally signing away his life to his man and his ambition. If not, well he didn’t know what he would do. He had never had any long-term goals or plans going into Universidad. He supposed he would end up working for some hero or heroic organization, using his talents for the benefit of mankind and the assistance of the lawful to chaotic good. That was fine with him, it would make his parents proud, but it wasn’t anything he thought of with any specific pleasure.

Creating weapons, machines of destruction, inventions designed to maim, injure, murder, capture, kill, cripple, disable, destroy, annihilate, defeat.

The mere thought gave Rocinante Flugslys...feeling. He felt lightheaded. His stomach seemed to clench a bit but not to painfully. His mind fluttered with the thought of what he could contribute. In his projects, capturing his fellow students, it was like he just realized he’d been holding himself back. He’d been limiting himself with what he could truly accomplish.

He wasn’t sure if it was a truly good feeling, but it was something stirred deep within him and it was something the peaceful alternative seemingly could not give.

Black Hat held his hand again, and led him away from the construction site. The future land for the headquarters of Black Hat’s future evil empire. He led Flug out past the gate, Flug noticed the lock had actually been broken, and they went back up the ridge to the car. Silently.

In that silence, Flug was allowed time to think. He considered it from every angle. Went over the details in his head. Tried to work out the logistics of the how and whys and whens and things he couldn’t wrap his head around. He must’ve lost himself in his thoughts because the next thing he knew they were back at the car.

He faced Black Hat, Black Hat looked him dead in the eyes, as if his thick lenses didn’t even exist. He’d given him intense stares before, but this was the most expectant.

“Have you killed people?” Flug asked.

“Yes.” The dark skinned man replied instantly. The shadow cast by his top hat made his face seem even darker, like the night itself grew a face.

“How many?”

“Who knows? I never bothered counting. I had more important things to think of.”

“How many other villains do you know?”
“Many. Spread across the continents. Some are friends.”

“The others?”

“Smart enough to not be enemies.” Black Hat said with a grimace. “Now, I think that after all the question you’ve asked me, I’m owed a few of my own.”

Black Hat spun them around and pinned Flug against the side of the car. He was still clutching onto his hand, almost painfully so, and held him forcefully. He doubted he could physically overpower him.

“I’ve answered you honestly.” He said with a malicious grin. “You’ll extend the same courtesy, yes?”

Flug nodded, of course he would. Even if he wasn’t being accosted like this, he would still probably be truthful. That night at the Cafe scared him.

Black Hat nodded back. “Bene, bene .”

“Bien .” Flug meekly corrected.

Black Hat stopped smiling. He actually had more of a blank look on his face now.

“Bien .” He repeated.

Flug nodded, putting a big smile on his face like Yep! You got it! Bien bien bien! You get a gold star!

“Flug,” Black Hat said, still stone-faced. “Will you tell me about Julio Bermudez?”

Crap. Flug thought. I didn’t think you’d ask about him.

“Y-yo-you don’t already know?” Flug asked, his breathing hitched and labored. Being in trapped positions like this were a bit of a turn on, which was awkward when done by a guy who’s potentially your new boss.

“I want to hear it from you.” Black Hat said with a shrug. “No need to leave out any... juicy details.” He grinned widely, showing off his definitely sharp and needle-like teeth.
This man is fucking with me.

Flug relaxed some of the tension in his body, going a bit limp. It wasn’t that he felt the danger had passed, it was more he felt he could get it over quicker if he just spilled the beans. He was honestly getting pretty fed up with the past coming back to haunt so constantly this past week.

“Julio was my boyfriend.” He said simply. No reaction from Black Hat. Ok, fine. “My first boyf-friend. My parents are very religious and I didn’t think they’d accept m-me if they knew. So when I found him in the Fuerza Aérea, I jumped at the chance to actually date someone. He, thankfully, felt the same.”

Black Hat nodded quietly, so Flug continued.

“He understood my situation, his wa-wa-was similar, so for the most part we kept our relationship private. We tried to, at least. B-b-b-but someone found out.”

“Gabriel Sueños.” Black Hat said.

“Yeah,” Flug said with a resigned sigh. “Yeah, that was him.”

Sueños. A tall, well-built man with dark hair and fair skin. Not the most popular guy in their cadet unit, but he had a fair amount of toadies that went along with his bigotry.

He had hated him.

“W-well, he found out. He threatened to tell everyone, the squad leader, the general, the other cadets. Julio was worried about getting kicked out, or our parents finding out, so w-w-w-we basically became his servants from that day o-on.”

Doing his chores, washing his laundry, giving him whatever portions of their food he wanted. He would shove and beat them when none of their superiors were watching. He scarcely left them alone at all. It was worse than he let on. They were not treated like servants by Gabriel, they were treated like slaves. He spoke to them as if they were lesser beings unworthy of basic decency. He walked all other them and it drove Rocinante insane.

Perhaps literally.

“And then?” Black Hat prompted after Flug had been quiet for too long.

“You know wha-what happened then.” He said, meeting his gaze with tired eyes.

“Tell me anyway.”
“Then the incident happened, and we ended up breaking up. The end.”

“Oh, what incident?” Black Hat asked in mock ignorance. He brought his hands up to pin Flug by his shoulders against the car. “Tell me what happened.”

Flug slapped Black Hat’s hands away from him, finally standing up straight. “I convinced Julio to sneak out with me, while our squadron was doing a drill. Each unit was camped out far away from each other to really sell the illusion of being stranded away from civilization. We stole an old, unused plane from one of the hangars. I flew it, and I crashed it into their campsite. Julio shielded me from the blunt of the damage. We were the only survivors.”

“And then?” Black Hat asked with a goddamn elated expression clear on his face. He was actually deriving joy from making Flug talk about this, apparently oblivious to the scorn in his voice.

“Julio was bedridden, so was I, but he was far worse off. He could barely move. I shouldn’t have moved, but I did anyway. People kept questioning us. I barely spoke at all. We were separated and weren’t allowed to see or talk to each other, but I went and visited him. First I convinced one of the nurses to sneak me in to see him. Then, when I knew the way by heart, I snuck over when I knew the halls were empty.

We figured out our story but, heh, it wa-wasn’t all that convincing.” Flug said with another chuckle. “Me being largely silent helped sell it, but it wasn’t enough for some people. Even then I knew altering records and our own statements w-wa-w-wasn’t going to be enough. So I got m-m-m-more...active with keeping my secrets.”

Black Hat grabbed him by the shoulders again. Tightly gripping him like he was afraid he was going to disappear if he let him go. If his smile grew any wider Flug was afraid it would up and split his head in two.

“Yes?” he asked through a clenched jaw of grinning sharp teeth.

“So, I, uh, I got rid of them.”

“Who?”

“The people who kept digging into things. Who kept trying to unravel the m-m-mys-mysteries of why it all happened. I ha-had to. It was the only way. Julio ended up taking responsibility for the crash. I never asked him to, but I didn’t stop him either. He didn’t tell them about us, or wh-wha-what Sueños had been doing.”

“And how did you do that? How did you get rid of them?”

“I killed them.” He said shortly, and without much emotion.

Black Hat’s grin fell a bit. He moved his hands in front of Flug’s face in a kind of “go on” gesture.
“I used a knife.” Black Hat’s smile faded a little more. “I stabbed them.” Flug said again. The smile got smaller. That elated look in the hatted man’s eye lessened.

“Ok fine, Julio actually watched me kill the last of them. That’s where our relationship ended. He took the fall for the crash, he never told anyone what he saw me do, and they had a really weak security system that was easily hacked into and that’s how I never got caught. The crash was officially labeled an accident by two stupid cadets who took a joyride in an old defunct plane and lost control. Are you happy now?”

Black Hat was still and silent. He was no longer smiling at all and he did NOT look happy. He had lessened his death grip on Flug’s arms, though. Which Flug swiftly brushed off saying “And can you let go of me? You’re like a clingy woman.”

Silence for a beat. Silence that Black Hat shattered with his next revelation.

“I’m not the one wearing women’s underwear, Flug.”

“Well, you know…”

Black Hat pinned Flug against the car again, with his entire body this time. He had a leg firmly planted between Flug’s thighs and roughly forced his arms to his sides. His face was close, so close Flug could feel his hot breath puffing against his cheek. Flug had his face turned away, both to hide his embarrassment and so that he didn’t have to face it. Face HIM.

Black Hat chuckled. “Oh, don’t be like that. It’s not like I really care about…” he trailed off. “You know.”

He’s laughing at me. I can hear it in his voice. He’s mocking me and CAN YOU BACK THE FUCK UP I DON’T NEED YOU RUBBING AGAINST ME RIGHT NOW!

Seriously though, comedic internal monologue aside, Black Hat literally shoving their bodies together against the backseat car door was FAR closer than Flug wanted to be with him. The feeling
of something hard pressing against his hip almost made him scream. And NOT in a fun way.

Um, Black Hat, sir, this is not appropriate employee-employer behavior. If you do not desist I WILL contact HR.

“I told you not to leave out the details.” Black Hat continued. “Why’d you give me such a watered down version of the story?” Flug swore he could hear him pouting.

“Black Hat, I don’t like talking about this. Or my relationships.”

“Oh oh ok, fine. Sure. How about we talk about the bodies? What did they look like? Did you see their limbs? How about his?” He asked with a sneer. “Could you smell the charred flesh? Or was it all burned away by the time you came to?”

“Please,” Flug murmured. “Can we just–”

“How do your scars feel?” Black Hat asked, bringing his face uncomfortably close to Flug’s. Flug had unwisely turned away toward his left side, exposing his scarred right cheek to Black Hat. “Do you feel lucky? You survived a plane crash, and the worst you got was a broken leg, and some scar tissue. And that wasn’t even the fire. Or the impact. That was the leg, but it wasn’t your face or that area on your chest and shoulder.”

Crap. He even knew about that?

“It was the glass, wasn’t it?” His breath was ghosting over the patchwork of scars on his cheek, giving Flug a slight tingly feeling.

Flug nodded meekly, trying not to shiver from the sensation.

“Yes, it was the glass.”

“Shoddy work on those old models, eh?” Black Hat said. “Should’ve stolen one more up-to-date.”

“Thank you, Captain Hindsight, but that doesn’t do me a lot of good right now.” Flug said, turning to face him. That only brought their faces closer together. They were directly face-to-face now. So close they would barely need to lean in at all if they wanted to kiss.
Wait, would Black Hat actually try to kiss him? He better not! Not after all this emotional whirlwind of torment and uncertainty!

*Black Hat, if you so much as try to kiss me right now, I will bite you. I swear to God.*

That might be a stupid thing to do to the guy who brought you to the middle of nowhere and who is your only ride home. AN EIGHT HOUR car ride home. And who has a large cooler that is probably big enough for a human carcass, if dismembered.

Ok is that line of thought really helpful?

“Flug?” Black Hat asked in a deep, low voice.

“Ye-yeah?” Flug responded in a much higher pitch than his usual speaking voice. It sounded like a squeak. Oh god PUBERTY WAS YEARS AGO why is his voice cracking?

“I’d like your answer now.”

Ah, yes, the true matter at hand.

Does Rocinante Flugslys agree to join with the up and coming villain from God-knows-where with no turning back?

Or does he refuse and sit through a very awkward car ride back to civilization?

- Pros:
  - Black Hat is a legit villain who has killed people before, and presumably has SOME kind of experience. So it’s not as if I’m joining up with someone who has no idea what they’re doing
  - Very easy workload, just work nonstop for the rest of my life. I can do that.
  - Simple work, designing and inventing machines. I know how to do that.
  - Extremely secure job position, quitting is **not** an option.
  - Good pay, Black Hat is loaded and willing to fund pretty much anything if it gets him closer to world domination. Money will most likely not be a *huge* issue.
  - No need to hide true self/past, he already knows about it.
  - Headquarters will not be complete for another few years, leaving time to finish education and iron out the details of this whole world conquest scheme. Together.
  - Possibility to contribute improvements in Black Hat’s oversimplified plan. Although seeing that he’s picked some out of the way spot for his main base, maybe he’s putting more thought
into this than I originally assumed. That is a good call.

- Cons:
- Morally wrong, is by definition evil.
- Lifetime commitment, quitting is not an option.
- Probably not something to tell mom and dad about, or anyone really. Can’t tell anyone what it is I do for a living.
- Having to live with the fact that everything I do is mostly likely killing people.
- Boss knows dirty secrets and will not hesitate to use them to taunt me.
- Will have to spend the rest of my life under Black Hat. Do I really want to do that?
- I wonder what the work hours will be?
- Will most likely leave little to no time left for things like socializing or relaxation. How much anime will I miss? And is that really what concerns me right now?

Somehow, he felt the pros were beginning to outweigh the cons.

And really, what were Flug’s plans to begin with? After coming to terms with the fact that he would never fly again and deciding to go to college, what was his actual goal?

Get a degree, get a job, move on with life. Those were the basics. As oversimplified as Black Hat’s goals. It had been over two years, and he was still no closer to figuring out what it was he actually wanted out of his life.

So, why not?

He took a deep breath. “Black Hat.”

“Yes?”

“I’ll do it. I’m yours.”

Black Hat grinned maliciously at him, his pupil exploding in his glee.

“Excellent!”

Chapter End Notes
The next chapter is my absolute favorite! I can't wait for you all to read it. Same Fallin FanFic, some time next month! Spring Break is coming up, so hopefully I'll be able to write a lot and maintain my update schedule.

Translations:
Inoservato = Unnoticed (Italian)

perfezionare = perfect (Italian)

Bene = Good (Italian)

Bien = Good (Spanish)
The Man with the Curse

Chapter Summary

This chapter is broken into 3 parts. They can be summed up like this:
1: (Flug:) "Did I just sell my soul?" (Black Hat:) "LOL Yep, cheers!"

2: (Flug *drunk*:) LET'S JUST STICK HATS ON EVERYTHING! (Black Hat *also drunk* :) "Kiss me you fool."

3: (Flug:) "Zzzzzzzzzz" (Black Hat:) How dare you leave me with my angst.

Chapter Notes

Happy Friday the 13th! And International Kissing day! And the premiere of the Miraculous Ladybug episode Zombizou!

This was where I discovered my two favorite things to write: drunken antics and Black Hat POV. Because i can't help but write Black Hat as a huge freaking dork and I love it! Oh, and you know what PaperHat was always missing? Daddykink! (I'm so sorry)

Oh, and there's a lot of spanish in this chapter, translations in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

YES! YES! YES! YEEEEEEEEEES!

Finally! Rocinante Flugslys had agreed to become his subordinate! Black Hat was beyond thrilled! It had been so long since he had employees and he was over the damn moon to have one again!

The last one had been incredibly useless, but Black Hat had high hopes for this Flug! THIS man wouldn’t die from vomit!

But, just in case, he would put extra effort into not vomiting on him.

With the news of Flug’s agreement, Black Hat had to restrain himself from literally jumping for pure joy and elation. He didn’t, obviously, he had an image to maintain. But he did insist on doing most of the unpacking while Flug sat on the cooler once the two finally got in out of the backseat of his vehicle.

He also insisted Flug drink the first beer of the night. It didn’t seemed like the scarred young man was a drinker by any means, but he deserved it.
He just signed onto the team of the future world dictator, after all. News like that needs a drink to help it sink in.

While Flug sipped half-heartedly from his beer bottle, Black Hat went about unloading the trunk. There wasn’t anything really heavy; just some sleeping bags, fold-out chairs, a smaller cooler filled with some defrosted meat, buns, and all the necessary materials to build a campfire. Oh, and utensils, along with paper plates.

Black Hat was not some savage.

Flug wanted to help him, it was actually pretty adorable, but Black Hat shooed him away. He was grateful for his submission and wanted to show him how much he truly appreciated his joining him. He would do this by making a fire and cooking dinner.

Neither man had had a decent meal all day, so it should be a nice treat.

The fire was made easily enough, he had made fires on his own time for so long using whatever flammable materials he could scavenge, so having such simple tools at the ready was quite convenient.

For those not in the know, it’s a good idea to dig a hole about six inches deep for the fire, making sure to keep flammable materials like fabric or dry plants away. Fires could be unpredictable, and Black Hat had burned himself enough in his youth to know to take it seriously.

After the hole is dug, six inches deep and maybe two feet across, make sure there’s a good amount of dirt piled around the rim, to prevent the fire from spreading. Gather tinder and kindling (in layman’s terms, the stuff that you’ll start off with and the actual fuel for your fire), which Black Hat had brought with him. Start a small fire with the tinder, using conventional fire-starting means, and place it in the hole. Once it starts to really burn, begin adding kindling gradually.

You don’t want to waste all your kindling, or else you’ll find yourself sitting in the isolated desert with an ever lowering flame, losing the faint protection and security the small light provided. Having the darkness close in on you, along with all the creatures that hide within it. Growing closer to you as the faint embers burn out and leave you stranded in a dark sea with no shore until the sun itself comes upon you from the distant horizon.

That scenario was perfect for scary stories or murders, not so much when attempting to make your new underlings feel at ease in your presence.

Black Hat made their campfire, set up the metal tray to cook the meat patties on, and set up the fold-out chairs. Two of them, one for each man. They were non-distinct things he got from... somewhere.
It didn’t really matter, he didn’t use them often.

The dark suited man sat leisurely, and after a moment’s hesitation Flug sat in his own chair adjacent to him. The fire was small, a bit hidden by the tray that was cooking their dinner.

Flug was still sipping his alcoholic beverage. Wow, he still hadn’t finished it? Black Hat would’ve probably been halfway through his second bottle by that point. Then again, he didn’t really sip his beer. Wine he would sip. Not beer. Beer went down better if it went down quickly.

Ok, this silence was getting awkward. Really awkward. Oh God someone say something.

“Dammit Flug stop being so fidgety! Calm your ass down!” He said, loudly.

Crap. He hadn’t meant to say that out loud. Or at that volume.

Flug himself had jumped, and spilled some of his drink on himself in the process. Aw man, he really scared him didn’t he? He wasn’t close enough to casually reach out and touch the other man, scooting his chair over like a child was out of the question, so what was left? Awkward small talk to lighten the mood?

Uuuuuuuuuuuugggggghhhhh why is this so difficult?!

With a sigh, he resigned himself to making conversation. “So, not a drinker?” He asked.

“Huh? Uh, no. Alcohol isn’t really m-m-m-my thing.” Flug replied, still holding the bottle timidly with both hands like a teenager having his first uncertain drink of his fathers liquor.

“It’s better if you don’t sip it.” Black Hat said, trying to offer legitimate advice to his young subordinate. “Beer isn’t made to taste good, stop trying to savor it.”

Flug looked down at the drink in his hands, he didn’t look like he was enjoying the prospect of drinking it in bigger amounts. Black Hat got up and retrieved himself a bottle from the cooler. He opened it swiftly and took a large swig.

“Ahh, see? Like that.” Flug looked unconvinced.

“Just try it.”

Flug shrugged his shoulders as if to say Well, I got nothing to lose, and leaned back as he chugged the rest of the bottle.
Black Hat laughed. He wasn’t expecting *that*! The timid engineer just up and chugged that stuff! He was thinking maybe he’d give it a cautious try but nope! He downed the remaining half in seconds!

“Now *that’s* what I’m talking about!” He exclaimed, going over and slapping the young man on the shoulder. Flug himself was shaking his head like a wet dog, likely feeling the effects of the alcohol.

“Better?” Black Hat said with an eyebrow raised. He was back in good spirits again.

Flug nodded. “Y-yeah, yeah actually. That was...that was better.”

“Want another?” Asked Black Hat, already sauntering back to the cooler before Flug could say no.

“M-m-maybe in a little bit?” Flug replied, but Black Hat was already approaching him with a second beer. It was said as sort of a question so Black Hat opened the bottle and handed it to him anyway.

“Come on, Flug. We still haven’t toasted to celebrate your joining of the future-ruler-of-the-world’s team!” He said. “It’s a special occasion! Let go of your inhibitions!”

“I’m n-n-n-not sure I wa-want to?”

“It customary.” Black Hat said with a shrug. “A toast! To my first employee!”

The two men clinked their bottles together and drank heartily. Black Hat noticed from the corner of his eye that Flug was taking a rather large swig of his drink. He smiled, finally the guy was getting into it!

Man, those burgers were starting to smell great. How exactly he could smell them, he wasn’t sure but he wasn’t complaining. Nothing like the scent of cooking meat to bring out the hunger you’ve been ignoring all day. Black Hat’s stomach growled loudly. He felt the deep urge to sink his teeth into whatever was producing that glorious scent immediately.

*Now now,* He chided himself. *That’s no way to behave in front of your brand new underling. Patience.*

Of course, he too must be desperately hungry. Well maybe. The guy was so skinny Black Hat wasn’t sure how often he actually ate. He was thinking on this as he flipped the patties over, letting their heavenly scent float up in his face like a delicious cloud of satiating warmth.

He felt he might start drooling. How undignified!

And with what his vomit was capable of, how messy as well.
“Oh! Do you have a pen?” Flug asked from behind him.

“A pen?” He turned.

“Yes. So I can sign this contract?” Flug waved the piece of paper around.

Oh yeah! While he was still sober enough for it to be legally binding! Yes, sign it! Right now sign it now!

“Right, right. A pen. Here.” Black Hat fished around in the coat pockets and produced an elegant ink pen, which he lightly tossed over to his employee. Finally, they could put it in writing! He’d been waiting for this since the Cafe!

Speaking of, he was going to have to thank that woman with the distracting hair again. She told him ALL about Flug’s comings and goings and what he talked “non-stop” about. It was enough to make his charcoal skin blush, if he was physically capable of blushing. She also shared many details of herself, of which became of more and more interest to him the more she divulged. She seemed like she could prove herself useful, if Black Hat found any need for her.

While he found her voice a bit annoying, as well as her tendency to speak uninterrupted for minutes on end, she had given him a lot of useful information. Had...helped...him, even. It was, after all, in part to her suggestions of “playing hard to get” that Flug now owed him a favor. Which made him see stars at the thought of all the possibilities he could use that for.

And his face when he walked in with her on his arm! Excitement, then confusion, then something Black Hat couldn’t describe in one word. Something between disappointment, surprise, and maybe even embarrassment. Was there a word for it?

Ah, but all of that could wait. Flug was now contracually under his employ, and Black Hat would not let anything sour the air of good cheer he was trying to put on.

He turned to him, grinning. It probably looked sinister to the young man. Black Hat wasn’t overly trying to look intimidating, he supposed he just had one of those faces. He didn’t wear “friendly” very well.

Flug apparently thought so too, as he got up and got himself another beer of his own accord. Good! The high-strung man was learning to loosen up!

Speaking of, had he actually read that contract? Black Hat wasn’t sure it would work if he didn’t read it in full. It was, in truth, very simple. It could be summed up in a single sentence: I sign away my life and soul to the service of Black Hat and his evil empire.

It was not stated in a simple sentence because the voodoo needed at least a page worth of
incantations and charms to work. And that was the stuff NOT in the fine print! A little keepsake from his time in Louisiana, courtesy of a villain with more power than he knew what to do with. Sure, ruler of the underworld sounds fine, but managing all those subjects has got to be hell. Literally.

Oh, he hoped Flug wouldn’t be too upset that he signed away his soul. The only reason Black Hat didn’t tell him was he didn’t think he’d believe it. Who would, without proof? It wasn’t as though Black Hat could just summon Dr. Morte at the drop of a hat.

Well, he could but he wasn’t sacrificing his hat just to bring a depressed voodoo practitioner out to the middle of Mexico for no real reason. It kind of went without saying that you don’t bother the guy with the zombie henchmen just because.

“Ummm, Black Hat?”

“Yes?”

“Wh-what’s this ab-b-bout my *hic* soul?” Flug asked in a slightly...buzzed voice.

_Oh wow I did not want to explain this._

Black Hat turned from the burgers, which were nearly done, and faced Flug completely. Yeah, the boy was really starting to feel that beer in his system. Lightweight.

He pondered how best to break it to the tipsy man. Just come out and say it? It sounded ridiculous! And a tad...possessive.

Then again, he WAS under the influence a bit. Probably not enough to completely forget what happened yet, but…

Black Hat walked over and took a look at the contract. Flug had already signed it.

_Oh well tough luck, Rocinante._ (Black Hat could say it perfectly in his mind, why was saying it out loud so hard?!) _You already signed it. No take backs._

Like reading the terms and conditions of a software update, you still clicked that you agreed to it. No one can be blamed but yourself.

“Oh yeah that.” Black Hat said with a menacing smile. “It’s for real.” He walked swiftly over for another bottle of beer and opened it in one swift motion. He took a swig and continued. “I have a very close relationship with a Cajun villain based in the southern United States, perhaps you’ve heard of him? Dr. Morte?”
“The...the...the w-w-wi-witch doctor?” Flug said, sobering up a bit as the realization of what he’d done set in.

“He prefers the term ‘obeah doctor’, but yes, that’s him.” Black Hat said. A delicious scent filled his nearly nonexistent nostrils. Oh boy! The burgers were done! Black Hat swiftly put them on buns and and plates and presented one to his new subordinate. Flug took one blankly.

“Well, good old Morty was feeling generous after I did a few...odd jobs, let’s say, for him. I mentioned how I was looking for loyal underlings and he suggested to just take their souls so they can’t betray me or quit. Sounded good to me, so he drafted a few contracts in advance, gave me a few pointers for making my own, and naturally gave me whole list of things to not do under penalty of eternal damnation and endless suffering.”

Flug blinked.

“Or they just won’t work. Honestly, I’M the one who’d be suffering for eternity, why are you frightened?”

“Did I really just sign away my soul to you?” He asked in a very small voice.

“Yes, you did.” Black Hat said, taking another drink. Wow, Flug looked like he could use another. Well you should’ve read it in full before you signed, Flug. It is not Black Hat’s problem that you didn’t.

“Can you even actually do anything with my soul? Does it have monetary value?”

“If I remember correctly, the going rate for a human soul is based primarily on the worth of the human it belongs to. Think of it like the barter system, it’s as worth only as much as what you’re getting in exchange.”

“And...what am I getting? In exchange for my soul?”

“A fabulous job opportunity!” Black Hat said, spreading his arms dramatically. “Lifetime employment! Dental coverage!”

“I get dental coverage?” Flug asked surprised.

“Yes yes I had to throw in something to make it seem worth it. Just so you know, your medical expenses are only paid if they inhibit your ability to work properly. If you can get up and move, you can pay it yourself. Don’t worry, you will be making more than enough to pay for anything you might break.”

A pause.
“This is surreal.” Flug said, running a hand through his hair.

“Well, you agreed to it.” Black Hat said, tapping his bottle to Flug’s mostly empty one. “And I thank you deeply for your sacrifice.”

Flug looked over the contract in his hand again. Black Hat say down in his seat and dug into his burger as he watched the flames. Free now that the metal tray had been removed. Ahhh, the beautiful sight of flames flickering faintly from down in the earth. Even from their position in the ground, they provided decent lighting. And it was a welcome sight to pair with his dinner.

“This says I work we-weekends and holidays.” Flug spoke up.

“Does evil take vacations?”

“Can I take siestas? They’ve been p-p-proven to increase productivity a-and morale in the workplace.”

“I’ll think about it.” Black Hat said, trying to remember what exactly a siesta was. A party? No that wasn’t it.

“Work hours are very unspecified.”

“Do you really want to get into negotiating the contract now? This is a night of celebration! A worthy addition to the fight for world tyranny! We can go over the specifics like hours and wages tomorrow.” Black Hat took another swig of his drink. “I for one think you could really stand to relax every once in a while and just live your life without analyzing every little thing.”

“Well fine, ‘Lord and Master’ Black Hat, maybe I will.”

Flug got up and walked over to the cooler. Black Hat liked this lighting for him. It made him look sinister. The firelight cast slight shadows in the curves and indents of his scars, making him look ominous and somewhat ghostly. Like his face was coming right out of the shadows.

“Feel free to keep calling me Master,” Black Hat said under his breath.

Really now, if Flug was going to bait him like that then he best be prepared for what Black Hat could do. He wasn’t going to restrict himself to plainly noticing the curves of the younger man’s body out of the corner of his eye for long if he was going to be such a tease.

And Black Hat did notice Flug’s body. Firm and lean, thin but not overly gaunt, his jeans did his legs and ass justice. Flug as a whole was just the embodiment of slimness, something that Black Hat had a bit of a weakness for. He couldn’t help but notice it when it flaunted itself so prominently in front
Black Hat also noticed that Flug had gotten two beers out this time.

Oh this was gonna be good.

Fun fact: drinking on an empty stomach gets the alcohol into your system faster!

Observation: Flug had not eaten anything all day besides chips, soda, and the occasional candy bar. Then downed three bottles of beer before eating a single hamburger, after which he drank two more. All of this while Black Hat, a man who’d been introduced to booze quite early in his youth and had built up a large tolerance to your typical name brand bottle over the years, watched on as he opened up his third bottle of the night.

What Black Hat was getting at here is that he got Flug drunk. Off. His. Ass. Drunk.

And he himself was only slightly tipsy.

Remember kiddies, eat before you drink and know your limits. Or your new boss will encourage you to open up another and you’ll do it, because mama didn’t raise a quitter.

Which would be Flug’s best defense as to why he clumsily fumbled with the stubborn bottle in the state he was in. Or it would be, if he could get the words out. Mainly he was slurring along something Black Hat couldn’t make out. It became slightly more intelligible when he grabbed the bottle out of his hands.

“*No no yo puedo hacerlo no.*” He said, slurring and mumbling like a drunk toddler. He was waving his arms slowly, like that was going to actually do something. It took Black Hat a second longer than usual to mentally translate what he was saying.

“No no no, you’re going to hurt yourself. Let me.” He opened the bottle and handed it back. The flumbling scientist spilled a good amount on his shirt before he was able to bring the bottle up to his lips.
Black Hat chuckled. “Flug, had you ever actually drank before tonight?”

“I…” he struggled to stay on his feet. “I’ll have you know…” His voice dipped higher and lower, like someone messing around with the pitch of their instrument. Also he burped. A LOT.

“I’ll have you know Señor *burp* Sombrero, that I’ve been drunk SO many ti- *hic* times before it’s not even, it’s not even funny.” Oh god this was hilarious.

“Oh yeah? How many?”

“Se-seven…six…two…?” His voice trailed off.

Oh sweet lord that was IT?! No way! He was such a baby!

Black Hat couldn’t stop himself from laughing at loud at this! It was just too good! He laughed so hard he almost fell down! Although he regained his balance shortly after, he did stumble a bit.

Which Flug apparently took at a sign that it was okay to push him down.

Other fun fact: Drunk people have terrible balance.

So when Flug attempted to knock down his howling companion, he fell right with him.

Or rather, fell on him.

Black Hat stared in absolute shock at the intoxicated man struggling to lift himself off of his chest. He apparently gave it up, and resigned himself to just. Laying there.

*Um, excuse you, GET YOUR DAMN ASS OFF ME!*

“Flug.” Black Hat said in a serious tone. He was all for drunken antics but this was pushing it. He was his boss now, officially! He wouldn’t take insubordination laying down!

Despite that being what he was currently doing.

Flug turned his head up to look at him. His glasses were askew on his face, the one eye Black Hat could see clearly was glassy and it’s pupil was dilated. His face was slightly red, although it was hard to see from the orange glow of the fire. He also had a really dumb smile on his face.
“Black Hat,” he mumbled. “Where’s your nose?”

_Oh for the love of-_ 

“Flug.” Black Hat prompted again. The man in question focused on him a bit. “Get off me.”

Instead of obeying, Flug instead crawled up his body, bring himself closer to his face, and reached for something above him. All the while rubbing his booze-splattered shirt on Black Hat’s fine-tailored dress shirt.

Oh shit the coat is getting all dirty! No!

Then Black Hat’s heart momentarily stopped as he realized what Flug had grabbed. As Flug sat up on his chest wearing HIS HAT!

“¡Ahora soy Black Hat!” He announced, the hat falling in his face.

_There are...no words…_

_Well, except maybe-_ 

“Give me back my hat!” Black Not-Wearing-A-Hat yelled. He sat up, which knocked Flug down, and left Black Hat with a drunk Flug sprawled in his lap scrambling to get away while keeping the hat on his head. They fought, Black Hat grabbing his legs and pants, Flug attempting to stand up. Both failing miserably due to the alcohol in their systems.

Black Hat was better off, but still three beers deep mind you.

“¡No no no, soy Black Hat, soy el jefe a-*hic*-ahora!” He screamed in his drunken tone, tripping over himself and stepping on the real Black Hat’s legs. “¡Yo digo que no!”

Black Hat himself was losing track of what Flug was saying, but he recognized “Black Hat”. Needless to say, he was not happy at what he could only guess Flug was saying.
“Flug if you don’t stay still and give me my goddamn hat back I swear-” He was cut off by Flug landing a kick to his stomach. He instinctively let go of Flug in order to hold his aching body. That was going to be sore in the morning.

Flug managed to get to his feet and run for a few steps before he fell flat on his face again. Most likely damaging the hat.

Oh boy you done fucked up now.

Flug actually managed to get back up and keep running. While still holding the hat on his head. Black Hat was slow on his feet but he too rose up and began to chase the drunken headwear thief.

Flug actually had Black Hat chasing him around their campsite for five goddamn minutes! Amidst screams of “¡Yo soy Black Hat! ¡Impostor! ¡Hagámonos de la base un sombrero gigante! ¡Quiero un sombrero gigante del mal!”

But, as anyone who gets habitually drunk can tell you, booze and exercise do not go well together.

While Black Hat was limping along, going easy on his stomach, Flug was running around like a toddler. Knocking into things, tripping, getting turned around. It was a wonder he didn’t step into the campfire.

He did, however, puke really close to Black Hat’s car.

Much too close for comfort.

Black Hat took the opportunity to do what he should’ve done from the absolute start. He crouched down, resting on his knees as Flug hurled. There was no need to keep this ridiculous chase going. He unleashed the long multi-jointed limbs from his body, allowing them to slither just out of the light and latch onto Flug while he was distracted. They tore holes in his shirt and coat as they shot out from his back and sides. Even Black Hat himself had very little idea of where exactly on his body they came from. It seemed like they protruded from wherever he wanted them. His back was a favorite, the flat expanse of flesh an ideal area for sprouting his hidden limbs, if they could be classified as limbs. They were really more like tentacles.

Flug found himself being yanked by his ankles back to where Black Hat crouched, still holding his stomach. He attempted to grab something to anchor himself. But it was no use. One, nothing was tied down or anything, so he would just drag it with him. Two, he did NOT have the motor skills for that right now.

He screamed on the short way back. Screamed like something out of a horror movie was dragging him back to murder him. Which may not have been far from the truth.
Black Hat considered tucking the tentacle-esque appendages back into his body. Flug hadn’t seen them, even if he had he was too drunk to remember it, he would probably write it off as a hallucination or a weird dream if he did.

But, the little drunkard was still fighting! So he kept them out, holding him in place by the ankles and ever so gently snaking their way up to his knees. Well, ok, maybe he was a bit rough with him in truth. He allowed them to slither up Flug’s legs and squeeze him tight to inhibit his movements. Flug would not be going anywhere. He stole his hat. But, you know, it wasn’t that big a deal.

It was ok. Things were fine. He made sure all the little mouths that tended to spring up from his body during times like these closed and disappeared before approaching Flug further. His abdominals hurt, he would likely have a bruise in the morning. Damn him. But that was ok. He could live with it. Everything was just peachy keen. Perfectly fine.

Except everything was NOT fine, because his precious hat was FILTHY!

As he snatched it from Flug’s still thrashing head (oh come on, you’re just going to make yourself sick again), he could see the damage. It’d gotten all this dirt and dead grass on it from Flug’s crashing into the ground every few seconds! It was scuffed and bent in places! Why Flug, why did you hurt an innocent hat you monster!

But...he was still going to wear it. That was his hat.

As Black Hat placed the filthy thing back on his head he positioned himself on top of Flug’s still writhing body, pinning his bottom half down with his own legs (and the tentacles, but Flug didn’t need to know about those) and held his wrists above his head in a death grip with his right hand. It didn’t stop him from trying to squirm away. Black Hat had to admit, he enjoyed Flug being feisty and defiant like this. It showed spunk. It showed a will to live that just not everyone had.

Because most in this position would scream “No, no let me go! Please!” Instead of “¡Suéltame, nabo enojado!”

His Spanish was beginning to come back to him. Ah, it was good to actually understand the nonsense this man was spewing again. Then he realized Flug had called him an angry turnip.

...What?

He couldn’t help but laugh at that.
Black Hat leaned over, letting his weight rest on Flug’s body. The man stilled, seeming to realize his situation. About time.

“Flug,” Black Hat said in his ear, low and menacing, hoping he was coherent enough to understand him again. “Flug, you took my hat.”

“I-I’m sorry-” Flug said, stuttering more from intoxication than this apparent nervous condition.

“Flug,” Black Hat said again, cutting him off. “Flug, you messed up my hat. I love this hat. This hat is the most precious thing I own.”

“S-s-sorry.” He did actually sound pretty sorry for what he’d done. He didn’t sound scared, though. That was a problem. In these situations, he should be scared.

Black Hat wrenched his head to the side with his free hand, exposing his neck. Flug let out a cry of pain from the force, and Black Hat’s iron grip in his hair, he was sure.

Black Hat allowed his breath to ghost along the nape of Flug’s neck seeing goosebumps rise on the sensitive skin. Flug tried moving his head, but it was no use. Black Hat had him in his clutches, and he wasn’t moving unless Black Hat allowed it.

“If you’re so sorry, why don’t you make it up to me?” Black Hat asked, exposing his sharp teeth in a wide grin.

Before Flug could reply, Black Hat sunk his teeth into the area where the neck met the shoulder. Biting hard. Hard enough to send little rivers of blood to pour from the man’s body. He chuckled as the familiar taste of blood filled his mouth and he lapped at the open wounds. Nearly close enough to open up a few old scars. Nearly.

Black Hat was expecting a cry of pain. A scream. For Flug to beg him to stop. Sobbing and pleading that it hurt so much!

He didn’t hear it.

Instead what he heard was a cry of...pleasure? Followed by “¡Ahhhh sí papí más duro! ”

And...he felt Flug...move...against him? But not as if he was trying to get away. More like...well, he was arching his back, and that was...odd...it was like he was trying to get his hips closer to-
Black Hat had lessened his grip in surprise, but now he experimentally clenched his teeth down again. He gingerly stroked his tongue back and forth across the flesh in his mouth. It would probably burn a bit, but if he was careful the worst Flug would suffer is a few bite marks and something that could pass for a sunburn. A pretty bad sunburn but nothing worse.

Flug gave sign of pleasure and a cute little moan. And another pleasing cry when Black Hat increase his bite further still. He began to pant loudly, and he kept pushing his ass up. Trying to grind against him.

Well...unexpected, but not completely unwelcomed. This’ll do.

Black Hat released Flug’s hands, opening his maw just long enough to instruct him to stay down before he bit him again. Flug, it seemed, had no intention of moving from his spot beneath him. Content to let Black Hat’s now free hand roam along his side until coming to a stop at his hip.

Black Hat grabbed him roughly and kneaded the soft flesh through his jeans. Flug stilled his own movements, lost in bliss, so Black Hat took the initiative and began grinding into him himself.

Flug’s sounds became more needy. He started writhing again, but not in panic. More in pent up lustful desire. He tried bucking his hips up, but the force of Black Hat’s thrusts kept him down.

Keep in mind, both men still had their pants on while doing this.

Flug tried to move his hands down, but Black Hat grabbed him by the neck with his left hand. He angled his face so that he could look into his eyes. Still dazed and glassy, but they had a certain spark in them that was driving Black Hat up the wall.

“And who said you could touch yourself?” He said sensually. “Hmm?” He moved from the open wounds on his neck and brought himself closer to Flug’s face. He ran his tongue over the cross-hatching spiderweb of scars on his cheek. Flug tried in vain to hold back a moan. The acidity of Black Hat’s saliva likely giving him a small burning sensation.

So, they were a sensitive spot, were they? Good to know.
“I—I was just, just, OH!” He exclaimed as Black Hat moved down to nibble at his neck again. Softer this time, not enough to break the skin. “Just, just going t-t-t—”

“To what? This?” Black Hat asked as he moved his right hand from Flug’s hip to his crotch. He grabbed him none too gently and began to palm him through the jean material. Flug’s voice got noticeably higher and tried furiously to thrust into his hand.

Which is kinda pointless when you’re still wearing pants. It’s just not happening, man.

Black Hat nipped Flug’s ear. “Mmmm, you’re so worked up Flug.” He whispered. He tightened his grip on his neck. Not enough to cut off his breathing, not much of it anyway, just hard enough that he’d still enjoy it. “Are you getting all hot just for me?”

In between Flug’s shameless gasps for breath, he mumbled out something that sounded like a confirmation.

“Still a virgin?”

“Ye-yes.” He mumbled, his face turning red.

“You want more?” He asked, while stroking him lightly though his pants. Oh boy, anymore and he’d probably cream himself. “Do you want more of me?”

“Yes yes yes yes please.” Flug repeated like a mantra, his hands clenched into fists in the dirt. “Please please please yes sir yes please.”

Aw, he called him sir. How adorable. How lovely it would be to see him come undone by his hands right now. To have his undeniable submission, right from Day One. Oh, Black Hat would hold it over him for the rest of his life! Would constantly remind him of how he had begged him for his body, how desperate he was for his touch.

So Black Hat stopped touching him. He removed his hands from his body, stood up, released Flug’s legs from their bonds of his extra limbs, and walked over to the cooler. He calmed reached in and took one of the remaining beers, opened it, and sat back down in his chair. Or maybe it had been Flug’s. Who kept track?

Flug himself had rolled onto his back and propped himself up on his elbows. He was staring at Black Hat with a mix of confusion and betrayal clear on his face. How could you? It screamed. I was so close!

“Wh-why did you stop?” He said.
“You made it up to me.” Black Hat said with a shrug.

“What?”

“My hat. I said that if you were so sorry about messing it up, you should make it up to me. You did.” He took a long swig of his beer. “Ahhh. We should do this again sometime. You’re a fun drunk. And a lightweight.”

Flug continued staring at him. “Are you even human?”

Black Hat’s heart stopped for a second.

He’d been asked that question before. Numerous times. Mostly he heard it from people on their deathbeds. The cornered and broken. The ones lucky enough to escape once but not enough to cheat death twice. The ones who looked up with wide eyes knowing the multi-limbed figure in front of them would be the last earthy sight their eyes beheld.

Are you even human?

“I’m here with... this- ” Flug said, gesturing to his crotch. Impressive tent there, boy. “And you just...*burp* get up and leave me.” He swung his arms around drunkenly. “Like it’s...it’s nothing. You’re ju-just fine. What the hell.”

Oh, he was talking about himself. Oh.

“Oh get over yourself.” Black Hat said, taking another long drink. He emptied the bottle this time and it was finally starting to give him a real buzz. “Go on talking about your giant hat.”

“Giant hat?”

“That’s what you kept screaming about, Flug. You wanted a giant hat. Of evil.” He was honestly proud of that one, not that he’d admit it to him.

“Oh!” Flug suddenly yelled. It startled Black Hat so much he actually jumped in his seat. “Oh I remember! Black Hat!” Flug crawled on all fours over to him. “Black Haaaaaat!”

“What? What? I’m listening.”

“Our *ermmph* our base! Our headqua-quarters!”

“What about it?”

“Let’s make it a giant hat.” Flug said, grinning up at him.
“What?”

“Let’s make our base a giant hat.” Flug said again. He reached up and adjusted his thick frames. “For Black Hat. It’ll...it’ll be our thing.”

“Our thing?”

“Ye *burp* yeah! Like, your hat is, is your thing so when we build our base we sh-should make it a hat an-and it’ll be like...our thing.”

“Hats?”

“Our fearless leader Black Hat.” Flug said in drunken singsong. “In a big Black Hat House. In...what’s the name of this town?”

“I don’t-“

“Let’s call it Hatsville.” He said grinning again.

Maybe it was the alcohol. Maybe it was being called “fearless leader”. Maybe it was that stupidly cute grin on Flug’s face. For whatever reason, this was starting to sound like a great idea.

“And, and, *omph* it’ll be AAALLLL red and black, like you. And it’ll be great, and we’ll live in it together, and we’ll get so much work done, and I’ll have a giant TV to watch anime, and-”

“What’s ani-may?” Black Hat asked, feeling the foreign word stick on his tongue like a wad of strange candy,

“Anime is the gre-greatest thing ever!” Flug proclaimed. “It’s like cartoons, but better. And it has giant robot fights.”

“Flug, we can just build our own giant robots. And have them fight.”

Flug gasped. “Yes! Yes! We’ll call them...we’ll call them Hat-Bots! And they’ll be huge, and have hats, and, and-”

“You’re really stuck on hats tonight, huh?”

“You’re...you’re Black Hat. Let’s just put... hats ...on everything…” Flug was close enough now that he could grab onto Black Hat’s knee. “Hats...for Black Hat.”

“Make it my villain persona, you mean?” Black Hat said. In all honesty, not a bad idea. It was catchy, it fit him well, people could actually pronounce it. It was something that wasn’t being used by anyone else, as far as he knew.

This...might actually be genius.
“Yeah, yeah.” Flug said, crawling sloppily into Black Hat’s lap. “Everyone knows you can’t use your real na-name. So you, you be Black Hat and I’ll, I’ll be your awesome scientist, Doctor Flug!”

“Doctor?” Black Hat asked, staring at the drunk young man attempting to straddle him. Oh wow he was bad. You really didn’t get far with Julio now did you Flug? Well, it was probably mostly due to the booze in his system. Which made it Black Hat’s fault, really.

Flug nodded. “Yeah, I’m gonna be a doctor! And I’ll build the d-drill that will pierce the heavens!” He said while pointing up into the sky dramatically. He nearly lost his balance and almost fell right off Black Hat’s lap, if said man hadn’t grabbed him and pulled him forward. He also took the liberty of righting his leg position.

There we go. Much better.

Black Hat looked up at the man in his lap. The man who was still fairly hard and looking at him with a lustful expression. Drunk and stupid-looking, but lustful. Sitting on his lap. Probably feeling his own excitement through his dress pants. Which were also ruined.

Hey…

“You know…” Black hat said, reaching to hold onto Flug by his sides. If the man actually had any meat on his bones, these would probably be what people call love handles. “You’ve ruined much more than just my hat.”

“I did?” He said, with that dumb look still on his face. Oh God damn him.

“Yes. I’m all dirty because of you.”

“Oh, I-I-I’m sorry. Can I make it up to you?” Flug said, bracing himself on Black Hat’s shoulders as he lowered his face to meet him. His drunken face split in a thin smile.

“You better.” Black Hat said, leaning up to meet him.

The two kissed. Mouths open to taste each other’s flavors. Craning their necks to find the perfect angle to deepen their embrace. Tasting the sour flavor of alcohol and the sweet sensation of the other’s warm and inviting being. Along with the slight stinging sensation of a weak acid.

Flug seemed to enjoy it, he moaned into Black Hat’s mouth, lifting himself off of his lap slightly to get that long tongue intertwined with to his own. Black Hat took that as an opportunity to grab his ass, harshly. It only made Flug moan louder, open his mouth wider, invite Black Hat in deeper.

Flug started moving his hips in amateurish, clumsy moments. Mostly likely trying to emulate things he’d seen on the internet. Black Hat supposed he had a few things to teach him.
There was no rush, they had all the time in the world.

Flug passed out shortly after the fun began. Black Hat apparently could get no farther with him than dear old Julio Bermudez had.

Black Hat’s shirt was unbuttoned and he was missing his tie, still not completely sure where exactly it ended up but he was for the most part still decent, if you don’t count the numerous tears and holes in his filthy clothes that he was going to have to change out of eventually. Flug was shirtless and his pants were unbuttoned, revealing the pink feminine garment underneath. Not that anything really ended up happening with that.

*Goddamn lightweight. You’re lucky I’m such a gentleman.*

It was true, it would be extremely easy to take advantage of Flug’s unconscious state. But Black Hat wouldn’t. Much like his employment, he preferred to be willingly given these kinds of things rather than take them by force. It was why he hadn’t used Flug’s dirty little secret against him. Why he waited so long for Flug to give him an answer of his own free will.

Besides, Flug was drunk. He probably wouldn’t remember it clearly enough. One’s first time should be something remembered fondly.

And Flug screaming Black Hat’s name to the cosmos while he ravaged him with pleasures experienced for the first time in his life was DEFINITELY a moment to be remembered fondly by both parties involved.

Which was why he unrolled the sleeping bags and tossed Flug into one like a sack of sweet potatoes. His glasses were probably still on, maybe, could be. Whatever. If Flug needed new ones he could just get some for him.

His special lenses were probably fairly pricey, but that was no issue. If it was a necessity for his new scientist (future doctor) it was money worth spending.

The fire was starting to die down. They still had a bit of kindling left, which he promptly tossed down the hole. Why save any? He didn’t intend to come back anytime soon, now that Flug had become his. His…
His.

He liked the sound of it.

He walked off a bit, wandering into the night. Confident that the fire would guide him back should he lose his way. Happy to have an underling again. The last ones had been so utterly useless. He was happy to watch them die after failing him so badly. Flug, hopefully, would not be the latest in a line of disappointments.

But. But he kept thinking back to what Flug had said. That offhand question that cut unfathomably deep.

*Are you even human?*

He had gained a bit of notoriety in Italy. He knew it was bad. He knew what it meant. It meant he was no longer safe hiding in plain sight like he did. It meant he had to leave. Go somewhere else. There was nothing more to be done, all that was left was to wrap up loose ends and book the next stop in his journey.

But, how could he? This country was beautiful. So, so beautiful. The land, the culture, the people! It was all magnificent! The underground network of criminal activity was nothing to scoff at either. This land had a long history of organized crime, and their expertise truly showed in how efficiently they ran their business.

Truly, an inspiring and enlightening three years.

He wanted to stay. He’d found himself a little sidekick that was competent enough, nothing special. He certainly wasn’t keen on leaving his homeland. Why would he, it was gorgeous!

So he stuck around. He knew it was a stupid move. He knew he was breaking the one rule that had kept him alive and thriving all his life. But he couldn’t tear himself away just yet.

He paid for that. With interest.

Apparently, a young up-and-coming villain from parts unknown like him had seemed like the perfect target for a hero just starting out. A hero calling himself *Squalo Tigre*. Young and inexperienced,
Despite being born a shark-man and living in a city that’s been sinking for hundreds of years.

He hadn’t wanted to fight himself. It was nearly impossible to keep his true self hidden when fighting. Despite people like himself being treated FAR better in the majority of the world, there was always that constant fear of being ostracized and discriminated against. So, acting like he was too good to fight, he sent his little sidekick to fight him. He was a normal human, but a good shot with his twin pistols. Someone who could hold their own.

Or so he thought.

Turns out that jumping into the canals to fight a person who is half fish is a bad idea. Who knew? Well, Black Hat knew. Because he wasn’t a goddamn idiot! He tried telling him, but nope! He just jumped in after, saying something about how he’d finish him off. He tried telling him, “No, it’s a trap! Don’t jump in the water you idiot!” But no, clearly the sidekick knew better.

It didn’t take long for the blood to surface.

Of course, he wasn’t dead. Squalo Tigre was playing at being a hero, so of course he wasn’t going to murder the pathetic excuse for a henchmen. He wasn’t above giving him a serious gaping wound in his leg, though. Which he would probably bleed out from fairly quickly. Dumbass.

Then he came at Black Hat. Of course, he wasn’t Black Hat back then. This was the country that gave him his fine tailored suit, but not his hat.

It had set him off. Both that his underling had disobeyed, and that the amatuer hero had the gall to damage something he considered HIS.

Squalo Tigre died that day, his blood running in the canals of Venice along with whatever chunks of his body remained of him. There wasn’t much, just a few strips of flesh that clung to the fabric of his costume. Black Hat could taste something vaguely metallic in his mouth, even though there was nothing in there but spit. He had the sense that something (something meaty) was stuck in his teeth, even though he could find nothing when he felt around with his tongue. He had the odd sense that he was somehow checking the wrong teeth-

But he preferred not to think about those things.

The look on his failure of a helper’s face though. That...haunted him. This was a man who’d seen him torture people. With conventional means; electrocution, screws, barbed wire, waterboarding, slowly skinning someone alive with a potato peeler, ripping off fingernails, he’d even seen him murder a man’s favorite dog and then serve it to him as meatballs. But still. He’d seen and participated in some truly twisted acts.

But seeing Black Hat. Seeing what he truly was. His curse.
It...broke him.

Broke him in a way that made him impossible to keep around.

His eyes were wide in horror, his mouth agape, if he hadn’t had a shark bite in his leg he probably still wouldn’t have ran away because he was nailed to the floor with fear.

Black Hat attempted approaching him, calling him by name as if that would snap him out of it. But it didn’t help. If anything, it made it worse.

“Alberto…” He said, trying his best to keep his voice level. To make it clear it was still him. His boss of almost an entire year. “Alberto, it’s me. It’s just me.”

The man was too shaken up to form complete sentences. The most he got out was “No...that...him...you...so...arms...mouths...t-t-teeth...blood...you…”

“Monster.”

Then he tried to flee. Tried. He was still waterlogged, and his wound was bleeding profusely. He likely wouldn’t be able to stand on it, not even with the adrenaline pumping through him. His mobility was severely limited, the best he could do was crawl backwards by his elbows. Repeating that phrase.

“Monster...you...you...monster...he…”

And it was clear that Alberto was no longer serviceable.

He had always thought that this was a possibility, so he was prepared to do it. It wasn’t something he looked forward to, but it had to be done. It would be the last tie to cut with this land, save for Il Ratto and his large network of henchmen. A future client, Black Hat hoped. One with influence.

He approached his former compatriot, both of them knowing full well what was to be done with him. He stopped crawling, seeming to realize how pointless it was to try and escape his fate. He looked up at him, his boss, and asked him:

“Are you even human?”

Black Hat didn’t answer, because in truth, he didn’t really know. Was he a man with a curse? A man with an ability? Was he even human at all? He had many features some would consider inhuman, as far as he knew it was just how he was born. Who’s to say he was or wasn’t? And what did it matter?

And why did the question seem to crush his very soul?
Alberto died. In much the same way Squalo Tigre had. Blood running down the street into the water, nothing left but scraps of meat and the not wholly unpleasant taste of blood.

Black Hat thought of this while using his extra appendages to strangle some unfortunate desert creature he’d happened upon in the night. Poor thing, it was dead the minute the undefined limb closed around it. The only evidence of its life were the small nicks it left in his form. He didn’t know what it was, or why he’d come out here to kill it, but he had. He supposed it was just his body’s way of exercising his abnormal muscles.

He found their campsite, led back by the flame he’d made. He took a quick glance at his sleeping future doctor. He was nestled all adorably in the sleeping bag Black Hat brought for him. His eyes shut tight to the terror sharing his space.

He wondered, would Flug have the same reaction? Could he be trusted to keep his secret? Would the man who moaned and writhe and begged for his touch in a drunken stupor scream in horror and fear as he ran away from what Black Hat was, underneath the suit and tie and hat and bravado?

He didn’t know, and he wasn’t eager to find that out just yet.

As he crawled into his own sleeping bag, not bothering to change, he pondered the question he’d heard so many times before tonight.

“Are you even human?”

Perhaps not, but that wasn’t something he was going to let damage him.

He was the villain who would rule the world.

He wouldn’t be hurt by a query so inconsequential.

He refused.

Chapter End Notes

obeah doctor = just another term for witch doctor to be honest
No no yo puedo hacerlo no = No no I can do it no
¡Ahora soy Black Hat! = Now I'm Black Hat!
¡No no no, soy Black Hat, soy el jefe ahora! = No no no, I'm Black Hat, I'm the boss now!

¡Yo digo que no! = I say no!

¡Yo soy Black Hat! ¡Impostor! ¡Hagamos de la base un sombrero gigante! ¡Quiero un sombrero gigante del mal! = I'm Black Hat! Imposter! Let's make the base a giant hat! I want a giant hat of evil!

¡Suéltame, nabo enojado! = Let go, angry turnip!

¡Ahhhh sí papí más duro! = Ahhhh yes daddy harder! (Again, I am so sorry)

Squalo Tigre = Tiger Shark (Italian)

Il Ratto = The Rat (Italian)
Chapter Summary

Flug wakes up from the drunken escapades of the last chapter. Surprise, he feels like he got run over by 1000 mopeds. But a hangover is no excuse to put off dealing with your problems.

Unless your problems happen to be the fact that you made out with your new boss and now need something to cover all your "love marks" for the next few days.

In which case feel free to put off talking about it and try to sleep on it while he drives you home. If you can.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This first thing Flug became aware of was the sunlight. It shone directly into his face and slapped him awake like a spouse shouting *We overslept!*

The second thing was his massive headache. Which was only getting worse the more he became aware. His mouth was dry, he desperately needed water. And toothpaste. And mouthwash. Oh just the thought of mouthwash!

The third thing he realized was that he had no idea where he was right now.

He sat up immediately, and instantly regretted every decision that had ever led up to his life at this point. His head throbbed painfully, his body was sore, his mouth felt like he’d been gargling dust, and he was having a super hard time moving his right arm.

So much as opening his eyes at this point was a pain. It was far too bright and everything was murky and blurred and his face felt sticky and stiff. What the hell had he been doing?

When he finally did manage to open his eyes and take a look at his surroundings, he found himself in a sleeping bag in the middle of nowhere with some car and a small campsite. And the smell...oh god the smell of cooking meat. Oh man it felt like it was going to make his throw up. What the hell was going on? Where was he? Why-

“Oh, you’re awake.” A scratchy voice said from...somewhere.

Flug turned, trying to deal with the world’s constant spinning, and saw a familiar man. One whose name he couldn’t place right now but he knew that he knew him and he seemed fine so he must have

“Well for one, you got drunk as hell last night.” The black man (was it alright to call him that?) in black and red said casually. “We came out here, explored a town in the making, you signed over your soul to me, and you got totally bêbado.”

Flug was nowhere near coherent enough to comprehend other languages right now. If it meant anything like bebido, that explained this massive head-pain.

“And this, young man, is what’s known as a hangover. Any of this sound familiar, Flug?”

Having something so dark to focus on was very relieving to his weary eyes. The man wasn’t painful to look at like the rest of the world was right now. He tried thinking back. The last thing he remembered fairly clearly was indeed something about a contract. He’d signed it and…

Oh, that really happened. He’d really sold his soul for a job opportunity.

Well, shit. His mother would not be happy about this.

Rocinante Flugslys, the man who’d apparently signed away his soul, moaned in agony. How much did he have to drink last night? He wasn’t an avid drinker, seeing as he never went out and drinking alone struck him as sad and pathetic, but how badly did he embarrass himself last night in front of his new boss?

Oh yeah, he agreed to work for Black Hat. At least he could actually remember the man’s name, finally.

He wondered if he should quit his part-time job at Radioshack now.

Flug tried to think back to anything else that happened that night. Contract, soul, dental coverage (a pleasant surprise, honestly), drinking on an empty stomach. Well, that was his first mistake. But he felt copious amounts of beer might help him deal with the fact that he now was no longer had ownership of his own damn soul.

Considering that he wasn’t particularly concerned with that fact anymore, it seemed to have worked.
Okay, then things got fuzzy. He got the sense that Black Hat had been laughing at him, so he’d pushed him. Then fallen on top of him. Oh God how mortifying, had he really done that?

And then...he wasn’t fully sure. He’d been running around screaming like a crazy person, he tripped, something dragged him along the ground (ok that had to be the alcohol), and then-

And then he must’ve passed out and had a crazy sex dream because while Black Hat did sometimes weirdly touch him and outright pinned him against the car last night, there’s no way in hell he bit him while grinding him into the dirt.

And that’s what Flug thought...until he reached over to touch his aching neck and found dried blood. And scabs. Going along his clavicle (more commonly known as the collarbone) and up his neck. Bite marks. And some weird rash-like areas that stung a little bit when he ran his fingers over them. Even just lightly. There was a bit snaking its way up his neck and on his cheek and oh boy did it burn!

He spared a glance at Black Hat himself, who seemed to be busy cooking...something that made him want to vomit all the alcohol in his system. Sausages? Would normally be delicious. Now they were sickening.

Well, Flug himself only had very vague memories of last night. Black Hat had been drinking too, maybe he could only sort of remember it as well.

Even though he seemed perfectly fine right now and probably had a higher tolerance for alcohol and it was totally possible that he’d been completely aware the entire time and had perfect memories of the events that transpired between them.

But, one could always hope.

He caught Black Hat’s eye, staring at him wordlessly as his pawed his bite and burn marks. Black Hat rewarded his confused and worried expression with a predatory grin. Like: Yeah, you’re mine now. Body and soul. You seemed pretty eager to offer yourself up, really. How could I resist?

Flug covered his face and moaned again. If that had really happened, what else had they done last night? He couldn’t remember anything else past that point, and it just clicked that he was shirtless.

He quickly checked the rest of his body for marks, and was immensly relieved to find the rest of him intact.

His lower half seemed fine, nothing felt sore or any different. That was greatly reassuring. At least his cherry hadn’t been popped while he was too drunk to remember it. The worse he could find were small nicks and bruises around his hips. He was too relieved at that being all he found to give much thought as to how he might’ve gotten them.
His glasses were filthy, had in slept with them still on? What could he use to clean them?

Flug got up to make his way to the car, which he left his bag in. It had his clothes in it, another pair of jeans and a T-shirt. Oh man his back was killing him. His head was killing him. His face was burning like he’d stuck it in an oven. His body was actively punishing him for his poor life choices.

He noticed a weird dried up mound of something disgusting near the car. Ew, what was that? It smelled awful.

He got his bag out, cleaning his lenses on the spotless blue shirt. He quickly shoved it over his bare chest, glad to be covered once again. He reached to slip of his dirty, dusty jeans, and noticed that his fly was down.

And a hint of bright neon pink satin was showing.

And it hit him again that Black Hat knew yet another of his secrets.

You know what? Flug thought. I don’t have the energy to care right now. Do not care. Fuck it. I wear panties. They’re comfortable, I like them, they make me feel pretty, and I don’t care that my scary boss knows about it.

He didn’t bother to try and hide himself either. He stripped off the filthy light blue denim in full view of said new employer, too over all of his concerns to bother with modesty. He was glad he didn’t bring the stockings, even if Black Hat probably knew about those too. It was too hot to be wearing them out here.

He felt eyes on him, but he couldn’t find it in himself to be worried about that either. The hangover took over all of his thoughts and he couldn’t be bothered to care about anything else.

Besides maybe how god awful the rest of him felt.

Once he was in clean clothes again, he focused his energy on trying not to vomit from the smell of the cooking meat. And not being blinded by the sunlight. And staying on his feet amidst the spinning of the world. Oh god, he needed an aspirin.

Black Hat was driving them back home. Luckily, he was well enough to drive the entire day again, so Flug got to rest his eyes in the passenger seat. Thank God for tinted windows.

It seemed Black Hat was trying to be...nice...he was keeping his road rage somewhat in check, only screaming at the top of his lungs it he was cut off or honked at. Other than that he kept it at an angry mumble of curses under his breath. Which Flug was grateful for, he wasn’t sure he would be able to keep his cool if he had to deal with his aching head and Black Hat’s raspy yelling.
The events of last night were still a blur, past making a complete fool of himself under Black Hat he had no memories at all. Except maybe that they had changed positions. He felt like he could vaguely remember being on top. Which he hoped was just the alcohol, and hoped Black Hat didn’t expect things like that to continue. If they could keep their “relationship” more or less professional, that’d be great. He didn’t feel he could handle much more stimuli at the moment, so he tried his hardest to fall asleep on the inevitably long car ride.

Packing the car had been a pain. Even with Black Hat showing a considerable amount of...patience...for his hungover employee, he still had to help get the cooler in the backseat again. Thankfully, it had been much lighter without all the beer bottles.

As for the empty bottles, they left them out in the open. They were villains, officially in Flug’s case now, what did they care?

Flug allowed his mind to wander, thinking maybe it would zone him out faster and he could fall asleep, and finally get some relief from the drum circle jambori going on in his skull.

He wondered vaguely if things would be any different for him, now that he didn’t have a soul. Or at least, it was owned by someone else. Did that leave him soulless? Was his soul still in his body now that it had a new owner? He wished he could study the contract in more detail, work out the specifics of what he’d agreed to. He also wished he could form more complex thoughts.

Why oh why had he not read that stupid piece of paper beforehand?

Would things change, now that he was assumedly soulless? He’d never given any thought to things like the human soul, not even in the religious sense. Even being raised in a devout Catholic household and going to church every week up until his teenage years, he himself never really bought into the beliefs. He could vaguely remember through the fog of his mind that in the Bible it was basically the immortal essence of a human. Scientifically it was a psychological concept people came up with to try and explain the natural world based on observations. Observations of...

Things escaped him at the moment.

Flug couldn’t really think of anything he used his soul for. Or any sort of purpose the soul really had. He didn’t feel any different, aside from the feeling of his skull about to split open. God, was this what all hangovers were like? He was never drinking again.

Wait, didn’t he agree to go drinking with AURELIO CRUZ at some point in time? And ditched him for Black Hat?

Yeah, no. No no no no no. He was not doing that. He wasn’t going to show Mexico’s Next Top Male Model his drunken self.
Well okay, he could just not drink as much. Actually eat something.

What had he been thinking about? Oh yeah, his immortal soul.

Since he couldn’t come up with anything he did that involved the use of his soul, Flug figured he would be fine. Best case scenario was that life continued on as usual, with no lasting (or at least life altering) side effects.

Worst case...he couldn’t even begin to guess what that could entail.

Really, what could the consequences be for not having a soul? Would his hair turn red? Would he develop fair, freckled (well he already had freckles) skin? Would he become extremely light sensitive?

Would he get a cute little egg charm to keep his soul in?

Ok, maybe he was overreacting.

While still trying to unravel the mysteries of a soulless existence, he dozed off. Maybe. He didn’t recall a point in time where he’d fallen asleep, as far as he knew he’d just kept running in internal circles thinking of possible changes to his life now that he had no soul. Perpetually. He must’ve knocked out at some point without realizing it because the next thing he knew Black Hat was shaking him out of his thoughts. It was night. Pitch black.

Flug was surprised, to say the least. Even if traffic had been better this time around, it still would’ve taken hours. Long enough for Flug to get some real rest, to actually fall asleep. Which it didn’t feel like he had, even though it did seem to be night now. He felt like he’d been in a sort of half asleep state, lost in his thoughts. He couldn’t remember if he had dreamed at all. He was too busy trying to work his head around the mechanics of souls, with little progress.

He looked around, still groggy but thankfully not in as much pain. Through the dark windows of the car, he could see his apartment building. The crisp red brick building was a welcome sight. It held the promise of a warm bed, pain medicine, and some alone time that he was really looking forward to after this weekend.

Crap, he didn’t have homework due tomorrow, did he?

“Thank you Black Hat.” Flug said, trying to figure out what exactly to thank him for besides the ride home. *Thanks for the job, and for indulging my bite-kink. Let’s do this again sometime. “This w-w-wa-was...fun, actually.”*

That wasn’t even a lie, he was surprised to find. Being honest, he had actually enjoyed the weekend.
The stars, the construction site, camping, drunken...well, he didn’t want to say mistakes. Happenings. Some of which he couldn’t remember. Blaring road rage and all, never a dull moment.

“Glad to hear it.” Black Hat said with a smile. “Let’s meet up tomorrow, go over the specifics of your new employment and get everything settled. Once you’ve, you know, cleared your head.”

Thank you, Hat-Man, for being so considerate of my hangover.

“Yeah, yeah totally. Cafe Triste, around 1:00 w-work for you?”

“Sure. Now go home Flug. Rest up.”

Which Flug did, waving his new boss goodbye.

Once in his familiar apartment, he fished out two aspirin and quickly swallowed them with a large gulp of water. His hangover was mostly gone, he guessed he must’ve gotten SOME rest on the drive back home. But he still couldn’t really recall a point where he had actually fallen asleep.

Well, there was nothing he could do about that. He figured the best thing to do now would be to finalize his little traps. The deadline was finally approaching, by next Friday everyone had to present their own inventions to capture their Gifted classmates. Flug had finally decided on an extremely simple concept to tie together his final designs; electricity. It was something that had occurred to him on the long car ride back.

He would be using fairly high electric volts to make sure his test subjects couldn’t escape. He was hoping to be able to make them effective but mostly painless, as injuring his peers was not something he wanted to do at the moment. Perhaps if he could tune them to the very synapses of the brain and make the frequency strong enough to work from contact anywhere on the body…

As he originally planned, he’d aim on subduing Patricia and Natalia, the fastest of the volunteers.

For Patricia, the cheetah hybrid, he had nothing special planned. His concept was a gun that fired his own variation of bolas, those cords with two or three weighted balls on each end that you typically see being used to wrap around an animals or person’s legs to take them down. Except instead of weighted balls being used, they would be designed to wrap around anything they came into contact with immediately. Whether it be an arm, a leg, a torso, it would wrap around it’s target and administer it’s shocks to incapacitate it’s target.

This modified taser would be what he intended to use on most of the participants. It was a good long distance weapon, good for those whose Gifts needed physical contact or had a short range. If, for any reason, Flug needed to get close to anyone who fit that description...he could just wear gloves and long sleeves and pants. And keep them far away from his face. Or cover his face with something...Hey, if he was going to be a villain, maybe he should start thinking of a costume? Or just
something to cover his face.

For Natalia, the gun wouldn’t work. For the simple reason that she was faster than it. Ergo, something else was needed. Something a bit less confrontational.

Flug had an idea, of the same weapon in a different form. A sort of electrically charged bear trap, if you will. Simple concept; step on this thing get an immobilizing shock that keeps you on it long enough for the metal contraption to wrap around your foot and lock you into place. Or one that wrapped around a person's ankle and kept shocking them, keeping them immobilized. It wasn’t going to have the metal teeth of a true bear trap, but it was the closest comparison he could find. He still wasn’t sure which of the two ideas floating around he would settle on. It was entirely possible he’d end up creating both.

Maybe he should build one with the teeth for Black Hat. It sure sounded like a creation worthy of a super villain.

But, before he could even so much as consider that, he should really finalize the blueprints for what he actually had to present next week. Potential villainous adaptations would have to wait.

Flug set up his blueprint paper on the small table he had in the kitchenette. He wasn’t sure why he’d bought this, he lived alone and typically lived off of ready-made instant meals. He hardly ever ate at the table. Usually he’d just take whatever he’d heated up to the couch and eat out of his lap. The occasional fast-food dinner was eaten in much the same way.

For most of his childhood he’d eaten at a table, setting it for his father while his mother cooked their meals. One of them (usually Mama) always made it a point to say grace before they ate. Everytime they sat down and ate, they always said grace. So much so that Flug himself used to give a short prayer during lunch at school. Not out of religious piety, really, it was just how he had been raised.

At some point, he had just stopped.

He couldn’t remember any specific moment or time, no sudden realization of futility or meaninglessness. It just began slipping from his mind. So much so that by now he almost forgot the prayer entirely.

He supposed his parent still kept it up. Maybe he should call them sometime. Visit. Take them out and just talk.

What he wanted to talk ABOUT was unclear, but the longing he felt was as obvious as a new pimple on the face of a 10th grader.

He wanted to see his parents.
Speaking of meals, he hadn’t had anything decent since that...morning? Afternoon? When had he woken up? Did he even actually eat anything? With a groan at the prospect of having to actually take care of his physical needs, he rummaged around until he found something microwavable and popped it in for a few minutes.

Since he intended on working while under the weather tonight, he figured it might help keep his mind straight with a bit of background noise. He scanned his DVD collection of anime and found one of his older favorites. Something he’d seen multiple times and knew for a fact that the series didn’t really take off until episode five. Of course, the true conflict didn’t start until episode twelve, but 5-10 served as necessary set-up to the heartbreaking moments of having to reverse all the changes the Future Gadget Laboratory had made to the past.

Necessary set-up that Flug already knew and could totally service as white noise while he worked.

He popped in the first disk and waited for the menu to start up. While the DVD played the promotions for whatever anime’s were coming out at the time of release, his microwave beeped. Signalling that his dinner was ready.

Ah, yes, eating. That thing his body needed him to do or he’ll die.

He got his meager meal out, hot but not unbearable, and set it on the table. Getting his fork and ignoring the dubbed animated Japanese people, he stared at it for a second.

He could remember his mothers meals. Hot and sizzling. How they warmed his body starting from his mouth down into the pit of his stomach where it spread to his arms and legs until every ounce of him felt the pure love that only comes from a mother’s cooking. How his family would talk and joke and just BE a family over the dinner table every night.

And every night they would say grace.

He mumbled a small prayer to himself. He supposed if there was any spiritual being willing to listen to the prayers of an effeminate homosexual Mexican, he could count his ready-made meal blessed.

He hit “Play All” on the DVD menu, and settled in to eat and work.
Flug still wasn’t completely sure if he’d slept last night. He’d stayed up far longer than he’d meant to, actually getting most of his intended work done. By the time he realized how late it was (technically early), he would barely have about four or five hours to sleep. And that was if he fell asleep right that second.

He did not.

He spent a good amount of his limited downtime laying awake, trying to will himself to sleep. Trying to clear his mind from any distractions keeping him awake (like electric bear traps, the electric slide, electric avenue, bug zappers for humans...) was getting him nowhere. It felt like an enormous waste of his precious time to just be laying in bed thinking of nothing.

In an attempt to lull himself to sleep, he tried thinking of one of his favorite fictional characters. By that, he meant one of his anime crushes. He was actually someone quite different from what Flug considered his “type”. A driven but also quite manipulative man. A user. Someone willing to sacrifice others for his own ambition and expected them to be equally willing to die for his own selfish cause. But that ambition is what drew Flug to the character. He wished he could just go make his desires happen with such confidence, to be able to pay the price for achieving his goals with nothing but his own determination driving him.

He thought the mental image of the long haired albino bathing in the river, the blood running down his muscular arms from the force of his own blunt fingernails, would be enough to send him into a blissful wet dream.

But no. It just gave him an uncomfortable ache in his crotch, which actually made it ever harder to fall asleep. So, colossal failure there. Taking care of his little problem didn’t really improve his situation much either, all it really did was force him to get up and change his underwear. Putting himself right back at square one of his “fall asleep” scheme.

So he thought of his potential projects. What he would be showcasing next week. What could be altered and changed to suit his new employment. What would cause the most pain and therefore have the most appeal to supervillains.

He should really ask Black Hat about how and when he would be paid. Would it be a monthly salary or would he be paid based on his performance and overall productivity? Would it even be a set salary? Or would it be going by an hourly wage? Black Hat promised financial stability, and seemed to believe he could provide it. Flug hoped he hadn’t literally signed his soul over to someone who was all talk.

Oh, there it was again. The soul. Surely, Black Hat wasn’t serious about that, was he?

Was he?
Well, Flug’s alarm was going off. God it felt like he hadn’t gotten any sleep at all. Like he had just spent the night going over potential scenarios and blueprints in his head.

He was going to need an extra large cup of coffee today.

The rest of the day progressed as usual. Flug wore a turtleneck to cover the bite marks he’d received and met Black Hat right outside Cafe Triste and they went about their conversation. Flug was honestly surprised, he didn’t feel nearly as tired as he thought he would, having gone presumably most of the night without sleep.

He and Black Hat talked over the financial aspect of their brand new business relationship, coming to an agreement on Flug’s paycheck, allotted working hours, and Flug presented a well enough argument that got Black Hat to relent and allow him scheduled breaks throughout the day. He wasn’t entirely pleased by it, but Flug pointed out that exhaustion and poor health led to lesser quality products, which won his new boss over. If there was anything Black Hat did care about, it was the quality of his future products.

“So, when does all this really get started?” Flug asked. “Our base isn’t even built yet. That’s another thing, what is our e-evil la-lair going to be like?”

Flug still had a hard time getting the words out of his mouth. Evil lair. He was going to be a super villain. Or, the scientist of a super villain. Oh god was the high point of his life going to boil down to just being the sidekick?

“You know, I’ve been think of that for a long time now. Just recently I came up with something that I’m really starting to get attached to.”

“Well, let’s hear it.”

“Oh, bear with me here,” Oh boy is this going to sound as insane as his take-over-the-world pitch? “What if we built it in the shape of a giant hat?”

“...........whaaaaaaaaaat.............

“What?” Flug finally said out loud.

“Yes, it’ll stick out like crazy. Yes, it sounds incredibly impractical. Yes, it is because it seems like ‘Black Hat’ is the only name people can actually call me by with any degree of ease. And before
you ask, yes, I have the funds to do it.”

At this point Flug pretty much assumed that Black Hat’s bank account was a bottomless hole from the pits of hell. The man could probably just retire now at...whatever age he was and leave Flug alone. But he didn’t. He had a dream and he was making it happen. And decided that he wanted Flug along for the ride.

And apparently his dream included living in a giant hat.

Flug had to be honest, he wasn’t expecting that.

“Ummm, ok. Have you actually told any contractors this?”

“No, no, of course not. I don’t have any actually schematics of how I want it to be yet. I was, ah, hoping perhaps you’d be of some assistance?” He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively and Flug swore he caught his steal a glance at his neck.

I’m beginning to think you just wanted someone contractually obligated to hang around with you and not leave when you harass them, Flug thought.

“Well I don’t know how to design a building, per se, but...” Flug pulled out some spare graph paper from his backpack. “This isn’t going to be some ordinary building now is it? I assume it will be in the shape of a top hat?”

“Of course.”

“How much land space are we working with here?”

With Black Hat’s feeding him numbers and measurements, Flug was able to draft up a crude estimate of what a gigantic evil hat base might look like within the space Black Hat presented him with. Along with his eccentric demands for the place.

Black Hat wanted no less than three stories, not counting an attic, a basement, a sub basement, and a rooftop terrace, while also leaving enough space for rather sizeable front and back yards. As for the rooms themselves, Black Hat demanded the third floor be mostly dedicated to a bedroom (mostly likely his) along with a large private office, the second one consisting of spare rooms and storage, and the ground floor reserved for the actual living spaces and necessities such as the kitchen, walk-in freezer, dining room, foyer, living room, living room with a bigger television (Black Hat refused to
call it a game room), and a decently sized laboratory.

Said lab would be mostly for the “easy” stuff, Black Hat explained, and should only be used for comparatively basic mechanical inventions. More than likely commissions from customers or upgrades to preexisting inventions. Anything more complicated or requiring long term experimentation, meaning more dangerous and therefore more profitable, should be relegated to the laboratory in the basement. Which was to be heavily secured. The sub basement would be for resources and projects of Flug’s own choosing. His private lab, so to speak. Black Hat promised him free reign over this area to do with as his wished, so long as it didn’t divert attention away from assigned work.

One way to think of it would be that the experiments and inventions would get more complex and unique the further down you went.

The attic would be used for anything that didn’t fit in the second floor. More space, basically. Black Hat’s only justification for it and the rooftop terrace was that they were “aesthetically pleasing”. Well, it was his money that would be spent on it, not Flug’s.

The same reasoning was given for why Black Hat wanted such a large lawn and backyard. It was like he just wanted space and didn’t care whether or not he had anything to fill it with.

Given the amount of land Black Hat already owned (or was going to own, as soon as the paperwork was finalized), Flug felt actually pretty confident that it would all fit on the enormous plot of land.

It would look insane and anyone who looked at it would probably be able to tell the people inside were up to no good, but Flug supposed he would just have to suck it up and accept that he was going to move into a gigantic hat after college.

Flug was especially pleased at the prospect of having multiple labs, one entirely devoted to whatever he wanted. And placing the truly important work underground under heavy lock and key sounded like a solid idea to him. He was actually kind of looking forward to his new career as a villains’ scientist.

With most of the business they could think of off the top of their heads out of the way, the two men simply enjoyed one another’s company until their respective schedules made them part ways. The made plans to meet again tomorrow at around the same time to keep talking about the bright (or rather dark) future ahead of them.

And this became something of a routine over the rest of the week. Black Hat and Flug meeting over coffee in the afternoons, chatting about this and that, much to the delight of the Cafe staff. Their typical waitress Demetra in particular stealing glances at the two of them and grinning widely, like “My OTP, YAAAS!” They mostly talked about work, or future work.

Black Hat came up with this idea of “Hat Bots”; giant automatons to be used for security, heavy lifting, drones, sentries, mechanical army of the damned and what have you. Oh, and they should have hats. And laser eyes. And breathe fire! Nevermind that robots don’t breathe, Flug should be able to make it happen!
That was Black Hat’s argument for it, anyway.

But that wasn’t the most pressing matter. Somehow.

Friday night, one week before he was set to showcase what he’d been working on for the past month, and he was done. The ElecTrap (still working on a better name for his modified bear trap/taser/ankle bracelet, although that wasn’t half-bad) and his modified taser-rope-thing (which he was having an even harder time naming) were completed. A full three days ahead of schedule, too.

Ordinarily, this would be great news. More time for last minute additions and improvements. More time to test them and make sure there were no bugs in the wiring that would accidentally fatally electrocute anyone.

That should be saved for a few years down the line, when marketing it to villains. And it should be gradual, or have the ability to be remotely programmable so that it functions doubly well as a torture device and as a weapon that renders opponents immobile and ready for capture.

But the reason Flug had been so productive as of late, was not as great. As a matter of fact it was downright concerning. He himself was getting very worried, because it was just so unnatural.

Rocinante Flugslys had not slept at all in the five days since he got back from his weekend road trip with Black Hat.

And he was just... fine.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
bêbado = smashed (Portuguese)
bebido = drunk (Spanish)

So, I referenced 3 animes in total in this chapter; one when Flug is thinking of the consequences of a soulless existence, one when Flug just describes an anime he likes and owns, and one when Flug is trying to give himself sexy dreams. Can you name them all?
New Perspective

Chapter Summary

Flug is sleeping less than usual (not at all in fact), and puts off investigating the most likely cause to go get lunch with his parents for half the chapter. In the second half, he actually gets to read through that contract he signed. Maybe should've done that BEFORE signing the thing, you supposed genius.

Also Black Hat has an eye color. I know you were just on the edge of your seat wondering what color his eye is.

Chapter Notes

I don't know why almost every PaperHat fanfiction has Flug Angst but damn does it come easily. If anyone's curious still, the three animes Flug referenced last chapter were "Puella Magi Madoka Magica", "Steins;Gate", and "Berserk". The chapter title and the song that plays throughout the two halves of this chapter is Link<"New Perspective" (duh) by Panic! At the Disco.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

▷ I feel the salty waves come in

I feel them crash against my skin

And I smile as I respire because I know they'll never win ▷

Flug didn’t fully recognize the English song playing overhead, but it had a good beat to it. Very relaxing. He could understand it well enough, and the lyrics were catchy. He couldn’t place the band, but he had the vague feeling he’d heard this singer before. Maybe he’d popped up on the radio one or twice before and Flug just never paid it much attention?

Focusing on the song was much easier than focusing on his parents.

As your typical 20-something-year-old, once he determined something was wrong, he took to the internet to try and figure out what it was and what to do about it. Unsurprisingly, looking up “I think I sold my soul and now I can’t sleep, what do I do?” didn’t yield many results. Neither did “I haven’t slept in 5 days, what’s wrong with me?”

Well, he did get some results. Just nothing that helped him. Most websites went into stress and insomnia, but Flug was fairly certain that wasn’t the case with him. Even given his stressed nature
and insomniac tendencies.

The fact that most side effects of sleep deprivations were near fatal or could drive you to madness was not comforting.

Once he got tired of flipping through the Google pages (seriously, he got up to page 20. Page 20 of the Google search results!), he decided that nothing in the shallow end of the internet was going to be of any help. Not wanting to get involved in the deep web quite yet, he settled on a random ask forum.

There he detailed his experience, although he felt compelled to omit the parts concerning his newfound employment. It was like some newfound intuition warning him that it would be a bad idea to mention his job. As if some force was putting the thought of No no, you can’t talk about that, in his mind. He was able to post about his sleepless nights and something else. Something he hadn’t noticed until he was thinking over the past week, trying to come up with any other changes he’d been going through.

His sense of time was all kinds of messed up. When he was working or studying, it was like he was going a supersonic speed. He was at his peak productivity and it felt like it took no time at all. But when he wasn’t doing anything, when he tried just relaxing and letting his mind wander, time dragged on. On and on like the next hour was days away.

It gave him the impression that he was wasting time.

And to top it all off, on top of his growing concerns for his health and well-being (thank you, WebMD) there was yet another symptom of whatever it was that ailed him.

He felt fine.

Yeah. All the neurotic tendencies in the world coupled with insomnia, anxiety, and the unceasing need to keep working lest time stretch on into eternity, and he felt pretty much ok in all honesty.

Still concerned for himself, still an anxious ball of nerves, still horny as fuck, but ok in the grand scheme of things.

What was happening to him? Was it related to his signing of that contract? The contract Black Hat had gotten from some witch doctor from the United States? The contract that gave Black Hat ownership of Flug’s soul?

Was he going to be okay?
He would have to see it again. The contract. And actually read it this time. Read it in full. He had only had one good look at it, and he’d been drinking a bit. His memory was foggy.

Flug didn’t know exactly how to approach this predicament with Black Hat, so he decided to avoid it altogether for one more day and call up his parents to go get lunch. It had been too long since he’d seen them, and he was horrible about remembering to call.

Rather than just sit quietly and awkwardly in his old home, he opted to take his parents out, so that he could sit quietly and awkwardly in public.

♪ Can we fast-forward till you go down on me? ♬

Flug wondered if his parents understood the lyrics as well. Maybe they could talk about that instead of his life.

Things were fine at first. Flug told them about what he was working on, how quickly he had been able to build his latest inventions, how his grades were (as always) near perfect. They were so proud, they were always proud. Always supportive and telling him that he could do anything he set his mind to. His latest progress a clear sign of what they’d always know; their boy was something special. Someone who was going to really make a change in the world.

It hurt Flug, to know that he was such a disappointment to them.

Not that they knew that. As far as Marta and John Flugslys knew their son Rocinante was an above average student who was going to graduate with honors and his doctorate in Robotics and Mechanical Engineering, going on to a successful career helping heroes and making this world a better place. Somewhere along the line they probably expected him to meet a nice girl and have a family of his own.

Past his graduation, he wouldn’t be doing any of that.

A few weeks ago, it was more or less his plan to do nearly everything on that list. Putting his mechanical skills to use helping others was the best way he could think of to make a living. It was a job that always needed new talent to keep up with villains, was considerably safer than actual heroics, and would pay well. It would also make his dear parents immensely proud of him, to see him accomplish everything they knew he was capable of.

That was all well and good, but it wasn’t anything he really looked forward to. No matter how he looked at it, it just seemed like something he’d do because there was nothing else he could really think of now that aviation was out of the question. Everyone expected him to go into the business of assisting heroes, it was just kind of what was done, and there wasn’t any other profession he could find that would put his skills and talent to good use.
Until he was scouted by the competition.

Since finally taking the plunge and signing away his soul, he felt free. As free as he used to feel when he was flying planes. The majority of times were test runs, to make sure he could actually fly the things, but the few times they left him to fly moderately freely would be moments he would treasure till his death.

He felt the same rush of unchecked ability, like he was truly free to do whatever he wanted.

Albeit it was a bit more freedom now, or it would be when Black Hat’s crazy Hat House (knowing him it was probably going to be much grander, like a mansion or manor) was finally built and Flug got his own labs. The promise of free reign of his OWN PERSONAL LABORATORY made him feel high. Or at least what he imagined being high felt like, he didn’t do drugs.

Oh that was another thing, how was Flug going to explain a) his job, b) the fact that he would be moving in with his boss, or c) that settling down and starting a family was pretty much out of the question?

Even before the whole villainy thing, that wasn’t happening. Flug was out of the closet, not exactly publicly but he knew himself and that was enough for him, so marrying a woman and having children was a tough if not impossible scenario to imagine himself in.

He supposed he could maybe adopt a child or two, do some good and give some orphans a nice home and his parents grandchildren to spoil. And maybe, just maybe, he could find a woman he liked well enough to live with for the rest of his life. Maybe he could live a lie and be okay with it so long as everyone around him was happy.

If he was really going to be villain though, and he’d already literally signed away his soul so it’s not as if he could very well change his mind about it now, bringing children into it was out of the question. As well as bringing some innocent woman (or man) into his life.

It was bad enough with just his life on the line, the life of a villain a guaranteed dangerous one, no way he was including anyone else in it.

God, was this what heroes felt when they tried planning for the future? Just a big hole of “Nope! Never putting anyone I may care about in this situation! I’m going to live my entire life in a relationship with my hand!”

As his parents chided him for the umpteenth time about how he shouldn’t let his studies control his life, he should really put himself out there and find a nice girl, Rocinante wondered about how they’d react if he came clean and came out. Right now.
Ok, maybe not right now this very moment now, but maybe on the way back home? When they dropped him off at his apartment, and he maybe invites them up for a quick drink or to use the bathroom or something? Maybe he tells them then?

He doubted he would tell them then. Or ever. They were such nice people, they loved him truly. He was their son and nothing he could do or say could change that.

But he was living a lie. A lie that they cherished and placed all their hopes into. Could he shatter their illusions of the ideal perfect son?

Well, not perfect. He’d had an accident in *la Fuerza Aérea* and had gotten pretty badly hurt (due to the pressurings of a fellow cadet, as far as they and anyone else but he and Julio and now Black Hat knew), but that was all behind him. Everyone makes mistakes, sometimes things happen that we just can’t explain, and we just have to trust that it’s all a part of God’s plan. We may not understand it, and it may even be painful, but God has a plan for all of us and we must believe that even in the darkest times, He is with us. He is always with us.

Sometimes while growing up Rocinante felt that it was part of God’s plan for him to be gay, to teach his parents that prejudice was not ok. If that were true then he wasn’t doing a very good job of it. He couldn’t even bring himself to tell them.

Logically, he knew there were two outcomes. He tell them and they reject him, or he tell them and they accept him. Realistically, he knew he couldn’t keep up the charade of heterosexuality for the rest of his life. Or even just the rest of their lives, they were very healthy people.

He couldn’t keep lying to them so blatantly, right to their faces. It hurt, almost physically. He couldn’t just live the rest of his life acting like everything was fine when he had to force himself to be something he wasn’t. It was going to rip him apart eventually, and it was just going to be worse the longer he waited and allowed it to fester within him.

But...he found himself without the nerve to risk breaking their hearts in order to preserve his.

» *And who cares? Divine intervention
*I wanna be praised from a new perspective
*But leaving now would be a good idea
*So catch me up on getting out of here »

Singer, band, whoever you are, you have the right idea.
Because apparently Reynaldo, the son of the couple across the street who’s maybe four or five years younger than him, got caught with another boy behind the high school.

They were making out, as stupid high schoolers do.

And Rocinante’s parents just couldn’t believe it. He always seemed like such a good, God-fearing boy. And his parents were just the nicest people. Where could they have gone wrong with him?

Must’ve been that other boy, set him on the wrong path. That was the only explanation. He was such a good little boy, they always saw him playing across the street with the neighborhood kids when he was younger. Playing futbol and tag in his front yard like all the other boys. Completely normal.

But then again, who could tell nowadays? It seemed like they were just crawling out of the woodwork. You couldn’t go anywhere anymore without running into un maricon shoving their sinful lifestyle in everyone’s faces. They supposed it was just a matter of time before someone they knew turned out be be that sort of person, but they never expected one to be someone from their own neighborhood, someone they’d been around for years. You think you know somebody!

Rocinante nodded his head along silently, vowing that he’d keep his secret for the foreseeable future.

♫ Stop there and let me correct it
I wanna live a life from a new perspective ♫

That sounded nice to Flug. Correcting these bigoted and prejudiced views from the two most important people in his life. His family. Showing them an entirely new perspective. Perhaps changing their lives (and his) for the better.

But, he didn’t do that. He picked up the check and held the doors open for his mother and father, got in the car, and allowed them to drive him back to his apartment while exchanging more pleasantries on the ride.

Once back in his own dimly lit space, and assured that his parents were on the way back home, he disrobed. First removing the scarf, thank God for the chilly Fall day, and touched the little teeth marks Black Hat had left him. They still hadn’t fully healed and it would be a while before they did if he kept pawing them like he was now, unlike that weird rash or burn or whatever, which seemed to fade away on its own after a while. Touching and stroking and picking at the scabs like he needed reassurance that they were real.

Oh yes. They were real.

He slipped off his coat and his blue T-Shirt, revealing the tight corset he’d been wearing underneath. Not part of his usual attire, he didn’t typically like things above hip level, but he’d been feeling
adventurous. He was glad for his oversized shirt tucked into his pants, it left little chance of anyone seeing what he wore underneath.

Stripping off his jeans which felt far too loose in comparison, he really should get some tighter pairs next time he went shopping, he stood in front of the mirror in his bedroom and took a long look at himself.

The corset was black and plain. He would get something more inviting if he wore these kinds of things more often. The slightly crushed feeling wasn’t completely unpleasant or foreign, he often felt crushed. Emotionally, and that translated well into his physical being every once in a while. Actually, having a bit of control over when he felt such a tightness in his body was...refreshing.

Flug ran his hands over the thing lightly, just barely making contact with the very tips of his fingers. The material was stiff, and melded with his already thin frame quite well. It wasn’t as if he had any need of it, if anything he could stand to put on some weight rather than make himself even skinnier.

It did make his body seem a bit more curved, though. Accentuating hips and chest which were flat and plain otherwise. He’d be lying if he tried to say that he didn’t like this extra bit of slimness the corset provided.

The light pink panties contrasted sharply with the deep black squeezing him. A nice, soft, pastel sort of pink going roughly against the corset and black stockings, although their lacey white trim matched perfectly. It seemed like such an innocent sort of color, one for small girls or pure young women.

And yet he, a semi-grown man who could not be called pure or innocent by his own standards was wearing them. Had wore them in the presence of his sainted parents. Had deliberately slipped them on this morning knowing full well that he would see them.

It did not escape him that he was growing more aroused the more he thought about how much of an embarrassment he’d be if they ever found out. That heat in the pit of his stomach getting hotter by the second.

Such a...naughty little maricon.

Who needed to be...disciplined.

Well, it wasn’t as if he didn’t have the entire night to himself. If Flug was just going to stay awake all night again, then why not indulge in the virgin’s favorite past time?

Flug laid down on his bed, one hand snaking into his panties and the other coming up near his head. As if an unseen hand was holding it there. Holding him down. As if the hand caressing him softly (for the moment) could belong to someone else.
He could still just barely see himself in the mirror. He made eye contact and tried to block out everything but the sensations in his underwear and the desperate look in his eyes. That wanting, yearning, needly look that swore obedience to someone or something that Flug didn’t want to comprehend right now.

He parted his legs a bit wider, allowing for better movement of his hand. He watched his back arch slightly, and his head tilted back with it. He saw himself bite his lip to keep himself from moaning too loudly. The corset was making it more and more difficult to breathe, but he wanted to keep it on. Wanted to see the effect it had on him. He watched, as if it was someone else.

As if that wasn’t him clad in ladies wear, wasn’t him spreading his legs even wider now, wasn’t him trying to get that perfect angle that made him feel so slutty and perfect, wasn’t him wishing he had someone else to touch him so that he could watch his legitimate reactions to stimuli. Wishing that for just one night he wasn’t alone.

Sorry, Dios, for making you cry. Again.

“D-d-d-di-d-did you bring it?” Flug asked Black Hat. Given the nature of their meeting today, they’d opted to meet in the library instead of the Cafe. It offered a bit more privacy, as there were very few people present and getting an isolated table far away from those few was easy. He was still uneasy, this whole thing made him nervous. But it had to be done.

“Yeah, I brought it.” Black Hat said, pulling out a familiar scroll, complete with the same red ribbon keeping it rolled up tidily. “You say you haven’t slept at all since you signed it?”

“That’s r-ri-right.”

“Well, let’s go over the side effects.” Black Hat unfurled the ribbon, letting the scroll uncoil itself a bit. He held it flat against the table for both men to see.

Flug was a bit nervous to be looking at it again. In the lighting of the library, it seemed spookier. Unnatural even. Like it was better suited to lonely campfires in the unknown rather than familiar rooms of quiet safety.

What in him had thought it was a good idea to sign this without reading through it properly?

It was hard for Flug to concentrate on reading the words, his eyes kept going back to the bottom where he’d signed it. It was honestly in much better handwriting than he’d thought it would be in, given that he was slightly buzzed when he’d actually signed it. In the dark, leaning over and using the top of the cooler as a flat surface.
Black Hat had signed it as well, in his actual name. Which was either in some crazy cursive or was in some different language. It still had an air of elegance and poise to it, though. Like it knew it was the handwriting of someone important.

Flug’s signature itself was normal. It looked about the same as any other time he’d written it. Perhaps a little sloppy, but clearly legible and clearly his handwriting. It would probably hold up in court.

Wait, were soul contracts considered legally binding? Who would he have to talk to about this, an attorney or a priest? Was he going to need some kind of spiritual lawyer when he died?

Flug returned to skimming over the contract as best as he could, shaking himself out of his distracting thoughts. Some of it was in a language he didn’t recognize, but it seemed like the basics were in English, which he could read perfectly well. Maybe just the mystical stuff was written in...not-English?

“By signing this contract you agree to submit yourself in entirety, including but not limited to life, earthly possessions, body, mind, will, any and all private resources and/or properties, immortal soul, and desires to the service of…”

Yeah ok, that confirmed it. Black Hat’s name was something he would never be able to pronounce or read. What language even was that? Were those letters?

“Once willingly signed, this contract will relinquish you of your immortal soul within 6 hours. If this does not happen, you have no soul to take possession of. It is recommended that this contract is burned, you take another’s soul as your own or reclaim your original soul, and attempt to pledge your being again after 90 days.”

Well, ok, Flug assumed that he had a soul before last week. He wasn’t aware that souls could apparently be taken so casually. Or that you could take someone else’s as your own and use it in business transactions like this. Who knew?

So, had he been relinquished of his soul? What did that mean for him?

“Once the soul has left your earthly body, it will take up residence in the contract itself. You will not be able to disobey anything stipulated by this contract. Any attempt to go against the contract or destroy it will cause tremendous mental, emotional, spiritual, physical, metaphysical, fifth dimensional, psychosomatic, mystical, or phantom pain. As well as distress the nature of which has not been yet experienced by humankind.”
Ok, what the hell was fifth dimensional pain? Flug assumed he didn’t want to find out, but seriously, what the devil did that even mean? He didn’t exist in the fourth dimension, much less the fifth dimension! At least, he assumed he didn’t. Maybe he did and he just couldn’t comprehend it as a dimension of space.

So, his soul was no longer in his body, it was now in this very piece of paper before him. Yeah sure why not? BUT WHAT DID THIS MEAN FOR HIM!?!?

“Stipulations of this contract are as follows:”

The long and short of it was the Flug had agreed to spend his life working under Black Hat, that he was not at liberty to discuss matters of his employment or his employment itself with persons unauthorized by Black Hat, he could not disobey anything ordered by Black Hat, and the only one who could free him of this fate without causing tremendous pain to Flug was of course Black Hat himself.

Why had he agreed to this again?

“As compensation for your sacrifice, your new lord and master has graciously seen fit to bestow upon you-”

Ok was this one of the ones Black Hat wrote himself? He seems like the kind of guy to refer to himself as “lord and master”.

And his “gracious compensation” was dental coverage, health insurance if it impeded his ability to work, lifetime housing, recession-proof employment, the honor of being subordinate to the future world dictator, free protection (whatever that meant), and negotiable scheduled breaks.

Ok, maybe Flug was wearing him down.

Flug grinned up a bit at his new boss, and found said dark-skinned man peering intently at the contract through a magnifying glass. Which really made Flug take notice of the nearly black color of his eyes. Almost like he didn’t have an iris.

When Black Hat glanced up at him from it though, he was reassured. Through the magnifying glass, Flug could see a rim of nearly-black-reddish-brown circling his pupil. Almost indistinguishable, but there all the same.

“Having any better luck?” Flug asked. “Because I’m not s-s-seeing the side effects of being s-
soulless anyw-w-where.”

“It’s in the fine print.” Black Hat said simply.

Flug sighed. “Of course.”

“I-i-i-is that...is that what I a-a-am now?”

“Is what you are now?”

“Soulless. Am I s-s-s-soulless?”

Black Hat looked up in contemplation. “I guess so,” he said after a second. “Does that bother you?”

“W-well, it’s not like I was using it.” Flug said with a sad sort of smile. “Do you see any life-threatening side e-f-ffects?”

“Just usual sleep-deprivation stuff. Insanity. Possible hallucinations. Have you stopped feeling pain and empathy?”

“Uhhh, no?”

“You may stop feeling pain and empathy.”

Well, okay. That was closer to what he was looking for. He pretty much knew the symptoms of sleep deprivation; fatigue, weight loss, weight gain, heart disease, diabetes. And that was just the physical stuff! Mentally it pretty much destroyed the brain!

Like going insane! Or hallucinating! Well isn’t that just peachy!

“So, I can’t sleep because I’m soulless?” Flug asked.

“The signer of this contract cannot dream and does not need sleep per se. Sleep is not strictly a requirement so much as it is an amenity.” Black Hat said, as emotionless as if he was reading out of an academic journal. “The signer can still lose consciousness and/or can be forced to pass out under the influence of medicinal or recreational substances. Nothing causing natural REM sleep will have any effect, save for drowsiness. Meditation or hypnosis is recommended as an alternative to normal rest should the signer desire it. These can be utilized as a way of preserving mental health.”

“Why exactly? Why can’t I sleep?”

“Doesn’t say.”

“R-really?”
“Really.”

Black Hat continued.

“The signer may experience the desensitization of physical pain and suffering. Both of their own and of others. Without the soul, the body has little sensational properties. However remnants of those sensations do linger and can be experienced as what are more or less akin to phantom pains. All physical perceptions can be controlled i.e. suppressed or intensified by the mind with practice.”

“So, if I concentrate really hard on not feeling pain, I won’t?” Flug asked.

“It’s more like you don’t feel pain at all, you just think you do. Because you don’t have a soul, you don’t really feel physical things at all, it’s just in your head. And you can control how much or how little you feel.”

“Oh,” Flug said, a little sad about it. He didn’t want to lose all his physical sensations. Painful or pleasurable. Well, it said “may”, so perhaps he wouldn’t lose them? Or perhaps he could simply not try to control them, thereby keeping at the very least the illusion of physical feelings. Yes, even if life hurt, he wanted to feel it.

“The signer may experience a lack of empathy towards others of their species as well as those beyond. The suffering of other beings may not affect the signer to any extent, either negatively or positively. This too can be altered by the mind of the signer if desired.”

“Well, that sounds like something I’ll need for a future in villainy.” Flug said under his breath.

Black Hat chuckled a bit. “You already had that one…”

They locked eyes for a few seconds. Flug almost daring his to break out into full blown laughter, he daring Flug to tell him he was wrong.

Flug was the first to break eye contact. He just knew Black Hat was smirking at him. He rubbed his neck, the area still covered in scabbed over bite marks covered by a green turtleneck. He just knew Black Hat only grinned wider at him. He refused to look at him, wouldn’t look in his eye. He kept his eyes downcast, trained at the piece of paper on the desk that said Black Hat owned him.

Shit, this was going to be a long lifetime wasn’t it?
“Due to the lack of soul and lack of sleep, the signer may experience a shift in the perception of time. Either that time is going by more quickly or more slowly. This also can be controlled, as time is itself an illusion.”

“Well, ok. Fine. I’m not too w-w-wo-worried about that.”

“There’s one more thing.” Black Hat said.

“Tell me.”

“Despite the controlled numbness to physical sensations such as pain, the change in the perception of time, and the lack of immortal soul, the signer is still a mortal being subject to death by conventional means of murder, illness, and old age. If you wish to upgrade to Premium- Are you serious Mortimer?” Black Hat said. “You’re really advertising your products in your other products?”

Black Hat laid down the magnifying glass with a huff. “That’s just desperate.”

A pause. “Shit, I’m going to do it too.”

Flug blinked. “Uh, w-wh-w-what was that about an up-g-grade?”

Black Hat was silent for a beat before answering.

“Nothing, don’t worry about it.” He said quickly. A bit too quickly. Flug became suspicious. What could he be hiding?

“B-Black Hat, come on now. Just tell me.”

“I said it’s nothing!” He snapped. All four of the other people in the library turned their way.

“O-okay, okay, fine.” Flug relented. What ever “upgrading to premium” meant, Black Hat wasn’t willing to talk about it. Not right now at least. Maybe Flug could get it out of him later.

Or just, you know, read the fine print himself and find out right now.

Black Hat snatched up the contract and put it back in his coat. He seemed to be in a real hurry to get out of the library. He practically bolted out of his seat and ran for the door. Flug hurried to keep up.

“Black Hat? Hey, w-wait! Black Hat!” He tried calling but his boss wouldn’t stop for him.
They exited the library, Black Hat speeding up a bit and Flug almost breaking into a light jog to keep up. Black Hat wouldn’t turn around or respond to anything he said.

“Black Hat! Look, I won’t a-a-ask about it again ok? Black Haaaaat! I’ll just f-f-forget I even heard about whatever it was! Wey, you’re one of l-l-like five people I talk to s-stop ignoring me!”

Black Hat spun around on a dime and Flug almost crashed right into him. It seemed like this happened every other time they were around each other. Black Hat had an odd look in his eye, and in all honesty Flug was more preoccupied trying to find that tint of color to his iris than discerning what that look meant. It was like a small little thread, just one shred of proof that this bizarre being he would live under was a human at his core.

“I’ll forget it, o-ok?” Flug said, trying to placate the man. “Totally forget about it. As a matter of fact, what was it we were talking about? I have no idea. Already g-g-gone.”

Black Hat still didn’t respond. He seemed a lot calmer, which Flug counted as a win, but wasn’t his normal underlyingly menacing self.

“A-a-are we g-good?”

A pause. Black Hat relaxed his posture. Flug just barely took notice of how tense Black Hat had been. Why had he gotten so worked up about whatever “premium” meant?

Well, Flug knew what the word meant. It meant “an amount to be paid”, or referred to some more expensive version of a pre-existing product. It usually had more features and/or benefits, but Flug’s main concern was the price. The “premium” version of things tended to give little in the ways of updated technology and were more of an excuse to make things more expensive.

Hey wait…

“Yeah, yeah we’re good, Flug.” Black Hat finally said, his normal stance and attitude returning. “May I drive you home?”

“Y-yeah,” Flug said, being shaken out of his thoughts. “Yeah please.”

They walked out to where Black Hat had parked his car, the place a bit more populated than it had been before. His car stood out a bit, it looked as dark and suspicious as it’s driver, but no one ever seemed to take notice of this besides Flug. Or maybe, like him, no one else was willing to voice their concerns.
No matter how founded they might be.

As they got in and drove off towards his apartment building, Flug tried to lighten the mood with some small talk.

“So, n-now that I don’t sleep I guess I have a lot more time to devise weapons.”

“That you do.”

“Lots more time to experiment.”

“Yep.”

“Kind of bummed that I can’t dream. I’m going to m-miss that.”

“Well, look at it this way, you have more time to make your dreams reality.” Black Hat said, putting a hand on Flug’s shoulder.

“T-thanks. And hey, no dreams mean no night-m-m-mares so I got that going for me.”

“You have nightmares?” Black Hat asked. The way he said it, though. He asked it like it was a question he already knew the answer to. The hand on Flug’s shoulder was still and relaxed, not revealing any clues.

Just how much do you know about me, Hat-Man?

“Yeah, s-s-sometimes.”

“What about?”

“Hospital beds.” Flug said. Not the whole truth, but not technically a lie. “They’re not pleasant.”

Black Hat chuckled at this. “Neither is hospital food, but I never had nightmares about that.”

“What’d you do that landed you in the hospital?”

“Got shot. Among other things.” He said with a thin smile, sending the pair into another awkward silence.

“It’s probably too late to enroll for night classes,” Flug blurted out after a few seconds. “And I’d have to pay just to take them.”
“Night classes?"

“Well, if I have the whole night free now, I might as well expand my education. It’s not like I want to just stay in and do nothing for eight hours.”

“Ok, I see your point.” Black Hat said, tapping Flug’s shoulder a bit. “Same problem with online classes, huh?”

“Heh, m-maybe I should just hack into the school network and take online classes for free.” Flug said as a joke.

“Yeah, that would work. Go ahead and do that.”

Wait, Flug wasn’t being serious! Although...why not? He had nothing better to do with his time. Playing with himself was going to lose it’s thrill eventually, and he needed something to keep his mind occupied in the late night hours.

Well, he’d be way behind in the class. He probably would’ve missed more than a few important things. And what classes were being offered online anyway?

And would they show up on his transcripts or not? He wasn’t going to put in effort for a class and NOT receive credit for it.

But having so many classes in the following years at all hours would probably look really fishy…

GAH! Why couldn’t Flug stop thinking about every little detail and just fucking DO THINGS!?

Hey, what was that song playing softly on the car radio? It sounded familiar. Flug moved his arm to turn the volume up, slightly disturbing Black Hat’s hand. Black Hat didn’t move away, just settled back in the groove of things as Flug sat back in his seat. He even started rubbing Flug’s shoulder. It felt pretty nice. Flug leaned into the touch a bit without realizing it as he listened to the song. It was the same one he had heard yesterday with his parents.

♪ And I smile as I respire because I know they’ll never win

There’s a haze above my TV

That changes everything I see

And maybe if I continue watching

I’ll lose the traits that worry me  ♪

Black Hat started rubbing his shoulder in time with the song. Maybe he’d heard it before also? It felt
very relaxing, and Flug was able to feel himself calming down from his internal struggle. Perhaps if he just kept on this path he’d lose the traits that worried him as well.

♪ Stop there and let me correct it 
I wanna live a life from a new perspective
You come along because I love your face
And I’ll admire your expensive taste
And who cares? Divine intervention
I wanna be praised from a new perspective ♪

Yes, that was exactly it, a new perspective. Sometimes the only way to solve a problem was to look at it from a different angle, this he knew this from his many experiments throughout his life.

Many a time he hit a wall in his thought progress and being the stubborn workaholic he was, Flug couldn’t just leave it be until he came up with a solution. More often than not, the best method of finding a way around a problem was to literally look for a way around it. Whether figuratively, in the case of equations and theory, or physically, in the case of mechanical issues. A truly new perspective. In the case of his current predicament, the solution was clear as soon as he calmed down and thought through it logically.

Flug could not change anything about himself, not anymore than he already had by signing his soul over to a supervillain, but what he could do is change how he viewed it.

A new perspective indeed.

And truly, what is so wrong with not having to sleep ever again? The only thing Flug was missing out on was a few hours of lying unconscious in his bed every night. Yes, there was the matter of his mental and physical well-being, but apparently there were substitutes to take care of those concerns in meditation and hypnosis. Something that would be worth looking into, for the sake of his health if nothing else.

This could be a good thing for him, if he was willing to make it something good. The only problem he really had with it before was that he didn’t understand what had happened to him. His only issue had been not knowing what was going on.

Not knowing was the enemy, it was made of fear and uncertainty. Now that Flug knew what had happened and why, he could be okay. The information made him feel safe. Just knowing that everything with him was fine, that this was his new normal, gave him security. All that was left was to decide what to do with it, and Flug could do that at his leisure.

♪ More to the point I need to show
How much I can come and go

Other plans fall through

And put a heavy load on you

I know there’s no more that need be said

When I’m inching through your bed

Take a look around instead and watch me go ♪

So, what would he do once he got home? Perhaps enrolling in more classes and increasing his school workload wasn’t the way of going about expanding his mind. Both because it would look incredibly suspicious to anyone who bothered looking, and because perhaps what he was looking for wouldn’t be found in a classroom. Whether in person or online. There were alternative modes of study, he just had to seek them out.

And they were all probably readily available from the comfort of his personal laptop.

♪ It’s not fair, just let me perfect it

Don’t wanna live a life that was comprehensive

’Cause seeing clear would be a bad idea

Now catch me up on getting out of here

So catch me up I’m getting out of here ♪

He could work with this.

♪ Can we fast forward till you go down on me? ♪

Flug locked eyes (er, eye) with his boss once they’d arrived. He thanked him politely for driving him home yet again and swiftly walked up the three flights of stairs to his apartment, humming that familiar song as he went. The elevators had been down for some time now, so he was just accustomed to taking the stairs. He wondered again what that song was and who sung it. A quick search of the lyrics would probably turn something up, maybe he’d get around to it later tonight.

Flug made his way to his apartment, familiar number 302, eager to find something to occupy his time.

Chapter End Notes
We got long-ish Flug-heavy chapters this month. I hope you like angst and anxiety. Oh I know you do, you ship PaperHat!
Translations:
la Fuerza Aérea = the Air Force
maricon = basically is slang to mean a gay guy
Dios = God
Wey = slang for "dude" or "guy"
Idle Hands

Chapter Summary

The majority of this is told through flashback, kind of, but it boils down to this:

Flug does something bad. And has to deal with the consequences of his actions on his own. Because Flug, while brilliant, has the social confidence of a chicken nugget and the hindsight of the Dodo bird.

But he does discover a few things about himself throughout this chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Flug hoped he was doing this right. This was just one of many forms of meditation, and somewhere around the 30th pose that he had tried. Even after clicking through various meditation, karate, and yoga tutorials online Flug had yet to find a posture he was comfortable with. The whole thing in and of itself struck him as extremely silly and pointless, but given that he couldn’t sleep on things if he tried, he kept on going through video after video hoping he could find some magic pretzel pose that kept him calm and relaxed throughout the night.

He had found a new favorite past-time over the past few nights: wasting his time.

Flug told himself that he was going to be productive during these eternal all-nighters. He told himself that he would use this time to expand his mind. And what did he spend the last four nights doing? Flipping between Top 10 Anime lists and random documentaries that caught his eye.

Don’t get him wrong, he thoroughly enjoyed learning about the puppeteer behind Elmo and the horrible conditions of fast-food slaughterhouses, as well as the 10 Most Evil Villains in Anime, but it wasn’t exactly the sort of knowledge he’d been hyping himself up about.

Tonight, however, tonight was something different and he was determined to not waste the night away.

Tonight was only about another 17 hours away from when he would be presenting his project for his Engineering Club. And he’d found out there was going to be a surprise visitor to spectate. An American professor from a similar Universidad (sorry, University) in California. Supposedly he...
also had a Gift and was interested in what students from across the border came up with. He was going to be there for some tour or something, Flug didn’t know the details. But he was going to be on campus and was invited to watch their demonstration.

So, Flug was nervous. This guy was being built up as some kind of big deal, and Flug was worried about what he would have to say. That and he didn’t really know much about actual Americans, he just knew that in most media, they seemed to be really trigger-happy and eager to shoot things. Like people crossing the border.

Ok, not helpful.

Which was why Flug had spend the last few hours of moonlight trying to find a position that didn’t make him feel like a complete idiot sitting on his bed in front of his laptop with his eyes shut like some weird Hippie-Hipster-lovechild.

He was hoping that trying out this meditation thing could relax him enough to get through the night in relative peace. So far, it was slow going.

The Lotus position, the most common one, pained his legs. It turned out there were three variations of it, quarter, half, and full, all of them putting his lower half to sleep in what felt like minutes.

The main issue was that he couldn’t seem to reach the point of relaxation he wanted. He always got distracted by his uncomfortable posture, or bothered by how he felt like a complete idiot just for trying this, or got annoyed by the video itself. Such as the endless repetition of “breathe”. He knew how to breathe, he’d been doing it for over 20 years thank you very much. He didn’t need to be told over and over and over again “Breathe in, breathe out,” he wasn’t going into labor!

Although Flug really didn’t have any reason to be nervous. While everyone else had been spending the last few days trying to finish up their projects at the last minute before the live demonstration presentation amalgamation incantation what-in-tarnation (shit he was babbling again) tomorrow, Flug had been ok up until hearing about the surprise spectator. Which he should’ve been, given how early he’d finished them. It had only taken a few hours to make sure that everything was working perfectly as it should. So he was not any more neurotic and excitable that usual.

Ugh, the open wounds covering the right side of his face itched. Flug tried to ignore it, tried to put it out of his mind and get back to whatever the nice lady on the computer was telling him, but he was already losing his patience. Meditation was clearly a lost cause.

Oh, right, why was his normally scarred over cheek and part of his upper arm and shoulder now open? What opened his scars? Well, that’s a really dumb story highlighting the lengths Flug would go to in order to avoid human interaction.

With so few days left before he was set to present his inventions, what Flug should’ve done was
triple-check the wiring and make sure everything was working perfectly, ensure that nothing was
going to go wrong by measuring the electrical output and perhaps asking one of the professors for
their input, or even just taken the time to relax in his free time and go into his presentation well-
prepared and quote-unquote “well-rested”.

What he should not have done was remove his finished projects from their heavily sealed lockers at
school for “field tests”.

Given the sensitivity of their materials and their use, it was strictly forbidden to remove their
inventions from school grounds. Since they were made with school property on school property by
school students, they were effectively school property themselves. Meaning Flug just robbed his own
school.

Thank God for his naturally nervous and jittery disposition. Anyone else would have seemed strange
stuttering and jumping at every noise and constantly looking over their shoulder.

But, Flug actually did that pretty often, especially since Aurelio Cruz had made it a point to stop by
more and more frequently. Flug felt like he had to be on the lookout for him. It was like Aurelio was
going specifically to see him, not that he was of course that would be crazy, and it was surreal.

Flug hoped that Aurelio wouldn’t hold it against him if he shot him with what was pretty much a
bondage-style taser with less pain. Aurelio being angry at him wasn’t something he wanted. He was
intimidating and attractive and dreamy and had a scary habit of avoiding consequences for his
actions.

Even if Flug couldn’t actually dream or have nightmares anymore, he could still come up with
hundreds of terrible scenarios in his head to freak himself out. He really wished his brain would just
stop doing that to him.

Kinky as they were, they were not what he needed at the moment.

He’d stolen (he freaking made them, yet he had to steal them) his two latest inventions and had
ridden the bus back home in a state of frenzied panic. Paralyzed by the fear of getting caught.

What would happen if he were found out? Would he be expelled? Would they confiscate his
inventions? Was he going to be taken in for questioning? Or even arrested?! All of those seemed
likely, as he was technically committing theft (Or would it be robbery? Was the penalty for one
different than the other?) at the moment. In an attempt at being rational, Flug reasoned that most
likely he would not be expelled. Not if he could convince people that he wasn’t aware that they
couldn’t take their projects home.

As for getting the police involved, well, no one though Flug to be very intimidating or to have any
bad intentions. He’d probably get off with some questioning, and maybe just a warning if he acting
pathetic enough.

He could probably pull that off.
As he reached the familiar stop across the street from the red-bricked apartment building he lived in, he felt himself tense up even more. This was it, Flug just had to make it home and he was safe. No one ever came over, none of his schoolmates had ever even been here, no one knew where he lived or had his number so once that door was firmly shut and locked he would be cut off from the world once again and could think in peace.

Except for Black Hat. He had his number and had been here before, he’d even walked him to his apartment door that one time, so Black Hat could contact him if he wanted.

Speaking of, he was sure he never actually told Black Hat where he lived. Not even in passing. Flug didn’t think he even told him that he lived in an apartment at all, much less what the address was!

As Flug trudged his weary legs up the stairs, not even checking to see if the elevator had been repaired yet, he came to the conclusion that Black Hat stalked him. Or had paid someone else to stalk him. He did mention that he had someone dig into his past, a villain with more experience than Flug in the ways of computer science, was it so far fetched to assume that things like his address or place of work would’ve been included in whatever illegal background-check had been performed without his consent?

Was that how Black Hat found out that Flug wore panties? Oh God so some random person Flug had never even met knew as well?! It was as if his life was slowly spiraling out of control around him and soon all he would be left with was his intimidating top-hatted employer and nothing to occupy his time with except serving said well-dressed master.

Oh god not serving. Not the maid fantasy again. NOT THE MAID FANTASY AGAIN! It was random as all hell the first time and it’s random as all hell now!

Flug opened his door with one of two keys to the apartment (his parents had the spare just in case they needed to get in for any reason) and partook in his usual ritual of stripping to his underwear as soon as he was sure the door was locked and he was alone. He had constructed a little cap on his peephole, as he was paranoid about someone looking in without his noticing, and it was kept over the peephole at all times to make sure he was unobserved.

Except in the rare cases that someone actually knocked on his door and he took it off to see who it was. In which he case he would throw on some pants real quick.

It was kept covered so that no one could peek in and see him lounging in ladies wear. Much in the same way as all the windows were kept blocked with newspaper and the blinds remained shut. Someone could’ve just looked in his window and seen him! It made his electric bill high, as well as his air conditioning in the summer where he didn’t dare to open the windows unless he was about to die of heatstroke.
But it was a small price to pay for his peace of mind.

Flug took his stolen goods out of his backpack, trying to figure out what exactly it was he was going to do.

He wanted to test them. On living subjects. Humans, specifically. That was the plan, at least, if he even had one. But now, alone in his apartment, he wondered how exactly he was going to do this.

He wanted to test them on living humans. He knew consciously that it was an immoral thing, especially when he was already planning to modify them both later to be able to emit lethal amounts of electricity, but it was what he wanted. He couldn’t see how testing them on animals such as mice was going to be much help. The whole point of his creations was to immobilize Gifted humans for capture (and study, perhaps). So the most rational thing in Flug’s mind was to see if they actually could immobilize humans. The mice and rats they used to experiment on in the lab just didn’t give him the results he wanted.

At least not as quickly or directly as just going ahead and using humans would.

But that still left him with the issue of where to find a person to use as a test subject. What, was he going to just walk around some shitty neighborhood until he found some random homeless person? And then, what, just shoot him with his homemade taser?

Flug supposed he could offer to pay someone to let him shock them. Not sure how much that would cost him, though. And he wasn’t really willing to pay anyone either.

He supposed...he could always use...himself…

Rocinante Flugslys tried to push the idea out of his mind. Using some innocent person as his guinea pig was twisted, but using himself was just plain dangerous. If he was indeed able to shock himself into submission, how would he be able to turn his devices off? He’d be stuck! Shocked until he lost consciousness or died, whichever came first. He might even be able to fry his own brain if the electric current went through his body for too long.

Hey now, there’s ANOTHER feature he could add! Electroshock mode! File it under Black Hat edition!

That was what Flug had been calling all his ideas for modifications and improvements to existing inventions of his, the Black Hat edition.
Perhaps he should call Black Hat himself. He doubted the man would let him test his inventions on him, but he could probably be trusted to observe and make sure Flug didn’t accidentally electrocute himself. Since he’d wanted him as a subordinate so badly Flug was pretty sure Black Hat wouldn’t just let him die. Not even from his own stupidity.

Flug pushed the thought of calling the man over out of his mind. He didn’t want to have to depend on him for everything. He felt bad enough with how often he’d let Black Hat drive him around, he didn’t want to ask another thing of his new boss. Not to mention how he’d used him as a life raft to escape having to confront his feelings towards another man. Twice.

For some reason, which Flug didn’t care to delve deeper into, he really really really didn’t want to call the man and bring him over. It made him feel like he was helpless without him. Like Flug couldn’t take care of himself, like he needed Black Hat around. Like he couldn’t do things for himself anymore. That feeling didn’t sit right with Flug. He may be under contract to serve Black Hat’s ambition, but he still wanted at least a little bit of independence and autonomy.

It was at times like these he wished he had a more social personality. He wished he made more friends, actually put in effort to be close to his fellow students of science. Then maybe he would have someone he could trust to invite over and assist in live human testing of dangerous experimental devices.

It was at that point Flug remembered that supposedly, he didn’t actually feel pain anymore. Or pleasure. Or much of anything in the realm of physical sensations. It was just all in his head. Would that mean that he could potentially move his body while the electric current was flowing through him?

He’d designed them to cause the least amount of pain they could but the electric current would still be keeping him mostly paralyzed. It had been tricky, finding the correct electromagnetic frequency that halted the motor skills of the body but kept the important organs working as to keep the subject quote unquote “unharmed”, and Flug credited his long nights of sleepless calculation and unceasing workdrive to his achievement.

Why did he even feel the need to attempt this? Did he not have faith in his work? No, that wasn’t it, to Flug it seemed more of a matter of just making sure. He knew himself to be capable of great things, even terrible things. But he couldn’t just go and electrocute everyone else in his club. Not with so many witnesses.

Fuck, that was dark. Flug thought. Maybe Black Hat was right about me.

What he could do was see for himself just what exactly a person would be going through. It would give him better insight as to how to make his inventions better, give him that new perspective he claimed he wanted. He would use another person if he could, but he just didn’t have anyone else.
Well, maybe Black Hat could go out and kidnap someone for Flug to-

No, no, no! Rocinante Flugslys was stopping that train of thought right there! He was not going to rely on Black Hat for this. These were his creations! He’d made them himself, and he’d made them for himself! In the future, Black Hat would undoubtedly be involved, but not now! Not for this.

Would it be painful, Flug wondered. Would that be the only thing that could possibly save him from killing himself with idiocy? Perhaps it was possible to move even when being held still by electricity, but it was too painful for an average human to accomplish. Would Flug’s numbness (if he could control it) give him a fighting edge where a normal person would be helpless? Would it be possible to discern this without experimenting on himself?

He didn’t see how it could. He was a man of science. In science, you hypothesize and test. That was the most basic rule.

He could do this...maybe...He was willing to try if nothing else.

Deciding to go with the simpler of the two, Flug pulled out the ElecTrap from his backpack and lightly tossed it on the wood floor. In his hand he held a small device that resembled a car alarm. This was the controller for the machine. It had one button at the moment, the button to actually turn the thing on.

It’s Black Hat edition would have an option to make the shocks as painful and last as long as desired, while keeping the subject fully immobilized. Along with a kill switch, guaranteed to cause irreparable damage to the subjects nervous system if not outright death. Flug was sure Black Hat would approve.

Flug ran his thumb over the button. It was not the cliche giant red button protruding from the body of the device like one saw from TV and movies. It was at about the same level as the face of his creation, and had to be pushed in so that the button was actually at a lower level to turn the ElecTrap on.

Flug had done this to ensure that there was no chance of the machine accidentally being activated by being dropped or something falling on it or something. The push had to be deliberate and centered on the button.

Pushing this one button was also the only way to turn it off, because that was just more convenient. Why make two buttons when you can make one for all your needs?

Flug gave the button a hard press, and the plain-ish saucer-size dish that was the ElecTrap glowed with blue light for a second before going dark and producing a light humming sound, signalling that
it was primed and ready for use.

Not wanting to accidentally throw the remote and lose track of it once he was shocked, Flug placed it on his couch. He would most likely collapse as he lost his motor functions, and didn’t want to waste precious time looking for the key to his salvation. At least this way, he’d know where it was.

Of course, if he couldn’t move at all, it wouldn’t matter.

Swallowing his fear and hoping that his Soulless Super Powers would be enough to save him, he stepped onto his creation.

The first thing he was aware of was that it was too slow to be able to trap Natalia the speedster. Were he able to form coherent thoughts he would’ve began estimating how much he would have to speed up it’s process of snapping its jaws shut and attaching itself to a person’s ankle. Perhaps delaying the shock by a few milliseconds would allow that excess electricity to speed the process up enough so that the girl didn’t notice until it was already firmly locked onto her.

The second thing Flug was aware of was that for someone who was supposedly completely numb and just had phantom pains for all his sensations, he sure was feeling mighty sensationed.

Ok, there wasn’t really pain per se, more of an uncomfortable sort of buzz going through his body. Which was taking up so much of his notice that it took a second for Flug to realize that he was now stiff as a board on his hardwood floor. The ElecTrap wrapped securely around his ankle and sending a specialized electric current up his nervous system to keep him paralyzed.

Well, he hadn’t felt the impact. That was certainly...something.

Flug experimentally attempted moving his arms. As far as he could tell, they weren’t moving. He hadn’t landed on his floor in a position that gave him a clear view of his arms, or any other part of him aside from his left wrist. He could still move his eyes around and blink, although that did cause him a slight stinging sensation. His glasses were askew as well, something he wasn’t at liberty to correct, making his view of the world out of focus and dull.

He tried to open his mouth, which it seemed like he might be able to do, but vocalization seemed out of reach. At least at the moment. And now he couldn’t close his mouth. Oh man, he was gonna drool all over the floor.

So, Good News, it works! Bad News, it works. Flug thought through the haze of static in his ears. Now what the hell am I supposed to do?
Flug tried to move his body. He focused on something small, his thumb. He tried to focus all of his energy and being on moving his thumb. Like that lady in that movie, except she only had her legs paralyzed and had started with focusing on her big toe- NOT. IMPORTANT. FOCUS.

It didn’t seem to be working, and Flug began feeling a bit like an idiot who just screwed himself over all because he couldn’t get over his social anxiety and inadequacy issues and just call someone over to make sure he didn’t do anything stupid.

Ok, scratch that, to make sure he didn’t do anything stupid *alone* and with no help in case something went wrong. This was a terrible idea right from the start.

A terrible idea that he just HAD to go through with without telling anyone else or taking any sort of precautions! When would he learn, these things always ended badly for him? He just wasn’t cut out for spontaneity, it wasn’t in the cards for him. He was a man of science and science required taking risks. It also ideally required being prepared for the consequences of those risks and having failsafes so that one doesn’t end up paralyzed on their floor with no chance of help!

If he’d only swallowed his stupid pride and just called-Hey now what’s this? He didn’t feel anything. The incessant buzzing of voltage going through his nerves had quieted.

Oh wait, it was coming back. Like it had faded away the less he preoccupied himself with it and was being brought back by his revelation.

Flug tried to control it. He cleared his mind and thought about something else. Something that he could just go off on an internal Shakespearean monologue about.

Like the puddle of drool forming on the floor.

Oh God, how undignified. What if he died like this? Is this really how he wanted to be found, shocked still and drooling like some toddler? Then everyone would know what an idiot he was. Black Hat would probably facepalm so hard he broke his monocle. Like, *Goddammit I get this guy for a week and even get a killer make out sesh, and he goes and kills himself. You just can’t get good, reliable help these days. Now who will I live with in my Giant Hat of Evil?*

Oh yeah, about that. Assuming the townplan hadn’t been set in stone yet, Flug wanted to take a crack at designing the layout of their future town. It had started from an idea about the power source of their base, and how perhaps setting in up with its own generator and water heater separate from the rest of the town could benefit them. It would certainly save them money in bills, and perhaps it could be eco-friendly.

Hey, you can’t rule the world if there is no world to rule now can you? Heh, he should pitch that to
Black Hat. They could be eco-terrorists together. Save the world, so that we can rule it. Or rather, Black Hat could. Flug would be off to the side doing the majority of the work while His Hatted-ness lounged on his ass and bit off the heads of puppies or whatever was in those disgusting sandwiches he ate. Seriously, if Flug could still have nightmares, they’d be filled with whatever Black Hat had for lunch. Along with an abundance of mayonnaise. Perhaps he ate good intentions and paired them with the tears of starving children. No, too low brow. They were most definitely the tears of spoiled brats witnessing patricide. Only the finest misery for my Master!

Flug came to the realization that he’d actually chuckled out loud. Meaning his muscles were working enough to produce sound. If he wasn’t mistaken, he was also smiling. Which meant he sure as shit couldn’t die now because being found in a puddle of his own drool with a grin on his face in his lacey white stockings would only further cement that he was, in fact, a dumbass. A dumbass with an exceptionally great ass, CAN I GET AN AMEN?

Jokes aside though, he should really try getting up. Flug tried again to move his thumb, while also trying to ignore the fact that he couldn’t exactly feel himself but he was aware of the current going through him and how it felt far away. It was a detached sort of feeling, not unlike the state he liked to be in when pleasing himself. Being in his body, but not exactly being in his body. Like he was trying to experience things from outside his own flesh.

Well, if this was how he could control his senses, then this should be fairly easy. Just a different reaction to the same state of mind. Instead of heightening his feelings, he’d do the opposite and muffle them.

His thumb twitched, barely noticeable but it did. And Flug was pleased.

He estimated it took him roughly half an hour to finally pick himself and drag himself along the floor to his couch. And another half an hour to be able to reach his damn controller and press the button. Next time, he should really set up a timer. Or a camera, so that he could get a clear observation of his experiments. He could’ve sworn he had a camera somewhere, whatever could’ve happened to it? Did he leave it at his parents house?

While he had been able to move his body, it had been slow going. His body resisted the movement, and it probably would’ve been painful if he had paid it more mind. Mind over matter, that should be his new motto. At least he had some experience with his newfound state of being. He successfully numbed himself to pain and discomfort and was able to resist paralyzing shocks to his brain! He should do something to celebrate, like get some ice cream. Goddamn did rainbow sherbert sound good right now.

When Flug did finally free himself from his own invention, he took a long, deep breath and thanked every God imaginable that he was able to get through that ordeal he just put himself. Maybe it was true, God didn’t send us anything we couldn’t handle. A homosexual man in a Catholic household? He could deal with it. A bigoted asshole harassing him and his first actual boyfriend? Eh, he knows what to do. Some weirdo has him sign over his immortal soul and pledge himself to chaos and
destruction?

Well, people always said Our Lord works in mysterious ways. Perhaps He wanted to watch the world burn as well.

That sure was a funny way of looking at things. So funny that Flug bursted out in shaky, breathless laughter from it.

He should really clean up the floor, he probably made a gross trail of spit dragging himself along the floor like he did.

Flug turned his body, kicking the deactivated ElecTrap away from his foot, to face where he’d been laying before and found much more than drool.

Blood.

A trail of blood.

Where did all that blood come from?!

Flug raised a hand to his right cheek and felt some vague sticky wetness. It went from his temple to his chin, a bit falling into his eye, and there were patches showing from underneath his white shirt.

He’d managed to open his scars.

And oh man was it starting to sting!

Flug tried to calm himself down, tried to block it out like he had the voltage, but all his sensations (fabrications of the mind they might be) were coming back to the forefront of his mind and his body ached! It must’ve been from the force of the electricity, from making his body move against its own biological limitations. That must’ve been what opened all these old wounds. And fighting off his body’s synapses, oh man he must’ve pulled every muscle he had! Hell, maybe he actually damaged his brain! Goddamn delicate mound of meat-jello occupying his head-hole!
Flug dragged himself to his feet, hoping his lacy white legwear had been spared. No such luck, there were clear blood stains on the right leg. Darn it, he liked these. And his legs were seizing up, it was all he could to do keep himself from collapsing again.

Flug decided that his body took priority over his floor and limped his aching being to the bathroom to clean up. It was painful, stripping the rest of his garments off, like trying to move glass limbs. Every movement sent another wave of pain shooting through his veins.

Well, he sure wasn’t going to be doing any other experiments tonight.

Once he was in the bathroom and completely naked, he forced his legs to step into the bathtub. He made his unwilling body lean forward and turn the familiar dials to get the water running. He barely had the energy to plug the drain and crank up the cold water before he resigned himself to laying back and finally allowing himself a moment to let the cold take him.

The water was icy, he would have to adjust it eventually, but for the moment it seemed to help with his bleeding wounds. Like an ice pack helps a bruise. If he was not mistaken, the best thing for sore muscles was a cold pack first, then something warm. Ice now, heat later. Flug supposed this was the “ice” portion of his evening. He’d turn up the hot water later.

The freezing water helped him reach a state of numbness again, making it much easier to move around and assess the damage more acutely.

All the scars on his face were open and leaking out that sweet sweet life juice, a quick peek in his small handheld mirror confirmed it. Flug ran his fingers over the hatchmarked cuts gently, doing his best not to open them any wider. He had to be delicate with them, or it would take longer for them to close. His blood was seeping out of them down his face, slowly though, not at any rate that would raise concern. He’d probably be fine.

The rest of his open wounds, centered mostly on his upper right torso and shoulder area, were much the same. There was less scarring here, and bleeding wasn’t much worse. The amount of blood on the floor most likely due to how long he was crawling his way across. His bite marks were crying rivets of blood, meaning he’d be stuck with them for even longer now.

It was funny, even with the damage to his eyes from the crash, the color red was still visible for the most part. Most others had faded, the majority of the color wheel he couldn’t even see without his prescription glasses or goggles (a special order just for him, his dad had called in a favor), but red remained with him. It made the world without his glasses look a bit like that one movie, but less in focus.

Before the tub could overflow, Flug reached forward and shut off the water. If possible, it was even colder now that he was submerged up to his neck. He found he didn’t mind the cold so much, it was a suitable distraction from his screaming body. He wasn’t used to just stopping himself from feeling pain, so having something that would numb him under normal circumstances was a good gateway point to reaching numbness on his own.
Flug felt tired, something he wasn’t really sure why he felt since he couldn’t really do anything about it. You’d think that once a person lost the ability and physical need for sleep, they’d stop feeling fatigue. But nope! Flug still got tired, apparently. For some reason.

Maybe it was like his pain, just in his head.

Maybe he was already crazy. He was, after all, sitting in a bathtub full of ice water just letting himself bleed out instead of doing something useful like disinfecting his wounds. He should really get on that at some point. Although the bleeding was stopping itself already, and he’d just have to be careful he didn’t reopen them and widen within the next few days.

He felt like he could fall asleep. He was drowsy, the world was bleak and the the only color visible to him was that murky red clouding up the chilly water above his chest, and he couldn’t exactly say when the last time he’d bathed was.

Rocinante felt his lips dip beneath the cold liquid. Felt its piercing fingers soothe his jaw and coax a sort of sigh from his lips. His eyes drifted shut, all his attention focused on the numbing sensation of the water and how good it felt to lose all his feelings. That seemed contradictory but Rocinante couldn’t find it in himself to care about things like sense. Ironic, since all he could think about was his lack of senses. Most prominently, his lack of common sense. He grinned to himself, thinking about what an idiot he was for pulling such a stunt. Dumbass.

The water was past his nose, forcing Rocinante to hold his breath. He felt himself melting into the frigid touch of the water, aware of its presence around his shape but not feeling it, not exactly. He could feel the cold and he could feel the wetness but the further his mind got the less it was really touching him. It was just there, present but within its own boundaries not stepping over what he was comfortable with.

He could feel it seeping its way into his light brown locks, the briskness kneading into his scalp and making him calm. He was completely under now, freezing and utterly at ease. The surface of the water smooth as glass, as if he could stay below undisturbed for eternity. A perfectly preserved specimen frozen in time. Safe from the dangers of the living.

Rocinante wondered in the back of his mind if this was what it felt like to die.

Until he did the stupid thing and inhaled.

Immediately the calm was shattered and he was sent back above the water, painfully and bitterly. He was coughing up water, not good for his cheek or his facial muscles, and the fair amount of thrashing he did wasn’t doing any favors for the rest of him either. He was shivering and uncomfortable and it was hard to move.

With some difficulty, he removed the drain stopper and let the arctic peace he’d been experiencing circle down the drain. He turned the knob for hot water as far as it would go, ready to embrace the inferno.
It was a bit like sitting in a pot of freshly made soup. That was Flug’s first thought, at least. Or a hot tub, if hot tubs had no bubbles and were just giant vats of scalding water. But the heat, too, felt rather nice. Just as all-encompassing but with a fiery embrace rather than a cool one. Like it was determined to hit him full-force and consume him.

Until it was way too hot. And it got way too hot way too quick. And Flug had to mess around with the dials for a while until he got the perfect temperature and allowed himself to stop the drain up again and just wallow in his hotter than average bath.

Which was less of a bath and more of a rinse. Soap would only sting him further and he didn’t much care what his hair looked like.

The warm water was nice and inviting, but Flug just couldn’t compare it to the serenity he’d found in the biting ice bath. The water was better for him, wouldn’t give him hypothermia, would do more to relax him and his tender body, but much like a quiet life as a heroic scientist wasn’t anything he really wanted, neither was the common comfort of a warm bath.

Flug felt like he might be able to coax himself out of tub, after a few more minutes maybe. He really wasn’t sure how much time had past since he’d gotten in, but he assumed it to be fairly late by now. He’d have to check his wounds, just a precaution to make sure they closed up again. Curse his thin skin.

Hmm? What was that noise? It sounded kind of like his cell phone notification. Was someone texting him?

Rising to his feet, minding his body not to make any sudden movements lest he have a bigger mess to clean up, he dried himself off as best as he could and hunted around for his phone while the tub drained. He didn’t bother to cover himself up, he was home alone after all.

Flug found his phone on the kitchen counter, his clock reading 10:19. So, not as late as he thought it would be, but late enough to qualify as late in his mind. The text message was from Black Hat. Of course it was, who else so much as had his number?

So, how are these late nights treating you?

It took Flug a few seconds to read the message but he had a fair idea of how he was going to reply. He tried to remember where he left his glasses. Did he still have them on when he finally made it to the couch? Did he leave them in the bathroom? He couldn’t remember.

What he could remember was that he had a freaking trail of blood staining his floor. Shit, how do you get blood out of wood?
Flug lugged himself to the couch, trying in vain to spot his glasses. Then limped his way back to the bathroom to try and find them there. He rummaged through the pile of discarded clothes on the bathroom floor and pulled out the thankfully unharmed eyewear. If these broke, Flug didn’t know what he’d do. He could barely see without them. He was making his way through his apartment by sheer memory and caution.

Putting his glasses on, he typed out a reply with his hurting fingers:

For the most part ok.

It wasn’t as if that was a lie. Up until now he’d done little more than surf the internet all night. It was a strain on his eyes at times but he was more or less fine.

Flug made his way to his bedroom so that he could put some clothes on. Nothing special, just something to cover himself up. Even in his tightly shut fortress of an apartment where no one could see him, he didn’t like being completely exposed for too long.

Another text from Black Hat: Keeping yourself occupied?

He grabbed a random pair of panties and slipped them on without much thought as to what they looked like or what color they were. He decided he could go without stockings for a night and slipped on a pair of old shorts instead. He needed to stay shirtless for now, in order to give himself a small check up. Which would take a while if he couldn’t get his pain receptors under control. He sort of needed to move his arms for this.

Flug texted back: More or less, yeah.

Flug put his phone down for a second to go get his first aid kit. It wasn’t all that much, just some band aids, gauze, disinfectant, rubbing alcohol, some cold and flu medicine, just basic things in case of emergency.

What have you been up to?

Well, Flug thought sarcastically, Tonight I used myself as a guinea pig for one of those inventions I’m presenting Friday. Good news, it works! Need some help testing the other one though. May I shoot you sometime tomorrow?
He briefly chuckled to himself, as if he would admit to doing something so ridiculous. If Black Hat asked, he’d just say he’d exerted himself and his scars had opened up. It was the truth, even if it wasn’t exactly the whole truth.

But, Black Hat probably was expecting some sort of answer. Before Flug really gave all his attention to examining himself, he wrote:

**Oh you know, brainstorming ideas for our evil lair. I was thinking of taking architecture and city planning courses next semester. I want to design the entire layout of the town. Assuming there’s no plan for it already?**

Flug then turned away from his phone and set to work on examining his shoulder and bicep. He was no medical student, but it seemed like the blood was coagulating (he hoped that was the right term for “clotting and stopping the bleeding on its own”) and he wouldn’t have to worry about bleeding out. His cheek was about the same, although a bit more tender to its proximity to his mouth and eyes. If he was just careful and didn’t make any sudden facial movements, they’d close up on their own without much of a fuss.

During the time it took for Flug to determine he was alright by his standards, he noticed his notification alarm go off about four times. Black Hat sure was talkative tonight, huh? Flug didn’t so much as look at his phone until he was done so perhaps one or two of them was just an “Are you still there?” text.

**There is, but I’m sure whatever you can come up with will be superior.**

**I can probably get them to build whatever you want. I mean, these are the same guys who will be constructing a giant inhabitable hat. I don’t think anything else you add will top that.**

**Oh hey, what if we call the town “Hatsville”? What do you think of that as the name?**

**Yeah I know the hat thing is really corny, but when you have a theme you stick to it! And hats like this never go out of style.**

Black Hat was right, it was really corny. But also sort of...cute, in a dorky way. Flug appreciated the fact that even Black Hat could recognize when he was being ridiculous. And how he was so unapologetic about it. If it were Flug, he’d probably be constantly apologizing about how downright bizarre his ideas were and criticizing every aspect of his own plans. But not Black Hat. Black Hat was sure of himself and driven by his ambition. Flug felt that as his employee he now had an
obligation (whether contractual or otherwise) to give him all the support he could.

Or perhaps...as his friend?

**Do you get lonely being awake all night?**

The question was so sudden that Flug had to do a double take just for it to sink in. It was odd, Black Hat didn’t really ask how Flug was past making sure Flug was healthy. This was the first time he’d asked about how Flug was actually feeling.

He had to think about it. Not his answer, he knew that fairly quickly, what Flug had to think about was exactly how honest he was going to be with Black Hat. Black Hat had told him he didn’t appreciate being lied to, and Flug was not keen on being on the receiving end of Black Hat’s anger anymore than was necessary. Certainly not over something like feelings. But he still wasn’t sure how truthful he could be with Black Hat about himself just yet.

Yes, he knew some of his secrets, but he didn’t know *him*. Not really. Not in any sort of deep, intimate way that would make Flug comfortable enough to share things like his innermost thoughts so casually. And there was no way of telling whether or not he ever would, despite the (hopefully?) long future ahead of them.

Deciding to bite the bullet, he typed:

**No more than usual :)**

He hoped the smiley-face would make it seem like a joke. To strengthen the levity, he added: **For the record, I like Hatsville. It's charming.**

Flug hoped that would satisfy Black Hat for now. Judging by his next text, either something just came up or he got bored of the conversation.

**Ok. Good night.**

Flug doubted he was going to bed right now. The man had the same night owl vibe Flug recognized from his own self. Talking to Flug at all was probably just something to pass the time, and now he found something more entertaining. Not that Flug was complaining exactly, it wasn’t like he was a conversationalist in any sense of the word. But still, there are better ways of ending a conversation,
guy.

Which brings us back to the present, with Flug attempting to find inner peace and instead only finding his inner middle-aged-white-woman demanding to see the manager about her expired coupons.

Meditating was a bust. He wasn’t into it, he couldn’t imaging being into it, and he’d wasted more than enough time giving it a fair shot for his liking.

But, he was still without anything to do.

What was the other substitute for sleep? Hypnosis?

Ah well, that was probably just as pointless. Meditation was at least something he could comprehend. Controlled breathing and “relaxation” in stupid poses. For the record, doing them just sitting normally or laying down felt just as dumb.

But hypnosis? HA!

Flug could buy the relinquishing of his soul by signing a voodoo contract procured from a witch doctor (or whatever that term he preferred was) who led an army of undead subjects in the southeastern United States, but lulling someone into a state of heightened suggestion with mesmerizing swirling images and soft voices whispering repetitive trigger words and phrases in the subjects subconscious to cause specific behavior or actions when uttered was just ludicrous!

But, Flug had nothing else to do with himself. He wasn’t in the mood for any of his anime DVD’s and none of the recent titles had really stuck out to him. Unless he wanted to waste another night switching from *Top 10 Anime Betrayals* and *The Eight-Part Octology on the History of Hentai*, why not at least give it a try?

As a man of science, he did feel that perhaps he should be more open-minded. He’d given meditation a fair shot, after all. It wasn’t as if he had anything to lose.

So Flug typed out “hypnosis” and hit search. There were actually way more results than he thought there would be. Was there some kind of following for hypnosis videos? Was this like that ASMR thing where people put it on as background noise? He wasn’t a fan of that, the spine-tingling feeling being rather jarring and unpleasant for him. This was already off to a great start.

The titles weren’t much help.

Sleep hypnosis, not ever worth trying. Past Life Regression, not was he was looking for. Vampire Hypnosis Session, not his fetish, sorry. Stop Worrying and Be Happy, oh wow his anxiety magically
disappeared! Beginners Astral Projection, if that was even actually a thing would it work for
someone without a soul? Hypnosis: Meet Your Spirit Animal, if it wasn’t a bird he was calling
bullshit. He had all the bird qualities; love of flying, eats little, easily startled. Guided Meditation, oh
god it was like he was going in circles.

Hypnosis: Hands Free...Orgasm? Huh?

Slave Hypnosis...what???

Had...had Flug just stumbled across an entirely new genre of porn? Was erotic hypnosis actually a
thing people made and used and did? Who came up with that?! Who on earth got turned on by the
idea of being mentally controlled and submissive...submissive to, to someone...and...and being at
another person’s m...mercy...with...with absolutely no choice but to...to obey...totally and without
question...obey...be...be completely and...utterly...obedient...

...if anyone asked, Flug was doing research.

Chapter End Notes

I'm uploading this now so that I can work on my essay without constantly thinking back
to this. This is my 2nd update of May, I'm done for the month, and I need to focus. This
hasn't been beta-ed, or at least I can't remember if my friend had read the full version of
this chapter (I think I rewrote this like twice) so this might be edited in the future if I
remember. If this isn't how scars or science work, I'm sorry. I really struggled with this
one.

I don't think there was anything that needed translating, but just in case: hentai = literally
translates to pervert in Japanese, is synonymous with anime porn in Western countries.
Usually involving tentacles.
About That Night

Chapter Summary

Flashback to the time of Ch. 7, but this time, new and improved with BLACK HAT POV!

We learn some things about a certain neon-haired cafe waitress. And maybe a bit about our nose-less-but-can-still-smell-things-somehow man in a nifty top hat.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Black Hat had been having a rather busy week. He had his hands full with juggling his educational workload with his more personal projects. Nothing can be achieved by just sitting around doing nothing, after all. But Flug still hadn’t called him back, and it had been DAYS for crying out loud! How long does it take to just call back and agree or not?!

Friday night, he’d finally allowed himself to take a break from his usual nightly trips to the more seedy areas of the city. With his schedule cleared, he figured it was high time to get an answer out of Flug.

He called him. No answer.

Hey, he’s probably busy. He might have a class, although Black Hat knew Flug’s schedule and knew for a fact he did NOT have a class at this time, maybe he’s just away from his phone at the moment. Perhaps he’ll call back on his own after seeing that Black Hat called him again.

So he waited a few minutes before calling again. Figuring that if Flug had just innocently been away from his phone, he was surely back by now.

His call went unanswered yet again.

Ok ok, no need to get testy without reason. Maybe he’s just busy. He does stuff for that Engineering Club he’s in, perhaps he’s just wrapped up in that. He’s a young man, they check their phones often. Surely he’ll call back. It would just take a bit of patience.

Patience was never Black Hat’s strong suit.

Flug had had the entire freaking week to get back to him, and what was he doing?! What else was going on in his life that he couldn’t just return a damn phone call!? Was he ignoring him!?! Was that little ass deliberately letting his phone ring just to spite him!?
Black Hat reasoned that before he stormed that lab Flug’s little club met in most of the time, he should at least make sure he was actually in there. Maybe the neurotic little worm actually decided to get a life since the last time he’d seen him. Black Hat knew for a fact he hadn’t done anything crazy like run away, the boy was a coward but only on the surface.

He could see what he truly was under the skin. What poked out from beneath those scars.

The only place Black Hat could think of that Flug was even somewhat likely to be that wasn’t his apartment was Cafe Triste, that little coffee place he’d brought him to twice before. Of course, it was well past ten o’clock by this time, and the place was most likely closed, but he figured he might as well make sure Flug wasn’t there.

He found the cafe indeed closed, but not quite empty yet. The remaining staff were just about done closing up for the night, shoo-ing out the few straggling college students desperate for a caffeine fix.

He recognized the aforementioned waitress, and calmly knocked on the glass windowpane to get her attention.

She instinctively pointed at the closed sign on the door, probably eager to get home. She froze however, when she seemingly recognized him. Her eyes went wide and her jaw dropped. Not out of fear, more of...excitement?

She smiled widely and started hopping around like a giddy toddler, jumping and pointing rapidly at him and saying something he couldn’t fully understand to the rest of the staff. Who in turn looked out to see him standing awkwardly outside the door.

They too seemed pretty happy(?) to see him. One of the other waitresses motioned for the giddy girl to open the door, which she promptly did as well as grab him by the arm and drag him inside at inhuman speed.

What is going on? Black Hat thought. Did I miss something?

The girl sat him down none too gently and immediately began talking at break-neck speed.

“Dios mio it’s you! It’s really you! You’re Black Hat, right? Flug, that skinny guy with the glasses, he’s been coming in, like, ALL WEEK asking if we’ve seen you!” (Wait, what?! ) “You guys seriously need to exchange numbers or emails or something, cuz that guy just looked so sad everytime I told him I hadn’t seen you! It was painful man, just painful! And if you don’t mind me saying, I see exactly what he was so worked up about.”

She winked after that last part.
Black Hat took a second to process all that. Flug had been coming in everyday asking about HIM? Why didn’t he just call him? He should still have his number in his call logs, shouldn’t he?

Apparently, that second he took trying to wrap his head around what she’d said was too long, because she started back up again.

“So, now that you’re here, and way late by the way, we close at 10, what’s the deal with you two anyway? We all had our own theories, which Flugsy denied, but now that you’re here yourself you can set things straight, yeah?” She pulled up a chair at the table next to him and sat herself down.

“I’m Demetra by the way.”

Ummmm...okay.

“Now, tell me. How’d you and Flug meet?”

Before Black Hat had the chance to respond to her, a large older woman walked out from the back of the cafe. Given her authoritative tone of voice, Black Hat assumed she was the manager of the establishment.

“Demetra!” She yelled. “What have I told you? When it’s time to close, we close! When I said talk to the customers after hours, this isn’t what I meant! Samuel!” The woman turned to one of the few male employees. “Lock up when you get these two out.”

“Hehehe, sorry Consuela…” the bubbly girl said with a bashful grin, curling her hair around herself. She certainly didn’t look very sorry. In half a second she was ushering him back out the door, saying “Wait for me, I’ll be right back.”

What...what just happened???

Black Hat was far too perplexed at...well, MERE EXISTENCE at the moment to do little else except wait for the hyperactive waitress with hair that seemed to be a throwback to the punk era of the 70s.

Also...was he seeing things or did her hair seem to reflexively curl on it’s own?

He could almost swear that he’d seen her hair bouncing to its own cadence opposite the girls own.
When her superior scolded her, it seemed like it curled around her, like a blanket or the tail of some creature.

This warranted further observation.

Seeing as he had nothing else to do, Black Hat checked his phone again.

No voicemails.

No calls.

Not even ONE DAMN TEXT MESSAGE from Flug!

Oh for the love of all that was dark and menacing DO NOT TELL ME YOU DIDN’T NOTICE ALL THOSE PHONE CALLS!

Black Hat was sure he had the correct number. He’d been calling the same one from the one time Flug actually had called him back. The phone was ringing, so it couldn’t be that his phone was turned off or that it didn’t have service. And it rang multiple times, meaning Flug wasn’t outright rejecting the calls.

As a sort of test, he sent a text message this time. Something aggressive but not wholly unwarranted.

FLUG I KNOW THIS IS YOUR NUMBER ANSWER ME

Oh pineapples, was having it all in capitals a bit much? Was he coming off as desperate? Oh no he was NOT a desperate man! He just wanted to talk to him, that was all. Talk to him and maybe get an answer of whether or not he was willing to drive off into the bleak nothingness of the desert with him!

Ok, maybe leaving the specifics out had been a mistake. They had just barely met, after all. But, he wanted it to be a surprise. It really meant a lot to him and saying it without looking at it made it seem...dumb.

Black Hat really wished text messages were like messenger apps, the kind that showed you when the person actually read your text. The small solace of knowing that his text at least got through was little comfort.

Perhaps his silence was a message in itself. He had made up his mind, and decided to decline his gracious offer.

Well, that would be fine, IF THE BASTARD HAD THE BALLS TO SAY SO!!!
Black Hat tried not to clench his fist, hoping to have this phone a bit longer than a few months before he broke it like his last one, when he was shaken out of his thoughts by the flashy waitress from before.

Who’d changed out of her uniform, apparently.

While the punk aesthetic matched her hair and personality far better than the boring white blouse with her name tag pinned to it, he couldn’t say he was a huge fan. He could appreciate the sentiment of the anti-authority punk subculture, but not the actual music or fashion.

The asymmetry was giving him a bit of a headache to be honest. Her hair colors were at least complementary colors. Which was the biggest compliment he could muster. Why was she wearing leggings if one of them was ripped to point that it ended mid-thigh? Why not just buy another pair?

The lizard hood however, was sort of charming in a ridiculously childish sort of way.

“I like your hood.”

“Oh thanks!” The weirdo said, beaming. “I made it myself. My parents actually run a reptile ranch, and I made patches and stuff to advertise it all the time, but this hood I made just for me. Neat, huh? It’s a Demetra original! I based it on my own little guy, Locojos. Cuz he has these crazy little eyes that just dart around all over the place. Except when I feed him, then they lock on like he’s got little target sights. So that’s where the name came from. Loco. Ojos. ¡Locojos! He’s a horned lizard, that’s why it has horns, even though they don’t really look like this. They’re funny lookin’ things.”

*Oh WOW she talks a lot.* Black Hat thought. *She better have some good information on Flug.*

Thank God this woman could walk and talk at the same time. If Black Hat had to sit still and listen to this he was sure he’d go mad. Moving his body allowed him to keep moving his thoughts. Hopefully finding a way to steer this conversation back to Flug, the whole reason he was even here.

But for Hell’s sake, this woman just kept talking and talking and talking and talking and going off on tangent after tangent! What were they talking about now? Hadn’t the subject been her wardrobe only minutes before? Now she was telling him about the various lizards and snakes she’s raised. Black Hat wasn’t even participating in this conversation, he would just nod or give a one or two word reply every few sentences.

It also didn’t help that none of these topics were anything he even remotely cared about. Who was this woman, again? Didn’t he just see her once or twice before? Why was she telling him her life story?
“You said Flug kept asking about me?” Black Hat asked when she finally paused her infernal mouth vomit. She was saying something about how hard it was living with three older brothers? He didn’t care.

“What? Oh! Yeah! Like, every day! Just ‘Has Black Hat been here? Have you seen Black Hat? What no, it’s not like that!’ over and over! So!” The woman jumped in front of Black Hat, who just barely stopped himself from punching her in the throat reflexively.

“What’s the deal with you two? Are you dating? How long have you been together? Who started it? Is it over? Please say it’s not! It can’t end like this! You gotta take him back, he’s in shambles without you! Shambles I tell you! Anxious, nerdy, coffee addicted shambles! Flug is definitely the bottom, right?”

**WHAT THE EVER LOVING FUCK?!!!!?!?!?!?!?!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!!?!!
could be out spreading the terror of his name to unsuspecting men and women caught at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Hell, he could be at home watching black and white movies and eating popcorn in his briefs.

But no, he was sitting on the hood of his car out in some dingy empty parking lot smoking with some chick who was apparently born without an “off” switch. Thankfully it wasn’t anything stronger than tobacco, so it wouldn’t leave too much of an offending smell. Though he still refused to let her light up in the car.

Smoking seemed to calm her down a bit, she was no longer talking at break-neck speed and the flow of the conversation was much smoother.

Black Hat still wasn’t interested or invested in her life story, but she made it a point to tell him anyway.

“I swear Ivan blamed me for it. There was no possible way I could’ve been anywhere near the snake cage, but somehow it was my fault that it got out. The fact that it went after his dog was somehow more proof. Do you see how it could’ve been me?”

“No.”

Black Hat honestly had little to no idea what she was talking about at this point. They’d somewhat cleared up the situation between he and Flug, amusing as it was to the both of them it really wasn’t much to continue talking about, and it had apparently reminded her of some anecdote between one of her brothers and a classmate (Black Hat wasn’t even sure it was the same brother they were talking about now), and now the conversation was about how a snake had killed the family dog. Apparently the truth of the matter wasn’t all she had been hoping for, so she just dropped off the topic of Flug.

And he still didn’t know what he should do about it.

“Right? I wasn’t even home! It’s not like I have some psychic link to the snakes! Just because-” she cut herself off. It was so sudden that Black Hat stopped staring into the nothingness beyond the cheap streetlights and looked at her.

“Just because...?”

She was silent for a time. Longer than she had been for the past hour. “It’s nothing.” She finally said, in the quietest voice he had heard all night.
Very well. It appeared even this moronic girl knew that not every detail should be shared with a stranger over a cigarette.

Given her eagerness to share herself, Black Hat deduced that she didn’t have many friends or extended family to burden with her problems. No doubt her obnoxious and exuberant personality was a turn off to some, and to those with similar dispositions she most likely is more interested in enjoying the shared energy rather than getting into deep personal conversation.

The youngest child of a family of six, and the only daughter to boot. And yet he was able to talk with her into the late hours of the night without so much as a phone call from any father or brother asking where she is, who she’s with, what she’s doing, or when she’s returning home.

Black Hat may have been in this country for less than a year, but he understood enough about the culture to know that it followed the near universal familial norms. Respectable young women were not supposed to stay out late into the night doing heaven knows what with god knows who. Yes, she had a job with somewhat late hours, but even working women are still treated like women by their families, no?

“You’re family is strange.” He said, more to break the silence than to actually continue this conversation.

“Yeah. Well, what about you? What’s your deal?”

“Have none.” He said, taking a long drag of his own cigarette. “My parents died when I was young. I don’t remember them.”

“No brothers or sisters?”

“No.”

“No one else?”

I was raised in an orphanage, what do you think?”

“Well damn, sorry. Didn’t know you were so touchy.” She said, leaning against him and twirling her long ponytail around. She was gonna set it on fire if she wasn’t careful.

Black Hat rolled his eyes and went back to staring at nothing.

“So, no family. Do you have any friends aside from the dork you’re trying to screw?”

Black Hat huffed in annoyance. But answered just to shut her up. “No.”

“Well, that’s just pathetic.” She said. “Ok! You now officially have one more friend!”

“Fantástico.” He said sarcastically.

“Don’t give me that!” She said, shoving him slightly. It irked him when she touched him. “I’m just trying to lighten the mood. You’ve been getting grumpier the longer we talk, don’t think I haven’t noticed.”
And yet, you can’t figure out that you’re the cause, Black Hat thought.

“This is still about Flug, isn’t it? Well ok Señor Black Hat let me tell you up front: You screwed up.”

“What?” He said, surprised that she’d finally come back to the one thing he actually wanted to talk to her about.

“You don’t just call people up after two dates and ask to spend the weekend together. Especially not when all you’ve done is hold hands. Yeah, I saw that.” She gave him a rather devious smile.

“Yeah, ok,” He admitted. “But-”

“But nothing! Not everyone is as spontaneous and free-spirited as you. Or me.” She placed a hand on her chest and smirked knowingly. “Other people gotta be eased into things. Flug is definitely one of them.”

Black Hat considered her words. True, Flug was not the sort of person who simply acted on impulse or made spur-of-the-moment decisions in his daily life. No, he was someone who made it a point to think carefully and consider situations from every angle. An analyst to the core. The last time he hadn’t, the consequences had been near fatal for him. The two times Black Hat had been upfront and direct right off the bat had not ended as well as he’d hoped either.

She...might have a point.

“Fine.” Black Hat said. “How do I...fix this?”

“Just gotta wait. Give him time.”

“He’s had a week.” He pointed out.

“A week of constantly being on the lookout for you.” She pointed out right back at him. “Guess he felt anything he had to say needed to be done in person. Not over the phone. So, where have you been?”

“I’ve been busy.” He said. Busy with what was none of her concern.

“Leave him a message maybe, apologize for rushing things.” She took a drag. “What you don’t want to do is acosar him with phone calls.”

Black Hat’s face fell.
Her face went blank.
“Tell me you didn’t.”

“Well-”

“Oh wey!” She said, jumping off of the hood. “That is the one thing you absolutely don’t do! Like, basic Dating 101!”

Black Hat gave up trying to convince her he wasn’t after Flug for romance. It was clear she wasn’t listening.

“It was just today!” He said, defending himself against this loud, annoying person. “I gave him the entire week to get back to me on his own!”

“Which he felt he needed to do face-to-face!” She said, accentuating her point with her hands.

“How was I supposed to know that!?”

“Where have you been!?”

“None of your business!”

“What were you doing!?”

“None of your damn business!”

“Who were you doing!?”

“What the fuck are you talking about!?”

“Where were you!?”

“Why are you yelling at me!?"

“WHERE IS YOUR NOSE!?" She suddenly jumped forward and got up close and personal with his face. She pointed at the area where his nose would be if he had one.

Oh would people shut THE F*** UP ABOUT HIS NOSE!?"

Black Hat grabbed her by the face and shoved her back so hard she fell and landed on her ass. It was a wonder she didn’t trip on her hair. Or flash him her panties. Well, they were probably covered by the tights. But still, it was the principle of the thing.

Black Hat took one final drag of his cigarette before flicking it off into the night.
“That’s a really rude thing to ask, you know.” He said in an incredibly polite tone.

“Well excuse me,” she said. “You didn’t strike me as the ‘sensitive’ type.” She actually did the little air quotes with her fingers. What the hell.

“And what type do i strike you as?”

“Well, I think you just might be...mine.”

She was on her feet with just a leap of her legs and was directly in front of Black Hat within half a second. With the other half, she managed to get on top of him and push him flat on his back. She placed both of her hands on either side of his head. Her knees were on either sides of his waist. Trapped, if he were an ordinary man who had a problem with hitting women.

As it was, he had none. He was a gentleman, not a chauvinist.

That was impressive speed and agility, though. He wondered where she’d learned to move like that.

Also, her hair seemed to be defying gravity now. There she was, on top of him looking down through her bangs, and yet that chppy mess of neon green wasn’t falling down and engulfing the both of them in strands of hair. It wasn’t as though she was holding her ponytail up with her hands, either. Both hands were planted firmly on the hood of his car, restricting his movement in a small way.

“So, are you in fact, gay?”

“Could be. What’s it to you?” He asked in a bored voice. Honestly, what was he even still doing here? Why did he come here? Why does he do anything?

WHY WILL FLUG NOT RETURN HIS CALLS?!!!

“Oh nothing. Nothing at all. Just wondering. About what a man with such obvious good taste like you sees in that little guy.” She began fiddling with his tie, occasionally moving her fingers to dance along his chest.

“Well that’s my business now isn’t it?”

“Yeah, yeah. Are you perhaps bisexual?”
“I’m just interested in what will get me ahead in life. At the moment, that’s Flug.”

“And if he were a woman?”

*He wears panties and he could put your legs to shame, is that enough?* He thought.

“That wouldn’t change anything.”

“How open-minded of you.” She said with a smirk.

It really wasn’t. Black Hat was just focused on how he could use Flug to best suit his needs. If that involved taking care of a few of Flug’s needs every so often, so be it. It wasn’t as though the younger man was unattractive, as a matter of fact Black Hat found his thin frame and scarred face unique and quite pleasing to the eye. A physical relationship wasn’t anything unthinkable, especially since Flug himself wasn’t being physical with anyone else at the moment. Black Hat could be quite charming when he wanted, and was sure he could wrap the man around his finger if he could just get closer…

“So, if nothing’s decided and he’s still silent, why not have some fun?”

“I’ll pass.” Black Hat said, starting to get up.

He was rather roughly shoved back down.

“Now, is that any way to refuse a lady?” She asked, showing surprising strength for a female of her stature. She didn’t seem overly built, and she was shorter than him at about 5’ 6”.

Lean muscle?

“Is this any way for a lady to act?” Black Hat asked right back. “Not very refined, are you?”

“I am my own refined!” She announced to...him. She said it loudly, but there was no one else around but the two of them.

“That didn’t make sense.”

“Life makes no sense, why should I? Or you? Or anyone for that matter. We’ll only lose it someday anyway, why waste precious time trying to be sensible?” She folded her arms and rested her head on his chest. She looked him dead in the eyes with a look of seriousness he wasn’t expecting from her. “Everything is temporary, even things that last hundreds of years.”
“Only too true.” He said with a surprising amount of sincerity. “I have to say, I did not peg you for a philosopher.”

“You know, I don’t exactly peg you as a hero.” She flashed him a devilish grin that showed off those sharpened canines he’d glimpsed.

Black Hat remained calm. She couldn’t prove anything.

“Yeah, I guess I don’t exactly look very heroic now do I?”

“Nope,” she said bringing herself closer to his face. “Not heroic at all. As a matter of fact, I think you look rather—”

“Dashing? Handsome? Everything you’ve ever wanted?” He cut her off swiftly before she could say anything more. “Yes, I’ve heard it before. Sorry, but you’re just not what I’m looking for. I appreciate your enthusiasm, but you just don’t do it for me babe.”

Her face fell for a second, but soon she was smiling wide again. Giggling even. That too broke out into full-blown rambunctious laughter. She sat up on his stomach as she leaned her head back and roared her cacophonous cackling into the night.

It sounded malevolent almost, something Black Hat wasn’t opposed to.

But she needed to get off of him. Seriously, it was getting really hard to breathe. She was crushing his diaphragm.

“Oh you!” She said in between gasping laughter. “You are something else!”

Black hat shrugged. Well, as much as he was able to shrug with the air being slowly squeezed out of his lungs. He resisted the urge to push her off. For now.

“I like something else,” she said, yanking him up suddenly by his lapels. At least he could breathe a bit better at this angle.

“Can you not pull those?” He asked, still as uninterested as ever. “I like this coat.”

“Is this your only one?”

“No,” He admitted.

“Then I fail to see the issue.”
“It’s my favorite out of all twelve of my identical coats.”

“How can you even tell?”

“The keen eye of a man who knows what he’s after.” Black Hat said, slapping her hands away. “Can you get off me now?”

She rolled off and took her seat again next to him on the hood. Appearing to be still in good spirits.

“So, what are you really after?” She asked.

“What do you mean?”

“You want more than some degree and meaningless job you’ll hate after a year. So what is it? What’s your dream?”

“You first.”

“I always wanted to be a musician.” She said. “I even learned to play the electric guitar all on my own.”

Loud, obnoxious, and a bother to everyone who heard it. Fitting.

“But?”

“But contrary to TV and movies, you can’t get anywhere with just heart and soul. And my grades sucked so bad I couldn’t even get my high school diploma. And there was no point in sticking around when everyone knew I’d just flunk out again.”

Black Hat grunted as a reply. He could’ve guessed that much.

“So, instead of just sitting at home being reminded of what a failure I am, I went out and got a job.”

“Do you not like your job?”

“It’s not bad.” She said, pulling out another cigarette. “I meet a lot of people. I make an okay amount of money. Not enough to move out on my own but it’s something. It’s just not what I want to do. Not many other places hire high school dropouts.”

She offered one to him, he politely declined. She continued.
“Same with my social life. I had friends back in school, sure, but it’s not like they want to hang back and give up on their own dreams just for me. Outside of my coworkers and random guys I see out and about I don’t really talk to anyone.”

So, Black Hat was right. She really doesn’t have anyone else to talk to.

“Sometimes I’ll see a guy. Like, actually see a guy. Like actually go out more than once. Sometimes they’ll even be a nice guy. But then they go. They can’t handle me. No one can handle Demetra Yashchirkaova!” She proclaimed with a toothy grin.

But Black Hat could see the falseness of the smile this time. Could see how it failed to reach her eyes.

“So, I try being someone else. Someone maybe someone would stay with. Cuz clearly I’m not that person. It’s made friendships hard. Dating harder. It’s like, I have to constantly hide who I am. Lie about myself. Act like I’m someone I’m not, y’know?”

“Yeah, I know.” Black Hat said earnestly. He truly did, he’d been hiding his true self nearly his entire life. It was exhausting but got easier as time went on, until even he wasn’t completely sure who it was in his own skin anymore.

Maddening.

“I guess that’s why I just blurted everything out to you,” she said, smiling sadly. She tapped a few ashes off of her cigarette. “I figured, you’re just some guy who comes in every so often, seeing another guy. Some rando who I can tell everything to with no regrets. Someone who isn’t going to care or really listen, so I can just say whatever.”

“I was wondering why you were telling me your life story.”

She laughed again. A bit humorlessly.

“I swear, if I was actually just being myself with anyone else, they’d run away. I scare off every guy I try to get serious with.”

She flicked her cigarette off into the shadows beyond the streetlights.

“But you, you don’t scare off so easily, do you?” She asked with a malicious grin. A real one
“Oh darling, you’ll need to do much more to ever scare me off.” He returned her grin with one of his own. Menacing and promising nothing but evil intent.

Either she didn’t pick up on it, or she found it a turn on.

“You talk a big game, but I raise you-” She pulled out her phone. Then stopped as she went to unlock it. “Oh damn it’s almost midnight? Shit!”

Oh wow midnight already? My, how the time flies. And things were just starting to get good. Black Hat pulled out his own phone to see for himself and was surprised by a new text message.

From. Flug.

**Robotics Lab. Urgent. Come now.**

Well, not even so much as a *Hi, how have you been? Sorry it took me so long to get back to you. Could you please come get me, I’ve finally worked up the nerve to talk to you again.*

Just who did Flug think he was?

“Black Hat, you mind giving me a ride home? I live kind of far and I don’t have a car. Or a license. I’d usually get a ride from a Marietta but, you know, she’s not here. It’s been- it that from Flug?” She said, peering over to look at his phone.

“Yeah.” Black Hat said. “Sure, I’ll take you home.”

The both of them got up, Black Hat holding the car door open for his lady friend. Although the terms “lady” and “friend” were used in their loosest meanings.

“So, are you, like, not gonna reply?” She asked once he himself was seated in the drivers side next to her.

“Not right away, no. I don’t even know what to say. Is he in trouble? He’s been around, so it’s not
like he was kidnapped and just barely got his phone back.”

“That would be so dramatic and awesome. You could ride in a save him all heroic-like! Then he would swoon and be all like, ‘Black Hat, my savior! Let’s go on that romantic weekend trip! I’ll pay for the motel room!’”

Black Hat barked a humorless laugh. “Yeah I guess.”

The girl, Demeter or something, seemed to pick up on his lack of enthusiasm. “What gives? I thought you wanted to talk to him.”

“I don’t want it to seem like I was just waiting by the phone for him. Because I wasn’t.” He said defensively.

“Then, play hard to get!” She said, a wicked twinkle coming into her eyes. Yep, one was definitely a different color. A yellow-green tint to go against the chocolatey brown.

It actually looked kind of pretty.

“Play hard to get?”

“Yeah! Act like you totally haven’t been just waiting and waiting for him to call you.” She winked.

“Act like you’re busy.”

He didn’t like the way she winked. He wasn’t waiting for him to call back like some lovesick teenager. He wasn’t. He wasn’t! Stop eyeing him like that, he said he wasn’t!!

So, he texted Flug back: I’m busy. Can it wait?

“Good!” The girl said from beside him. “You sound totally disinterested!”

“Is that what I want?”

“Yeah! You’re not just waiting on him to get back to you, you have your own life! You do things! Riiight?” She winked again.

Stop winking damn it before I push you out of this car. He thought.
Ugh, they carried the smell of tobacco into the car with them. Black Hat rolled down the windows. This girl could stink up her own car.

In the event she ever got one.

A response: I don’t know, can that weekend trip you mentioned wait?

Ok, this was the best progress Black Hat had gotten so far. If he actually had to thank this annoying woman, he was going to be literally driven insane.

Said woman gasped, and really needed to stop reading other people’s text messages, as Black Hat started the car.

“See?” She said with a wide grin. “I told you playing hard to get worked!”

“Yeah ok ok I got it from here.” Black Hat waited a bit before making his displeasure known. Playing hard to get, as she said. He wrote: Oh so you’re FINALLY getting back to me about that?

He pulled out of the empty parking lot he’d spent the last hour in, glad to be back in his lush leather seats. He didn’t type again until they made it to the next red light.

So you’re in?

He kept the phone in his hand, so that he could see exactly when Flug responded back. Unfortunately, that also meant his passenger could see as well. And it was getting more and more annoying that she was reading from his phone so blatantly!

“Oooooh!” Said girl exclaimed. “He said, ‘Yeah I’m in. Now can you please come get me? I need a ride home.’ Aw, is that all?”

Black Hat rolled his eyes. Really, this was what was so urgent that Flug finally worked up the nerve to text him? Well, it was pretty late. The buses probably weren’t running anymore. So, Flug was pretty much stranded unless he wanted to walk for nearly an hour back to his apartment building.

Did he not have anyone else to drive him home besides Black Hat?

He typed: None of your friends can give you a ride?
“You’re doing this perfectly!” His passenger squealed. “You sound totally uninterested and bored! You’re a natural!”

Black Hat hummed in agreement. He was picking up this whole “play hard to get” thing rather quickly, wasn’t he? He grinned at his accomplishment. Soon, Flug would be eating out the palm of his hand.

**Look can you please just do this for me? I’ll owe you a favor, okay?**

Oh look, Flug, eating out of the palm of his hand! Black Hat didn’t even have to really try! Quite the opposite in fact, he just gave the least amount of effort he ever had.

Black Hat immediately responded: **Okay fine. Be there soon. Bringing company.**

It was perfect. It was bored, disinterested, and extremely vague. Those last two words were going to drive Flug up the wall, he just knew it! Flug would be attempting to unravel the meaning behind them, wondering if Black Hat was bringing another villain, if he had been busy with crime and murder and Flug had pulled him away in the middle of some dastardly misdeed.

Or Flug would think he’d been on a date, once Black Hat actually showed up. Oh, to see the look on his face!

Black Hat sped up. Screw the traffic laws, he needed to get to Flug NOW!

“So, I guess I’m along for the ride?” His new “friend” said from beside him.

“Yeah, it’ll only be a slight detour. Flug doesn’t live too far from campus.”

“Hey, it’s cool. Makes my dad’s upcoming lecture worth it.”

He’ll lecture her for staying out late, but won’t actually call and check up on her? Weird father. What if she had gotten into the car with some strange man?

Black Hat chuckled darkly to himself. Oh, the things he could do with a girl who’s father cared so little.
“What’s so funny?” She asked.

“Oh nothing.” He said.

Suddenly, he got an idea. If just acting disinterested got this much of a reaction from Flug, what would acting interested in something else do? Or rather, someone else?

What was this girl’s name again? Demeter? No no, it ended with an “a” sound. But he was sure it started with “Dem”. Dem-something. Dem...Dem...Oh screw it. Friends gave each other these “nicknames”, did they not? Dem would be fine until he remembered what the rest of her name was.

“Dem?”

“Yes?”

“Could you do something for me?”

“Like what?”

“When we get to the school, could you kind of...walk with me? Like, together?”

“You want to help you make him jealous?” She asked with that familiar devilish grin. It was a sight he was starting to like despite himself.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“Oh I am so in!” She said, jumping in her seat a bit. “Hey, this is a nice car you got here.”

“What, you barely noticed?”

“What’d you pay for this fancy ride?”

“Oh, I got it at a steal.” He said deviously.

“You’re kidding!” She said incredulously.

“Hey, you just gotta know how to handle salesmen. They all have a breaking point.” Black Hat resisted the urge to break out in full-blown evil laughter. But goddamn was it hard not to when he could still hear the bones snapping so clearly.

They pulled up into the school parking lot, only a few minutes away from the laboratory where Flug would be waiting. The both of them jumped out of the car at rapid speed (admittedly the girl was faster) and Black Hat had to fight off the woman trying to run for the lab immediately.
“What was that you said about looking uninterested?” He said, holding her by the hair to make sure she didn’t run off. “Running in looks pretty damn interested to me.”

“But but but! I’m just so excited!” She said in a voice that was much too happy and carefree for someone having their gigantic ponytail pulled on and yanked like some cheap leash.

“Dem-” Seriously, what was the rest of her name? Demona? No, no, that’s stupid. Who would name their child that?

“Dem!” He called. She halted her squirming and turned her head upside down to look at him. Rather impressive considering the angle at which he held her by the hair.

“Dem, we can’t just barge in.”

“Why not?”

“We’re being bored and together, aren’t we?”

“Are we? That doesn’t sound very fun.”

“Sure it does!” Black Hat said with false enthusiasm. “We’re playing a dirty trick on Flug. What could be more fun than seeing the look on his face when he sees me with you?”

She finally calmed down enough for Black Hat to feel comfortable with releasing her hair.

“Now Dem,” Black Hat said. “We need to really sell this. I need your best face forward!”

“I don’t think that’s how the saying goes, but I got it!” She said with a salute.

Black Hat offered her his arm, much like he had done earlier this night.

“My lady.” He said with a devilish grin of his own. Far more threatening with his multitude of sharp teeth and serpentine tongue. Far more regal in his suit and top hat. The look of a true gentleman from hell.

“M’lord.” She said with as much class as could be mustered when one is wearing a sleeveless vest and lizard hood. Her two-tone hair was a distraction from her one sided arm and leg garments, and a bit of a welcome one. Her sharp teeth were a nice sight, although they didn’t compare to his own.

He liked being called “Lord”, though.
She took his arm, eagerly as before, and the two of them strolled leisurely towards the familiar laboratory of the Universidad. Well, Black Hat was familiar with it. He’d been to it once before with Flug and had been several times on his own to...case the joint, so to speak.

Never when Flug had been there, of course. Which made going in tricky as it seemed like he was ALWAYS there! Get a life, man! He practically forced Black Hat to sneak in after hours, meaning he had to stay far later than he would’ve liked. It was an annoyance, but well worth it in the end.

As they reached the stately (and bullet proof!) glass doors, Black Hat made it a point to hold Dem a bit closer. He hoped that Flug would see. Would be...jealous, like she suggested.

As they walked in, they heard people talking.

“Going where?” someone asked. “Since when do you go out?”

“I’m, uh...um,” Oh, that was Flug’s voice! Were they talking about their weekend plans? Damn, maybe he should’ve given Flug more of a clue as to what the weekend entailed. Or just made something up.

“I’m-”

“We’re going out drinking.” Black Hat interrupted.

As they strutted in, the way everyone’s face fell! It had been perfect timing! It couldn’t have gone better if he’d planned it!

Well, one thing could be better. This annoying woman could stop moving so damn much! She was constantly shifting and angling her body to gawk at all the machinery on display and it was very hard for Black Hat to keep his composure.

Honestly, could she control herself for more than a few seconds at a time? He wasn’t her damn babysitter. He didn’t sign up for that.

Flug was talking to...some guy. He seemed familiar, perhaps Black Hat had seen him once or twice before, he didn’t much care. He just wanted to get Flug and get out.

“So, are you ready to go?” He asked, as nonchalantly as possible.

“Y-yeah, I’m ready.” Flug stuttered. Seriously Flug, what is it that makes you so nervous at such a constant rate? That must be exhausting. Do you just panic yourself to sleep at night?

Well...Black Hat already knew the answer to that...
Flug gathered his things and oddly fiddled with his glasses as he addressed the rest of the group. The very nosy group of people who were just silently staring at them all. Like fucking weirdos.

“I-I, um, I was feeling t-t-tired so I called a ride to take me home.” Flug explained. Why he felt the need to explain himself to these people Black Hat couldn’t say. But he addressed the guy he’d been talking to before.

“And, Aurelio, th-th-th-thanks. I think a weekend out is j-j-just what I need.” Black Hat supposed he was decent looking. Nothing exceptional except his normalcy. Conventional beauty was a trivial thing, one Black Hat had no interest in. He looked fine, and that was boring. Whoever he was, he was of no importance to Black Hat.

Then he laid a hand on Flug.

Flug was just calmly walking towards Black Hat and his female companion of the night, ready to leave and get on with life, when that guy put a hand on his shoulder and stopped him in his tracks.

Which Black Hat...didn’t like.

Black Hat had no reason for this to bother him in particular, as Flug had not officially signed himself over. And even if he had why should Black Hat care who he talks to or who touches him? There was no real sense in him feeling possessive or protective. Or just plain troubled by it at all.

But, as is often the case with possessive men (and women for that matter), they consider the things they want to be things they don’t have just yet. Yet . Meaning that they will be things they have in the future.

In Black Hat’s case, he was hoping to convince Flug by Saturday night. He was also acutely aware of what it takes to make men waver in their quote unquote “loyalties”.

Black Hat knew for a fact that Flug was lonely . Lonely in the worst sort of way. He had no one to be close to, emotionally or physically, and that tended to take a heavy toll on a human. He also knew that it was mainly due to Flug’s own choices. Flug had a tendency to isolate himself from others, most assuredly as a kind of defense mechanism against rejection and possibly humiliation. The downside of this is that it eliminated not only the threat of rejection, but the possibility of acceptance. So, Black Hat reasoned that a surefire way to get Flug closer was to do just that; get closer. Not allow Flug to put distance between them like he did everyone else. Then, and only then, would Flug open himself up, and Black Hat could accept him. And Flug would find himself unable to ever leave. Not strictly because he was unable to, although he wouldn’t, but because he didn’t want to. He would want to belong to Black Hat. For this to work at it’s best, it would be desirable for Black Hat to be the only one getting close enough to Flug to take him. Not in that way necessarily, but if he was open to it why not? So long as they both took it for what it was and nothing more there shouldn’t be any issues. Black Hat could do that and Flug could be persuaded he was sure.
So having another man touch Flug so casually when the deal wasn’t quite sealed was perhaps a troubling thing indeed.

“I didn’t mean to put you on the spot Rocinante. We’ll get together another time.” He said.

_Fuck he can actually say his name._ Black Hat thought. _I’m losing ground. Shit shit shit shit shit. Can we go now?

No matter, Flug had agreed to Black Hat’s little weekend trip and everything from there was up to no one but Flug himself. Black Hat told himself this in order to remain calm. Outwardly, he didn’t let on much. He was a master at hiding his deepest emotions and intentions. A lifetime of hiding will do that to a man.

Even when that same man has so confidently waltzed up to him and Dem-whatever-a.

“I don’t believe we’ve been properly introduced. Aurelio Cruz.” His hand was already extended. Well shit, Black Hat couldn’t be rude now could he?

Black Hat calmly and cordially introduced himself and shook his hand. He was thankful for his gloves, as they meant he didn’t have to actually touch the other man. Aurelio, he tried to remember. The name rang a bell but he couldn’t quite place it. It was going to bug him all night, he knew. His “lady friend” introduced herself as well, keeping with the quasi-sophisticated air they meant to put on.

“Demetra Yashchirkaova. Charmed, I’m sure.”

Great, they met. Could they get their scientist and go now?

Black Hat was glad to leave. He was glad to have Flug with him en route nowhere else but his own home, where he would be alone until Black Hat picked him up tomorrow morning. Dem, whatever her full name was, was making a ruckus again. Going on about how “hot” that other guy had been.

“Oh HOT DAMN Flugster who was that tall order of man meat?” She asked. “If I’d have known college men were so hot I would’ve graduated high school!” She gave Black Hat a lustful look, which he was in no mood for.
“T-that’s Aurelio C-Cruz.” Flug said meekly.

“So I heard,” Black Hat said.

What Black Hat wanted to say was **Who is that man to you? Why did your face get so flushed when he touched you? Why was he touching you, anyway? What’s his deal?**

Instead of saying any of that, he settled for asking, “Truly thinks a lot of himself, doesn’t he?”

“Y-yeah.” Flug replied. “He can be k-kind of f-full of himself.”

Black Hat huffed in annoyance. Just what he needed, a normal person to take interest in his prey. “You know him well?”

“Huh?! Oh, n-n-no! Well, n-n-n-not per-personally no! I’ve j-ju-just known OF him for a-awhile. We didn’t r-r-really meet until this past ye-year.”

**You’re really getting tongue tied over this guy?** Black hat thought. **Maybe I WAS putting in too much effort.**

“Flug-Bug,” The woman said teasingly. “It’s okay to be flustered. That guy was seriously ripped. Not nearly as hot as you though!” She poked Black Hat lightly in the chest.

It seemed she was finally grating on his last nerve. Black Hat slapped her hand away, muttering curses in his native tongue. Curses directed towards his apparent competition. The man who was making what would soon be his **squirm**.

Unacceptable. Black Hat would be the only thing to make Flug’s body rack out of his own control. He also wanted to be the only thing to make him twist and bend until he broke, but that was another matter. One that could be explored at a later time.

The trio finally reached the car, the bother of the evening claiming the front passenger seat, and they drove off in relative ease.

Flug was dropped off safely at his apartment complex, given instructions to expect Black Hat at 10:00 am sharp the next morning, and Black Hat could finally just drop off this annoying woman and have some peace to himself. Once he cleared up a loose thread or two.
“So, what was it you were going to tell me?” He asked when they finally got going towards wherever it was she lived. She was right, it was pretty out of the way.

“What?”

“We were talking, you pulled out your phone, you noticed how late it was, and we left to get Flug. But before that, you were going to tell me something. What was it?”

“Mmmmm, I forgot!” She proclaimed. “Maybe next time!”

**So, the mood is gone, is it?** Black Hat thought. **I guess even you won’t make things easy for me.**

It was a clear lie. For whatever reason, mood change or passage of time, she was no longer as open as she had been. Now, he’d have to work for what he wanted from her. Not that Black Hat overly minded, he rather liked the chase. If he got everything he wanted without even trying, there’d be no funny in being a villain. Well not exactly publicly just yet but he knew himself and that was enough for him.

He only hoped her secrets were worth his effort. Flug, he knew would be worth his time. Black Hat was a man who knew what he wanted when he saw it, and from the first time he’d seen that scrawny face and it’s scars, ashamed of it’s own resilience, he’d known he needed to find out more. The more he’d learned, the more he wanted the man. So far, he had no doubts. He still wanted his allegiance as strongly as ever, and was hopeful that he’d get it by this time tomorrow.

If this manic girl could provide so much as half as what he would be getting from Flug, perhaps it would be worth it. Unlike with Flug, Black Hat was going in blind. He had nothing to go on except what he could glean from her herself, and she was a challenge to listen to. Something he would have to learn to handle as he went, rather than strategize ahead of time.

Still, this meant that there might, in fact, be a next time.

Black Hat might be able to do that, if the rewards we as intriguing as her hair. Which was definitely moving of its own accord. Bristling and jostling even though all the windows were rolled up and the A/C was turned off. He had an urge to feel it, with his bare hands. To see if it felt the same as his own, which was kept neatly under his hat at all times. He was reluctant to remove his gloves, so he buried that urge down below to come up at a more convenient time for him. Preferably one where she was unconscious.

A curious girl with secrets abound to unravel. And he, a man with far too much time and only a handful of things occupy it with. Why not add her to the list? A sort of side project, to occupy Black Hat’s time and leave Flug wanting more of him.

Perhaps he could find a use for her after all.
Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Dios mio = My God
Loco = Crazy
Ojos = Eyes
Fantástico = Fantastic
Señor = Mister
acosar = harass
wey = slang term meaning "dude" or "guy"
Flug presents his two newest inventions. He makes quite an impression on a few people, much to his dismay.

“What, you don’t mind, do you?” Black Hat asked with that familiar grin that promised bad intentions. It was a wonder no one else seemed to see it.

“N-no, no I don’t mind.”

“Really? You seem nervoso .”

“Don’t I always?”

The dark-skinned man chuckled lightly in agreement. It was surprising how someone with such a raspy voice could sound so at ease.

“It’s just,” Flug said, trying to prolong their walk to the auditorium where his club’s presentations would be taking place. It seemed like it was much shorter than it should’ve been. Were his steps larger? Was one of them speed-walking? “It’s j-j-ju-just that I want this to g-g-go w-well.”

“I for one have the...damn, what’s the word in Spanish? Whatever, I have the utmost confidence in your work, Flug.”

“Ha, th-thanks.”

“Well of course! I wouldn’t have anyone but the most capable scientist I could find working under me.” He said with a rather rough pat on Flug’s shoulder.

As oddly reassuring as Black Hat was trying to be, while greatly appreciated, it wasn’t all that helpful. It wasn’t that he had a problem with Black Hat coming and watching, it was just that it was one more set of eyes on him. Well, one more eye at least. Flug still couldn’t tell if Black Hat wore that monocle as a fashion statement or because he was actually missing an eye or something. If anything, his presence just put more pressure on Flug. He knew the ElecTrap worked, he could attest
to it personally, intellectually he knew the same was true for the Stun Gun (It was a unoriginal name but it was the best he could come up with at the last minute), probably. He still wished he could’ve tested it out on a real living person.

But he wouldn’t be using himself again. Not alone at least.

Flug did not like being built up. It just made his potential failure all the more disappointing and nerve-wracking. Like he was letting down the people he cared about. The people who put so much faith in him, who believed in him, who would fund his insane experiments in the interest of bringing about world conquest.

Or, you know, literally anyone else.

Like his fellow club members. He didn’t want to look bad in front of them. Or make them look bad because of how bad he screwed up. Or make the Universidad look bad because he was horribly incompetent. Or-

“Well, here we are.” Black Hat said, jolting Flug out of his thoughts. He hoped Black Hat hadn’t been talking that entire time. He hadn’t caught a word of it. For a moment the two men stopped there in front of the large reinforced steel doors.

“Mmmmmhmmmm.” Flug mumbled. Oh God he felt sick. Like his stomach was doing somersaults inside a gyroscope. He wondered if he could just leave now. Said he caught the stomach flu or something.

Black Hat slung an arm around him, bringing himself close to Flug’s face. Not so close that it couldn’t be passed of as a casual friendly gesture, but Flug questioned whether that was all it was. Black Hat had a tendency to be oddly... touchy with him on occasion.

Black Hat was far too close for comfort. His mouth was also FAR TOO CLOSE to the scabs on Flug’s collar. To the bite marks that Black Hat himself had left. The thought of it made Flug shiver, like fiery needles going down his spine. Black Hat’s breath ghosted along the scabs like he wanted to open them up again.

Ok seriously, they could not do this out in the open like this!

“Flug?”

“Mmm?” Flug squeaked between lips frozen shut.

“Go in there and show me what that soul of yours is worth.”
Now that, that managed to calm Flug down a little. Instead of the trite and overused cliches of “Do your best! I believe in you! You can do this!” Black Hat, in his typical straight-forward manner, said simply “Go do it.” It made Flug have to focus more on himself than on everyone else around him.

Well, he couldn’t very well disobey his “lord and master” now could he?

As Black Hat removed his arm, Flug nodded briskly, opened the double doors, and stepped inside. His boss shadowing him closely.

It seemed like someone else was just finishing up their own demonstration. That was fine, it gave Flug the opportunity to mentally prepare himself for what was to come. It also meant that no one was paying him or Black Hat any attention and they were able to get his inventions from his locker and spectate from the back rows unseen. Flug liked the lack of notice, it gave him much more freedom he felt. He hated having everyone’s eyes on him. He hated that feeling of judgement that came from being so noticed. This was going to be horrible.

Luis was just getting the last of his volunteers. His invention was a set of cloaked booby traps. From what Flug could remember, they seamlessly embedded themselves into whatever surface they were placed on, distorted the light so as to appear invisible, and then captured anything that got within a certain proximity to them with the use of their mechanical bindings.

Flug couldn’t remember how many Luis had been able to make over the past couple of weeks, but there were three Gifted students currently captured. Two on the floor, and one guy on the adjacent wall. Flug couldn’t remember his name but he had some weird sticky-sweat ability. It struck Flug as a bit disgusting but hey, he couldn’t say it didn’t have his uses.

He had probably tried to climb the walls using his Gift to evade Luis’s contraptions. Luis had apparently planned for it. Flug had to wonder though how well he had to know the other guy in order to predict where exactly on the wall he would go. And how far ahead of time had he planted his little mines. He couldn’t have done it at any time his subject could’ve witnessed it, unless they could change position while cloaked.

Flug made a mental note to design something similar, but with barbed wire tendrils instead. Or maybe something similar to piano wire. Something tight and piercing, but not lethal if used correctly. Actually, he might’ve been muttering to himself a bit, since Black Hat seemed to turn his gaze to Flug instead of the live demo going on in front of them.

Patricia, the cheetah hybrid, was one of Luis’s volunteers. She used her impressive speed and reflexes to avoid his capture. She had a few close calls, but ultimately she managed to tag him, signalling that she was home free.

Along with her was a rabbit hybrid which Flug didn’t know very well, Tomas the telekinetic, Stephanie; a girl who’s Gift just so happened to be light manipulation, perhaps she could see his traps, Byron; who much like Tomas would just destroy the machine before it could fully entrap him, and few other people who Flug didn’t get to see as they’d passed Luis before Flug and Black Hat had arrived. Natalia wasn’t among them.
Said speedster was off to the side with the rest of the volunteers; Monica, Eric, Jason, Catarina, Ruby, Rodrigo, and Bianca. It seemed like someone was missing but Flug couldn’t really remember who else there was. He was too focused on how it would soon be his turn to present. How was he going to do this? How did he want this structured?

Who was that guy standing with the other professors?

Flug recognized Sr. Arellano, Sr. Guzman, Sra. Calderon, Sr. Trujillo, and Sr. Rios. Who was that other guy? Was he that American professor Flug had heard about?

He had dark hair, so dark it was nearly purple, and the absolute palest skin Flug had ever seen. It was like he was a vampire! Hey, he supposedly had a Gift, maybe his Gift was vampirism. It was far from the most outlandish thing Flug could think of. Although that would raise the question of how he was getting around during the daytime like this. Would he have to carry around an umbrella to protect himself from the sun? Did he need to have a cloak with him at all times? Would a standard hooded sweatshirt work fine?

The man himself was dressed semi-formally, in black slacks and a white button-down shirt that was only just a shade or two darker than his own skin with no tie. He also seemed pretty young. Like, maybe only into his late twenties or early thirties young.

Oh God he caught him staring. He was looking right at him. And giving him a pretty weird look. Was it the scars? Could he even see them from this distance? Just act natural. Natural damn it! What was natural for Flug to do!?

Flug panicked (pretty natural) and averted his gaze, looking back to Luis who was complaining about how Tomas and Byron had destroyed 4 of his mines between them. It did seem kind of like cheating, but then again if the subjects just allowed themselves to be captured there’d be no challenge in it now would there? Victory wasn’t as sweet if your opponent held back on you.

He still felt eyes on him however, and flitted his gaze back to the strange pale man to see that he was still looking at him. And giving him a very confused squinty-eyed look.

Oh God what was he looking at?

“Hey,” he heard Black Hat say from his right. Black Hat was giving him odd looks too. Oh Jesus what was up today he was on edge enough as it was! “What is it? You had calmed down before.”

“Oh, n-n-nothing.” Flug said. “I just thought that guy was staring at me.” He pointed towards the pale man.

Black Hat tilted his head a bit, kind of like a confused dog would. “Wow he is pale. He looks almost sick.”
Flug said with a shaky chuckle. “Is he still looking over here?” He didn’t dare to turn back and see for himself.

“He is.”

“Is he actually looking at me? Or did I imagine it?”

Hey, maybe he was just jittery and just imagined that he was looking at him. Maybe he was looking at someone else who just happened to be in this area. Yeah, why would he be looking at him? Had he never seen a guy with scars before?

Flug was used to getting the odd stare from strangers but this just felt so much more intense. Maybe it was just in his head.

“No, he’s definitely looking right here at us.” Flug noticed that Black Hat wasn’t looking at him while he spoke. He had locked eyes with that mysterious pale weirdo. And he wasn’t giving him any friendly looks. “Who is he?” Black Hat asked, with more contempt in his voice than Flug had been expecting. It threw him off, like Black Hat meant to say *How dare someone look at you*.

“I don’t k-k-n-know. I heard that we were gonna have a visitor from an American University, m-m-m-maybe that’s h-him? I don’t know his n-a-a-ame.”

“Hmmph,” Black Hat frowned deeper.

The doors swung open, and Flug was at the perfect angle to see the person he’d forgotten about strolling in. As usually, he came in like he was strutting down a runway in the most casual way possible.

*Aurelio Cruz.*

How had he forgotten that he would be here? He’d been the bane of his self-control for days!

Oh, and some other guy who was also volunteering as well walked in with him. But who cared because Aurelio walked in and that meant that Flug’s anxiety on a scale of 1-10 was cranked up to a 28 and yeah he should just go. He was feeling sick and should go home and rest, they could just go on without him.


Crap, he missed his window of opportunity. No turning back now. Well technically he could bu-
“Break a leg,” Black Hat said as Flug numbly crossed over him to get to the front. In front of all these... people. All watching him. Judging him.

You know, maybe it wasn’t too late to just collapse on the floor and pretend to pass out. Or fake a seizure. He could probably pull that off.

“Ok, who’s going to volunteer for Rocinante’s demonstration?” Sr. Trujillo asked.

Natalia and Patricia raised their hands. Flug had asked them in advance if they’d participate for his turn and they’d agreed. Byron, Monica, and Eric also raised their hands, cool. That was fine. Explosions, anti-gravity, and acid spit. If he was fast he could maybe catch one or two of them off guard.

And then...Aurelio raised his hand. With that award-winning smile that could be in a toothpaste commercial. What toothpaste did he use, were those even real teeth?! Why? Just why? Why could he not relax today?

That rabbit hybrid girl raised her hand as well. Apparently her name was Perla. So, 7 people. That was good enough.

Sra. Calderon gave the go ahead for Flug to start, so, taking a deep breathe and ignoring the piercing gaze of the pale man on the sidelines, Flug started explaining his inventions. The Stun Gun was in his right hand while the ElecTrap was clutched in his left along with it’s remote. The ElecTrap wasn’t primed yet and the Stun Gun was ready to go, so he started with that first

“T-This my my Stun Gun,” he said weakly, mumbling “I know it’s a d-dumb name but I couldn’t think of anything else...um, It fi-fires specialized electrical pu-pulses to p-p-p-paralyze it’s target b-b-bly.”

He heard someone laugh. He swore he heard someone laugh. Oh no oh God keep it together it’s ok it’s fine. It doesn’t matter they don’t matter don’t even give it any attention. It’s not like back in highschool, he was an adult now and he did not care if someone laughed at him or anything. He wasn’t going to let himself be silenced now like he had then.

You can do this just get on with it.

Flug didn’t dare look out into the crowd to see who it was, but out of his peripheral vision he could’ve sworn he saw a few people shooting dirty looks into the stands. Aurelio being one of them. Maybe. He could’ve just been imagining it. Yeah that was probably it.
“W-whatever, just...just come at me, you’ll see w-wha-what it does.” Flug said, wanting to get this over with as quickly as possible. He cocked the Stun Gun and mentally prepared himself for what he was about to do.

The professors shrugged and gave the all clear, no one not participating was in the line of fire. On the count of *tres* the seven of his subjects would book it towards him and he had a gun and a less lethal mine to stop himself from being tagged. Like a game of red light-green light with more of his self-esteem on the line than usual.

He had to be quick about this. If he could time it just right then he could get most if not everyone in just a few seconds. If not, then he’d still get a few of his subjects and he supposed he could live with that. It wouldn’t be all he was capable of, because he blew his chance like the failure he was, but it would be something.

*Uno*...

Flug took a deep breath and planted his feet squarely on the ground. Ok, ok, he could do this. Nothing to it. He *could* do this. What was that thing that guy in that one anime said?

Don’t believe in yourself, believe in the me that believes in you! Or something along those lines.

It was cheesy but damn it was reassuring when it came out of an animated persons mouth. It might’ve helped that the man spent most of his (admittedly short) screentime shirtless and fought off alien robots with a katana but that was beside the point.

*Dos*...

Ok ok ok ok ok, right when Sra. Calderon gets to *tres* he was going for it. If it worked, it worked. If not then fuck it he was just going to get on with it like nothing happened. Maybe he’d get lucky and someone else would trigger the ElecTrap.

But by God he needed to be fast if he wanted this to work. The whole thing would be over in a matter of seconds and he needed to be really freaking precise to get it right because he would not get a second chance to pull it off.

Flug readied his left arm and his got ready to push the button. One shot, a matter of milliseconds, he was as ready as he would ever be, just get on with it.

*Tres!*
As expected, Natalia immediately gunned down in a straight line towards him. She probably figured that she was so fast she'd just be a blur of motion and that he wouldn't be able to aim his Stun Gun and get a shot at her in time.

Which was true, neither his mind nor body moved fast enough to get a lock on her in such a short amount of time and shoot her before she could dodge. He knew this. Which was why he didn’t even bother aiming at her. As soon as the first syllable had been spoken Flug had tossed the ElecTrap in front of him and pushed the button to activate it. Hopefully right into her path, and hopefully she wouldn’t really notice what it was or think about what it did.

As luck would have it, one of those things ended up coming true. Natalia did end up running straight into it. Flug was right in predicting that she would go straight for him without even bothering to pretend to dodge his long-ranged attack. But she did notice that he’d placed something there. And guessed that it was mostly likely something to trap her.

Which was fortunate, for Flug at least, because he knew her pattern. She ran headfirst into every situation, not liking to go around obstacles whether they were physical or intangible. For someone whose mind was as fast as her feet, it had to be in order to keep up with her physical self, she didn’t really think things through.

So when she noticed something new in her path, rather than adjust her course or step over it, she opted to slow down and see what it was.

Which is hard to do when going at superspeed in sneakers on a polished wood floor.

She simply could not lose enough momentum to avoid the object in front of her. Instead she landed right into it. Her lowered speed also allowed Flug to gauge her path more accurately and just narrowly step out of her way.

Natalia found the strange disk wrapping itself around her with ease and once it began its shocks she immediately fell backwards and skidded right past Flug. The professors and subjects and spectators looked on with surprise. Even Patricia and Perla had frozen mid-step in their tracks.

“That was m-my ElecTrap.” Flug said, it a louder and slightly more confident voice than before. “It works exactly like the Stun Gun, but is a little more, um, personal, I guess. Sorry Natalia.”

Before anyone could get their bearings back, Flug had already begun shooting off at Byron and Eric respectively. He came to the conclusion that someone who could destroy his ammo was a higher priority target than someone who could dodge it. Eric was caught off guard, he was hit and down for the count before he could even think to unleash his acidic saliva at the compacted bonds coming towards him.

Byron however was a bit quicker, and the second the quote unquote “bullet” made contact with him he quickly blasted it before he was fully immobilized. The resulting debris left quite the smoke cloud, as is usual for explosions, making the other four subjects all the more caught off guard and vulnerable.
Except Patricia and Perla, the hybrids who had the sense to get out of the way when Flug started his onslaught. They escaped the blast radius and avoided the following smoke and debris with their superior speed and agility. Leaving Monica and Aurelio to wade their way out of the dust cloud and fend for themselves.

Monica was an easy target, she was closest to Byron and got caught in the brunt of his explosion. The second Flug saw that coughing face and racking body make its way out into the open he hit her dead on in the chest and she was on the ground still as a statue.

But Flug couldn’t focus on Aurelio just yet. As far as Gifts go, so long as Aurelio wasn’t within arms reach he wasn’t Flug’s top priority. There were still Patricia and Perla to deal with, who nimbly avoided his barrage of electronically charged contraptions and were making their way closer and closer darting across the room nimbly with their naturally heightened agility and reflexes.

He realized his problem; he was shooting at where they were, not where they were going to be. And his aim kept dipping to their feet, so as to trip them, even though that little added bonus of entertainment wasn’t particularly necessary for their capture. He needed to restructure his attack pattern.

He should’ve been aiming at their torsos. He knew that. Whenever you shoot at someone, you aim at the torso. It was the largest area on the body, the biggest target which held all vital organs and was not easy to protect without some kind of armor. Armor their feline and rodent halves did not grant them. Tracking them with a precision he’d thought he’d lost along with majority of his sight, he adjusted his aim and fired three rapid shots in succession. First getting Perla, then Patricia as she passed by.

He smiled, it had been a long time since he’d shot anything. Even longer since he’d actually hit his target. Flug was filled with an almost forgotten sense of satisfaction, one that these days he associated more with a completed contraption. But it was so much more than that. It wasn’t just merely finishing his vision and bringing it into the world, it was actually holding it in his hands and putting it into practice. Truly accomplishing what he set out to do when he made the thing. It wasn’t the same without his own two hands behind the wheel---

---The wheel of the plane the steering wheel of the plane where was it he couldn’t feel it anymore it had been right there in his hands he’d only taken his eyes off for a second to look at Julio and when he looked back---

---Flug stumbled a bit, oh wow that was intense. He shook his head to try and re-focus himself. He ran his free hand through his hair, pushing it back from his forehead. He felt a few beads of sweat and wondered where that came from. That had felt so real. Like he had really gone back there for a second.
With five down and two to do, Flug forced himself out of whatever that was and back to the present. He could see Byron and-

And Byron was charging at him. Oh jeez that caught Flug off guard! Byron was a big guy, for a second Flug though he might be back in high school and the linebacker was gunning for him again. So he did what he couldn’t do then and shot him.

He hit his target right in the pecs!

But he still kept coming.

Wait, what? He hit him, he could clearly see that he hit him. And it didn’t explode, so it wasn’t like a repeat of when he got him the first time. Bryon’s face contorted a bit so it couldn’t have been a dud. He was still feeling it and seemed to be in a bit of pain.

Flug fired again.

And again.

Ok any more and Byron’s life might be in danger and that wouldn’t look good for Flug so he was kind of at a loss here. It wasn’t working. Why was it not working? Why had he not collapsed like everyone else? Why was he still moving and coming straight towards him? What could Flug do to rectify this?

He was honestly afraid of firing the Stun Gun at Byron again. Hell, one shot was enough electricity jolting through a persons synapses as it was! Flug didn’t want to risk potentially stopping his heart or something just for this. Save that for later. Wait what was he thinking this was no time for such thoughts!

Byron was closing in however and Flug doubted he’d be able to sidestep him like he had Natalia. He resolved that he would shoot him one last time, risks be damned because he had to try something, but as soon as he had steadied his hand and aimed, Byron fell to the floor and began twitching slightly. Not a particularly good sign, hopefully Flug could wrap this up and deactivate his machine before any lasting damage could be traced back to him.

Flug was so focused on Byron however that he failed to notice the man behind him. The man who maneuvered around Byron’s fallen form with the agility of a cat and laid a large well-defined hand on Flug’s bare arm before he could even process his presence.

Flug looked up into his green eyes with those little specks of blue he’d seen up close and personal only once or twice before with silent surprise. His mouth may have been agape, but words were slightly out of reach for the moment.

Six out of seven down, not bad. But why did he have to be the one who actually made it through?
Aurelio and Rocinante locked eyes for a moment, one grinning proudly and the other still frozen as if he’d accidentally shot himself with his own weapon, until Sra. Calderon blew the whistle signalling that the demonstration was finished. That seemed to snap Flug out of his trance and turn his head to the professors lined up on the sidelines.

Oh yeah, he should really deactivate the Stun Gun and ElecTrap now. Especially for poor Byron. Poor guy didn’t even have a choice but to keep moving despite the immobilizing shocks. Flug quickly pushed the ElecTraps button and switched off the Stun Gun, freeing everyone from the two machines effects.

“Whoa dude!” Natalia said as she appeared next to him in a split second, handing him his machine back. “That was insane!”

“Um, th-thanks?”

“You didn’t have to shoot me three times though,” Byron chimed in, picking himself off the ground carefully.

“Oh, uh, sorry.” Flug said awkwardly. “Sorry about that.”

“Oh it’s fine _hermano_.” Aurelio said, removing his hand finally. “Byron can take it, can’t you Byron?”

He faced Byron with a very underlyingly threatening tone clear in his voice. Byron made sure to back away, which no one could blame him for.

“Yeah, sure. It’s cool man. Don’t worry about it.”

With that settled and everyone picking themselves up and dusting themselves off, Flug broke away from the group and went over to the professors to hear their evaluations.

“Good job, Rocinante.” Sr. Trujillo said. “You did well.”

“In the future remember to always keep an eye on your subjects.” Sr. Rios said. “If you had done that, you’d have done perfectly.”

Flug nodded his head, slightly embarrassed. He should’ve kept an eye on Aurelio. He knew he was here, he knew what he could do. It was a strategy Flug himself was very familiar with, and he knew Aurelio to be fully capable of having human shields/decoys and having done it in the past. How could he have let his guard down around him?
“You seemed a bit distracted, right before Aurelio used Byron as cover.” Sra. Calderon said. “What happened?”

“I, uh, I’m not r-really sure myself. I just felt really dizzy all of a su-sudden.”

Sr. Arellano chimed in. “You seemed very nervous as well, did you get enough sleep last night Rocinante?”

“Y-yeah,” he lied. “I slept pretty well. I guess I w-was just nervous about p-p-p-presen-presenting.”

“You did seem to calm down once you got into it.” Sr. Guzman said.

“I d-don’t know what changed.” He said. “It was go-going fine and then I guess I just lost it for a second.”

“That’s okay.” Said a the pale man, with a clear American accent in his spanish. It sounded a bit funny. “You did good, maybe just try and have a little more confidence in yourself.”

The other professors nodded. As if his problems all came down to low self-esteem. Flug knew they meant well, and were only trying to help, but it was just a phrase that he’d heard time and time again and the words were basically meaningless to him now. He nodded his head again and acted like he appreciated the kind words.

“Thank you sir.” He said politely.

“Oh, Rocinante, this is David Evermore.” Sr. Arellano said gesturing to the stranger. “He’s visiting from California.”

Ah, so he was the American professor he’d heard about. He seemed nice enough. His spanish was fine. Flug shook his hand, he didn’t feel cold like you would expect a vampire’s to.

And he was giving him a strange look still.

Flug turned away so his right cheek was hidden. It was something he did a lot back when he was still adjusting to life with his new scarred up face. Hiding that part of him like it would just disappear from people’s memories. As if “out of sight out of mind” would allow people to look him in the eyes again.

David Evermore looked slightly embarrassed, like he hadn’t even realized he was being so obvious. “I’m sorry, it’s just-”

“It’s ok sir,” Flug said, looking at him sideways. “After all these years I’m kind of used to it.” He chuckled, trying to defuse the tension, but he still sounded dejected to himself. No one else seemed to be fooled either. Better just go away.
“Thank you all, I’ll be sure to keep improving.” Flug said as he turned and left. Whatever that guy’s issue was, Flug really just wanted to forget him and go on with his day.

Flug looked into the crowd but didn’t see Black Hat. You’d think a guy with the complexion of soot and wearing a top hat would stick out more, but Flug couldn’t find him anywhere. He scanned the crowd awkwardly, wanting to just find his villainous associate and leave before someone else tried talking to him. Flug really just wanted to go home and relax-

“That was fun Rocinante.” Said a voice accompanying a firm grip on his shoulder from behind.

Flug turned and faced Aurelio. Maybe Flug was just so emotionally overloaded at this point that he physically couldn’t take anymore, but Aurelio’s presence wasn’t as intimidating as it usually was. That familiar thumping in his chest as his blood pressure increased didn’t feel as intense. That pit in his stomach that the butterflies flew around didn’t seem as heavy. There even felt to be less butterflies flying around, imagine that!

“Yeah, that was a great little stunt you pulled.” He said flawlessly.

“Who, me?” Aurelio said with mock-innocence. “I only did what anyone else with my Gift would do. You think anyone in the real world would do anything less?”

“Not at all. If you didn’t use everything available, it wouldn’t be nearly as fun now w-would it?”

Flug walked off to the sidelines. It was so weird just talking to AURELIO FREAKING CRUZ so casually and publicly. He felt like he was on display or something. He swore he was trembling, though his voice was calm. Aurelio followed right behind, seemingly caught off guard that Flug didn’t criticise or reprimand his methods.

“So...you don’t have a problem with me using Byron like I did?” He asked cautiously. Like he, God among men, cared about Rocinante Flugslys’s opinion of him.

“Not really.” Flug said with a shrug. “Like when Byron and Tomas used th-their Gifts to avoid getting caught by Luis, all they were doing was using what they had, same as you.” Flug leaned against the wall and looked directly at Aurelio.

“I think not using everything you have is the same as holding yourself back. And it’s no fun winning if someone’s holding back.”

Where on earth was this coming from? These were Flug’s real thoughts, but why was he telling them? Usually he was nowhere near this open. But he felt...at ease. Still on edge, because of who
this was he was speaking to, but he felt a bit more calm in the words he spoke. Internally he was surprised at himself, but his words weren’t forced. He didn’t feel supernaturally compelled to speak or like he was saying anything wrong.

This was...okay.

Aurelio seemed to think so too, if the half-relieved half-confident smirk on his face was anything to go by. Like he was glad that someone seemed to legitimately agree with him that he could never be in the wrong no matter what underhanded things he did.

Flug was most definitely not going that far, but he found no reason to say so.

“You know what we should do?” Aurelio asked. (We?) “We should celebrate.”

Calm was gone. “C-Celebrate?”

“Yes, celebrate! We should celebrate how well everyone has done! ¡Una fiesta! At my place!”

Party? At...at his place? Did Flug pass out and find himself in some crazy dream where he can talk to Aurelio Cruz like it’s no big deal and Aurelio invites him to a party at his house? He thought he’d lost the ability to dream, on account of losing the ability to sleep. Was he hallucinating?

Flug tried very nonchalantly to pinch himself. It didn’t even really hurt.

“A-are you inviting me to a p-p-party at your house?” Flug asked like what Aurelio just said could have been misinterpreted somehow.

“Of course Rocinante! You and everyone else in the club! Especially given how well you yourself have done today.”

Ah, well, that made sense. Of course being invited wasn’t something special or anything or Aurelio was thinking of him in particular or anything insane like that. Nope, just a totally normal party with a ton of other people. Yep.

“Unless, of course, you already have plans?” Aurelio motioned to Flug’s neck.

Flug felt his face turn red. Oh yeah, Black Hat’s little love marks.

WHICH WAS NOT WHAT THEY WERE! NOT AT ALL!
“Oh! Oh no no no I-I don’t! I swear! I’m n-not even s-s-seeing anyone!” Flug insisted. “I-I’ll be there! For sure!”

“Great!” Aurelio pulled out his cell phone. “Let’s trade numbers so I can send you my address.”

Flug shakily pulled his own phone out of his pocket, somehow managing to not drop either of the inventions he still held, and they traded phone numbers. This whole thing felt so unreal. Maybe Flug should pinch himself again.

“I’ll see you tonight then, Rocinante.” Aurelio said as he strutted away. Flug tried not to let his eyes linger too much on his form as he left him behind. He tried not to. He really tried. Really.

He didn’t succeed.

Well, he now had Aurelio Cruz’s phone number. And he had his. So if they wanted to, they could talk to each other. Pretty much whenever. They could talk. To each other. Whenever one of them wanted. To. Talk.

Was Flug sure he wasn’t in some bizarre waking dream?

Well, he’d better go put his inventions back into their lockers. No sense just walking around with them.

In the locker room, Flug noticed a guy who looked like he just got the shit beaten out of him. Both his eyes were bruised and probably going to be swollen shut in a few hours, his lip was bloody and cut, and he was covered in bruises. As he locked eyes with Flug, the guy rushed over. Or as much as he could, he had a mean limp. It didn’t look like anything was broken, besides maybe his nose. That still didn’t stop Flug from trying to back away. He’d gotten beat up plenty of times by guys who needed to take out their anger on someone weaker than them.

“W-wait,” the guy coughed up some blood. “I want, I want to a-apologize.”

Huh?

“I’m, I’m s-sorry I laughed at you. At your stutter.” The guy said. “I-I’m sorry, ok?”

“Uh, ok? Thank you?” What on earth was going on today?
“So, y-you forgive me, right? Right?” The guy asked desperately. “Right?!”

“Um, sure? I forgive you?”

The guy, apparently the one who’d laughed at him earlier, sighed. “Ok. Good.” Then he left, limping his way out of the locker room.

What the fuck?

---

David Joseph Evermore, D.J. to his friends and family, had always felt as if he had drawn the short stick in life.

He was the youngest of seven children; His oldest brother Jack, the triplets Violet, Europa, and Kathleen (who they all called “Kitten”), the twins Silena and Samuel, and finally he himself.

The Evermore family was not only bountiful, it was “blessed”. Gifts ran deep in their bloodline, and it was a rare thing indeed for a family member to not have some sort of ability. Both of D.J.’s parent’s were Gifted, all of his siblings were Gifted, and he of course was Gifted as well.

He did not, however, have a flashy power that he could turn into a superhero identity. Not like Jack, who was a very well established hero up in Washington state.

No, D.J.’s Gift was something he dubbed “Soul Sighting”.

For his entire life he had seen everyone, including himself, surrounded by a glowing aura. It had actually taken him a few years to understand that they weren’t visible to anyone else. It had taken a few years more to understand what the different colored auras meant.

White was what everyone seemed to start out with, as babies and young children were always enveloped in white up to a point, and as they grew up the color would develop as their character did. Your average adult had either a red, blue, or green aura about them. Fitting, as those were the primary colors.

Red meant that person was highly emotional, blue meant that person was more logical in their actions, and green meant they were relaxed and laid back. Naturally, there were many shades of the three, and plentiful dashes of oranges, yellows, violets, and all other colors. It was just that overall, people kept to the three primary colors and their variants. For those curious, his was cyan; a mix of blue and green.

The only people who didn’t have an aura at all were those without souls, the dead. He had seen them fade away as people died and that was quite the sight indeed.
So imagine D.J.’s surprise to see a person without an aura walking and talking and generally being a living human being.

He was greatly confused. Everyone had an aura. Everyone.

How did this young man not have one?

And who was that next to him with the black aura?

While auras were generally glowing vibrant colors, it wasn’t unthinkable for an aura to turn black. Instead of a bright and colorful reflection of the self, it was dark and showed little to no other pigment. Mere remnants of what the persons color might’ve been at one point. It reminded D.J. of a black hole, something that sucked up all the light rather than shine.

Which was appropriate when considering what it took to blacken ones aura.

As concerning as it was to have someone with such an aura here, D.J. was more concerned with the young man who didn’t have any sort of aura to him at all. He was bare, neither bright or dark. D.J. had never seen anyone like that and he was both intrigued and worried.

What could it mean?

Should he tell someone? He didn’t know what, if anything, they could actually do. Or what “should” be done. What would he tell his colleagues; Yes, Bruno, you see the problem is that the young man over there doesn’t seem to have a soul. I’m not sure what that means or what we can do about it but I’m very concerned.

D.J. didn’t want to make needless trouble for either the University staff or it’s students. The kid had seemed like he had some social anxiety issues, maybe even body image problems given his thin frame and those scars. D.J. didn’t want to add to the kids plate and make him feel like there was something actually wrong with him when there wasn’t. He didn’t seem dangerous, but D.J. didn’t want to risk exacerbating cracks he couldn’t see.

Perhaps he should stay in Mexico longer than he intended. And keep an eye on the guy with no color in his life.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

nervoso = nervous (Italian)

Well, that was fun, wasn’t it? Are you excited for the next chapter? Are you excited to see what wacky shenanigans everyone gets up to? It's a college house party, and if you
remember ch.9 I think you have a pretty good idea of what to expect.
Also D.J. Evermore is one character out of a whole bunch I made up back in like the 10th grade. I'm glad to give him and his siblings a bit part in something much grander.
Chapter Summary

What happens when a socially inept person goes to a party thrown by one of the most popular guys in college?

Probably not this. This is the stuff of fanfiction.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Flug had been invited to a party. He. Had actually been invited. To a. Party. By Aurelio Cruz. Flug had to keep saying it to himself or he felt he might start thinking that he imagined the whole thing. He’d been invited to a party by Aurelio Cruz. At his house.

He had a big house.

With a pool.

Not that Flug had ever been there.

He’d just seen pictures.

Yep. Mmm Hmm.

It still blew his mind that he was actually invited to Aurelio Cruz’s house. For a party. Hell, the fact that he got invited to a party at all was such a ludicrous happening that Flug considered buying a lottery ticket just to see what other insane things would happen. What was next, was he going to get a date?

Hey, he was already going. That in itself was so unexpected he wondered why on earth he agreed.

Oh wait, he knew why, because it was AURELIO FREAKING CRUZ. The man who made his knees weak and his heart pound and his dick hard and made him feel like a pathetic loser with no chance of ever going beyond jerking off to his Instagram selfies.

Yeah, that was why.

Ugh, he wanted more than anything to just relax. If only he could do something like sleep on it.

Well, he had found one small solace. The hypnosis videos seemed to work.
Flug still had a few hours to go before Black Hat came to pick him up. He was going, because Flug didn’t have his own car and Black Hat hadn’t had anything else to do tonight. They’d decided to leave around eleven, since apparently that was when things “got good” or something, according to Black Hat. Flug had the afternoon shift tomorrow so it would probably work out. Since he’d gotten home, Flug had occupied his time by making minute ramen (he really craved noodles lately for some reason) and put on hypnosis videos in an effort to relax.

While they too had a mildly annoying repetition of telling him to breathe, they also had a tendency to actually talk him through the process of hypnotizing him, which made following their tedious instructions a bit more bearable. The ones that got descriptive, speaking of his mind as a spiral staircase of consciousness that he himself was walking down, down into his subconscious where the voice needed him to be; or detailing his descent as slipping down into a suggestive state of mind like sinking into a warm bath, held his intrigue enough to keep him listening.

The spirals were eye catching. Especially when he intentionally unfocused his eyes and let it grow like it was going to spread past the confines of the laptop screen and encompass his entire field of view.

Hey, during those nearly hour long hypnosis sessions, it almost seemed it had done just that.

They seemed to have done the trick for him. The ones that were a bit more...suggestive...keeping him interested enough to follow along near-mindlessly, so much so that he had a bit of a hard time recalling the exact things said to him. What exact ideas had been placed in his deeper mind. He could remember basic things, like what the end goal of the hypnosis was meant to be. He was a bit hesitant to actually admit to himself what it was he had been listening to, though. He had found a few audio files that had gotten rather... objectifying. Things that spoke to him about how he was just a toy, just a doll. He was being made into the perfect little doll to be used and abused and he would love every minute of it. He was a slave for his master, he would be obedient and submissive. He was just a puppet being directed on how to act, how to move, what to think. He would think what he was told to think, when he was told to think it. Among other things that scared him a bit to imagine putting into practice, as well as aroused him greatly.

But yeah, he didn’t have the greatest memory of what he had put into his brain. Well, he could remember the word “deeper” being said a few times. The memory spurring something in him that made him feel...tingly.

Flug checked the time and saw that it was already past ten. Wow, time sure flies huh? He also found that he was sitting with his headphones on in utter silence. The audio had stopped playing. He wondered how long he’d been sitting there in the quiet, not a care in the world? It was only a 20 minute audio file, but Flug was pretty sure he’d put this on anywhere from between half an hour to an hour ago.

At least he had found something that gave his mind something to do without him having to actually focus on any thing or any thought. Something that allowed him to zone out and lose himself.
Flug stood up and stretched. He felt alright, he was calm and relaxed, and maybe now he could actually bring himself to go to the party.

Oh shit what was he going to wear? Should he try and dress up a bit? Was what he had on alright? Was there some kind of dress code for these types of things?

He currently had on some cheesy old T-Shirt. Pretty dorky, if he did say so himself. Maybe he should wear something a little more age appropriate? Maybe something with a high neck in case anyone else saw and questioned him about those little scabs on his neck from where Black Hat had bitten him?

Seriously, what exactly was he supposed to tell people? *Oh, we aren’t together or anything but we got drunk and made out once and it turns out he’s pretty intense ha ha ha, so anyway you probably figured this out but I’m gay.*

He slipped the old thing off his head and chose one of his nicer light blue shirts. Neat, but casual enough. No risk of being overdressed and no risk of looking like a total loser. Well, no more than he already did with his thick frames and general nerdiness.

His jeans were probably fine, although he still wanted to go out and get some tighter pairs this weekend. Maybe he should try skinny jeans. At least blue jeans never went out of style. Same with his chucks.

He also had on white and blue striped panties and matching kneesocks under his clothes, the combo giving him a confidence boost even though literally no one would see them. Hopefully. Oh God it would be so mortifying if someone pulled down his pants and saw what he had on under them! The socks at least would be easy enough to play off, they wouldn’t be all that odd on their own so long as no one looked above his calves.

Still, matching his socks and panties made him feel like he was that much more put together. A bonus bit of self-esteem that he was probably going to need tonight. He looked good, he felt good. If only marginally.

Flug thought about maybe making a sandwich or something real quick, to make sure that he had some food in him before he went out and presumably was going to drink a bit, but just wasn’t in the mood for one. Black Hat’s strange foreign food sandwiches had probably turned him off on them for good. A shame, he rather liked a good *torta*.

He was NOT going to get drunk and make a fool of himself in front of so many people. In front of Aurelio. Black Hat had already seen him be a drunk idiot so he wasn’t all that worried about him.

But seriously, what the hell was Black Hat eating? Half the time the ingredients were completely indecipherable. And why did he put so much mayonnaise?! No one needs that much mayo!
His phone chimed. A new text.


Dem? Oh, he must mean Demetra, that cafe waitress who got the entire staff betting on what the nature of his and Black Hat’s relationship was. He hadn’t really talked to her besides the mundane “Hi, how’s it going?” since coming back from their little weekend excursion. But she (and a few other staff members) had been giving the two of them knowing smiles ever since.

Oh sweet Jesus had she and Black Hat been talking? Did they talk about him? What did he tell her!? She spread it around to the others didn’t she?! What were they all smiling about!?

No way did they just appreciate the continued patronage and their decently sized tips! It had to be something more!

Flug decided he’d just go down and wait for them on the sidewalk. It wasn’t going to do him any good to just sit around and panic himself to the point that he bailed on actually going to this party.

Aurelio had texted him (yet another thing he never imagined would happen) his address a few hours back, and it turned out he only lived about 45 minutes away from his apartment. Flug was just now finding this out. Totally. Yeah. He had no idea of this prior to getting texted the address. No sir.

It didn’t take much waiting for Flug to spot Black Hat’s car pulling up. Demetra was in the front passenger seat, in what Flug guessed was her normal outfit outside of her cafe uniform. Flug promptly greeted his two “friends” (did the guy he would spend the rest of his life working for and the waitress he sort of knew count as friends?) and climbed into the backseat.

“So, where does this guy live?”

Flug told Black Hat the address and they were off and that was about it. No one was really talking besides Demetra who was off on a tangent about her brother Alex and how he was always sticking crap like old leftovers and dead bugs in her hair. Flug wouldn’t have found this especially worrying, if not for the fact that as she went on and started getting into how he always did that whenever he was home, although he was hardly home due to his long hours at his construction job, he realized that this Alex, was an adult. He would’ve understood this behavior if Alex was like, primary or even middle school age but apparently he was nearly ten years older than Demetra herself! And he was doing crap like that? What a man-child he must be.

But that did kind of explain why that gargantuan ponytail was cut so choppy and unevenly. She must’ve had to periodically cut sticky things out of it. Flug had had to do that sometimes in high school when he’d get gum or half-chewed candy stuck in his hair. He was grateful that he’d only had
to do that a handful of times, since that was more of a thing done to harass girls.

Ok now she was talking about reptiles. Apparently her family ran some kind of reptile pet shop thing? And she was moving into her sales pitch.

Flug was gonna lose his shit if she just hung around them hoping to score some customers for her family’s business.

“No but seriously we got some really cool snakes and things!” She exclaimed. “You two should totally come check them out sometime! We got a couple that are actually pretty exotic, out of country type things ya know? They’re super awesome and there’s this new one we just got that makes me think of you everytime I see her!” She poked Black Hat in the arm playfully.

“How so?”

“She’s all black and red!” She said with a smile. “Well, sometimes. The red seems to come and go depending on the lighting. It’s kind of like if you look at her just right you see a bit of a red tint to her. And I guess she’s more a light gray since she’s still kind of a baby? She’ll get darker when she grows up. But the red is pretty unusual for black mambas, so she’s crazy expensive but you can still totally come and see her! And maybe see if there’s a lil’ snakey snake you like? You strike me as someone who would like snakes.”

Flug spoke up at this. “Aren’t...aren’t black mambas extremely dangerous? Like, in the top ten deadliest snakes on the planet dangerous?”

“Yeah but that’s just cuz they’re really fast and bite more than once.” Demetra happily confirmed. “Trust me man, a cobra or a taipan packs way more venom.”

“Do you have any of those?” Black Hat asked.

“Ha ha I wish! But my dad was saying she might be crossed with something, on account of having that red tint I was talking about? Which usually mambas just don’t have? Don’t know what but she’s a real beauty.”

“So, you have a mixed-snake. That’s at least part black mamba and part something else you don’t even know.”

“Uh huh!”

“And this is just at your house?”

“Yep! I mean, she’s not in our house, she’s in the back of the store since we needed a brand new cage for her, special needs and all, but she’s close enough!”

“H-How?”

“How what, dork?”
Flug chose to ignore that. “How is there a snake that is half anything? Do snakes do that? Can snakes do that?”

“What, cross breed? Totally! I mean the venomous ones usually don’t but they can so long as the aren’t totally different species of snake. Like, a carpet python and a woma python can totally make babies, but a python and a cobra? It just ain’t happening. Mainly cuz cobras will eat other snakes. It’s why we gotta be real careful when putting some of these snakes together, cuz they might breed and make a bunch of little hybrid snakes. Some people...some people, they don’t like hybrids.”

Demetra laughed a bit, but it seemed kind of...forced.

“Well, is it really safe for them to do that?” Flug asked. “D-Do they have any h-health issues like when other animals interbreed?”

“No no, they’re fine. They’re even still fertile. Not like those lion and tiger hybrids where they’re always sick and can’t make their own babies. The snakes are fine.”

“O-oh, well then why-”

“Cuz people are dumb, Flug-bug. Ok?” Demetra snapped. “It’s misinformation and stupid aesthetics!”

Ok, he apparently hit a nerve there. The three of them sat in silence for a few minutes before Black Hat spoke up. “I want to see her.”

“Huh?”

“This snake you were talking about, the red and black one. I want to see her.”

“Oh sweet!” Demetra exclaimed. “When’s good for you? You can come by pretty much whenever! We’re open six days a week and on most major holidays! You too, Flug! We got snakes, lizards, iguanas, salamanders-” Yeah, this was her sales pitch alright. Flug really didn’t have any interest in getting a pet reptile, but they could be cool to see. He’d never really been invited to anyone’s house before, not counting today. Maybe it would be fun. Demetra herself seemed pretty knowledgeable about the cold-blooded creatures, which he hadn’t expected. So maybe he’d end up actually enjoying himself.

She continued on about the various reptiles her family had until they reached their destination.

As expected, it was packed with cars, loud, populated, and in general was a place where Rocinante Flugslys felt completely out of place. Why was he here? What made him think he could just go to a party like he’d ever actually been to one before? Why had he come?

Why was Black Hat parking on the lawn like he did this all the time? It wasn’t as if he was the only one but, still.

“What?” The man asked. “Did you see any other parking?”
Flug didn’t so he just dropped it. The three of them exited the car, and aside from a few strange looks here and there no one paid them any attention.

Walking in, the noise only increased and if Flug hadn’t spent the last couple nights mindlessly staring at a computer screen blaring out Japanese and soft lulling remedies of the mind, it’d probably be too loud for him to hear himself think. He’d improved his zoning out skills so much that it was little more than a mild inconvenience rather than a huge problem like he’d thought it would be.

Until Demetra said...something. He couldn’t hear her over the music blaring from the sound system some guy had set up on the back patio. Flug could just make him out from the doorway to the backyard. She said something and pulled Black Hat away by the arm. He shot Flug a look of Hell if I know either but I’ll catch you later, and allowed himself to be led off into the crowd.

Leaving Flug...alone.

Why the hell did he even bother to show up with two other people if they were just gonna bail on him?

Flug looked around, hoping to see anyone else he knew here. The rest of the club was invited too, right? So there should be a couple familiar faces somewhere, right? He just had to find them. And could then cling to one of them the entire night so he didn’t spend all his time standing around doing nothing in the middle of a party like a complete loser with no friends.

Even if that was precisely what he felt like.

Wandering around, he saw no one recognizable in the living room. Just a bunch of loud obnoxious guys playing beer pong while a guy and girl made out on the couch next to some other dudes watching futbol on the flat screen TV. In the kitchen he found people taking body shots and mixing drinks. He had no clue what was in that but he took a cup. Not like he didn’t have someone driving him home. God he hoped Black Hat remembered he had to drive them home.

Ok that was sour as fuck. What had he just drank? Flug shook his head violently, making the surrounding girls laugh. Laugh at him. He chuckled nervously and left. Well, that could’ve gone better. Damn his self-consciousness! He continued sipping, not wanting to get too drunk too fast.

Was this a dining room? It seemed like it may have been at a previous point in time; before getting swarmed with boxes of pizza, plates of nachos, a shit-ton of 2 liter soda bottles, and oh damn someone brought tamales? Flug was going to have to come back for those if he got hungry.

Bathroom, with two girls in it. One throwing up, one recording it. Flug silently closed the door again and continued his search for someone to cling to for the night.

Were those guys in the back doing karaoke or some shit? He could hear off key voices screaming loudly, even louder than all the splashing from people doing cannonballs into the pool. Flug wasn’t going out there. He wasn’t dressed for the pool. He wasn’t getting himself wet. He wasn’t getting out of these clothes. He wasn’t going out to the back if it killed him.
He climbed the stairs to explore the second floor. There were a total of three stories to this house, and it seemed the party had spread to every one of them. Hey, when word got out that Aurelio Cruz was throwing a party anyone who was anyone showed up. Mostly because he had notoriously laid back parents who’d been just as crazy stupid popular in their youth and took luxurious weekend getaways at every opportunity. Leaving their son pretty much to do whatever he wanted. Party on Friday, clean up on Saturday, maybe into Sunday if it got really wild.

Not that Flug had any good reason to know any of that.

He opened the door to one of the first couple rooms down the hall to his right, expecting maybe another bathroom with another drunk girl throwing up and crying into the toilet. Instead he found a bedroom. A very dark bedroom where the only light seemed to be from someone’s light up speaker, which was playing soft instrumental music. Around the speaker sat a group of people passing around a bong. He recognized a few people. Natalia, Tesoro, Hector, Miguel, Jose (three other guys from his Engineering Club), and even Manuel.

Flug was surprised to say the least. He hadn’t pegged any of these people for stoners.

“F-Flug,” Manuel said, coughing a bit from the hit he just took (that was the proper term for it, right?). “Uh, hey man. Wh-*cough cough* what’s up?”

“N-not much.” Flug said, closing the door. “How’s it going?”

“Fine.” Tesoro said. She looked...worried. Like Flug had caught her doing something she really really wasn’t supposed to be doing.

“Enjoying the party?”

“Sure, sure.”

One of the guys who Flug didn’t know spoke up. “You want a hit?”

“Ah, n-no thanks. I’m good.” He stood awkwardly sizing the group up. God he felt weird just standing here holding his cup full of mystery liquid.

“Uh, Flug?” Natalia asked. She seemed much more sluggish than usual. By which Flug meant she was moving and talking at normal human speed. “Can you, like, not tell Lio we’re smoking in here? He doesn’t like when people smoke at his place.”

“Yeah sure. You mind if I hang out though?” Flug said, plopping down in front of the door. “You’re the first people I’ve seen here that I actually know.”

“That’s fine, man. Just don’t tell.” One of the guys said. “Rather not spend tomorrow picking up shit for Lio.”
Well, that made sense. “I got it.”

“So, what, did you come here alone?” Hector asked. “Thought you didn’t have a car.”

“N-No. I came with...some friends.”

“So where are they?”

“Hell if I know.” Flug mumbled.

“Oh wait, is it that guy? In the top hat?” Natalia asked.

“Is it that obvious I have no other friends?” Flug had a sad sort of smile on his face. “Well, he brought another person. I don’t know if she counts.”

“Oh c’mon man, we’re friends.” Tesoro said, mumbling through every word. “I mean we never hang out or talk outside of the club or anything but...where was I going with this?”

“What she means is, like, we’re cool, aren’t we?” Miguel said. “Like, we’d hang out, but it kinda seems like you don’t really wanna hang out. But we’d totally hang out with you, like, if you wanted. Right?”

A few people nodded. A few Flug knew, one or two he didn’t.

He could kind of see what they meant. None of them actually disliked him, but they could pick up on the fact that he didn’t really have any interest in getting close to them or being one of the group. Back when he first joined, he’d been invited out a few times, he remembered. He went out to eat once or twice, keeping mostly to himself and getting involved in the conversation as little as possible. He had a vague memory that someone suggested they all go to the beach together, but eventually he just kept declining and it got to the point that they just stopped asking. It wasn’t that he disliked them either, but he didn’t really want to go out and be around so many of them so often. Most anything in groups was not his idea of a good time. So why he came to a crowded party just to sit in a dark room with a bunch of stoners was anyone’s guess. What had he been expected? Did he think he’d spend time with Aurelio one-on-one or something? Whatever gave him that idea? He was in his house, with no idea where he was, or what on earth he would say or do if he did see him.

He downed the rest of whatever the hell was in his cup and tossed it somewhere off to his left. He spent a while like that, sitting in the dark and listening in on what everyone else was talking about. Nothing in particular as it turned out. He probably could’ve joined in the conversation at any time, could’ve included himself in the little circle. But he really didn’t want to. As much as it pained him to be alone, he didn’t want to be with them either. It wasn’t that he had a problem with smoking, or any recreational drugs really, it was just them. Well, it was probably more him than them, but that was just so trite and overused. Such a cliché.

It wasn’t these people specifically, it was just people in general. He wasn’t ever going to let them be close enough to call them true friends; the kind that one goes through thick and thin with, staying in contact with for years to come, the kind that one can tell anything too with no worries about consequences or judgements. Flug just couldn’t see how he’d ever be comfortable enough with any of the people here to get to that point. There wasn’t anyone he thought he could, for that matter.
God, how was he ever going to fulfill his parent’s fantasy of a perfectly normal son if he couldn’t at least make a friend? C’mon, even workaholic perfectionists make friends! Not counting the person they sold their soul to and bum rides off of or the waitresses they make small talk with!

Flug must’ve been really lost in thought, because it took him a few minutes to realize someone had been trying to talk to him.

“What’s this guys name again?”

“Flug.”

“Is that short for something?”

“Yeah, Flugslys, my last name. What’s up?” He asked, surprising the high people.

“You sure you don’t wanna take a hit dude?” The same guy from before asked. “We usually don’t spend more than two hours here and we’re gonna pack up soon.”

“I’ve literally never smoked before.”

“Oh dang, virgin lungs? C’mere man, this that good shit.”

Flug sighed. Fuck it, what else did he have to do? It wasn’t as if sitting around getting more of a contact high before they split sounded any more appealing. He crawled over and was about to take the thing out of Manuel’s hand when the sound of booming rapid footsteps drew everyone’s attention. The door swung open and there was a silhouette in a long black coat with a large ponytail bobbing up and down as she panting heavily. Everyone froze for a second, the group of stoners and Flug and the woman in the doorframe catching her breath as they all took each other in. It took a second for Flug to recognize that mass of fluorescent green hair.

“De-”

“Demencia?” Asked one of guys to the back of the circle. One of the ones Flug didn’t know.

Demetra visibly tensed up before slamming the door on its hinges and ran off down the hall. The door swung, it hadn’t fully shut, and the woman’s panicked footsteps and shoving were heard even in the loud hallway drowned in ambient party noise.

Flug got up andpeeked his head out the door. He could see Demetra running from door to door. She was attracting a lot of attention from all the people standing around and talking in the hallway. Apparently whatever room she was looking for, she wasn’t finding it. Maybe she really had to go to the bathroom? And was she wearing Black Hat’s trench coat? Huh, come to think of it he wasn’t sure he’d ever seen the man out of it.

He decided he would follow her. She seemed really worked up over something, and it wasn’t as if Flug had anything better to do than find out what. Maybe they’d regroup with Black Hat and Flug
could spend the rest of the party with the two people he actually came with.

Flug stepped out into the hall and was about to run after Demetra when he heard a familiar voice call out from the opposite end of the hall.

“Rocinante?”

Flug turned. There was Aurelio, strolling towards him looking like he was trying not to lose his cool. Unusual, typically he kept his cool no matter the issue.

“Oh, um, Aurelio, cool party. Hi.” Oh God Flug couldn’t even talk anymore.

“Rocinante, what were you doing in there?”

“J-Just exploring. Sorry?”

Aurelio went over to shut the door, but he noticed the circle of stoners in there. They weren’t kidding when they said Aurelio didn’t like people smoking.

“What the fuck assholes!?” He screamed, cool lost. “You do this every time! Get the fuck out of my sisters room!”

Oh so that was Helena’s room? Explains why it was so vacant and they thought they could hide safely in there. Neither Aurelio or his parents ever went in there. Not that Flug knew anything about them or their daughter, who was roughly four years older than Aurelio and shared his dark skin and hair but had hazel eyes like their father.

Said smokers all ran out of the room as fast as their uncoordinated legs could carry them. Leaving Flug and Aurelio standing awkwardly around the door to his meth-head sister’s bedroom. Someone else might’ve booked it down the hall as well, it was starting to get crowded up here and Flug couldn’t see all the figures he was hearing.

“I didn’t know you smoked, Rocinante.” Aurelio said, with clear contempt in his voice. At least the music and chatter was a little less intense on the second floor. So he could make out what Aurelio was actually saying.

“I-I don’t.” Flug said. “I actually ne-never have. I was j-j-just looking for some people I ac-actually know, heh.”
Aurelio hummed, not fully buying it apparently.

“People from the Engineering Club, huh? I thought such smart people would know better than to partake in such a disgusting habit.”

Well damn, forcing people to clean your house for you after your parties is a pretty nasty habit too but I’m not bringing that up. Also your range is only five meters so I can’t imagine it’s all that efficient either.

“I hate it when Natalia pulls this shit. Especially in my sister’s bedroom.”

“Oh I-I didn’t even know you had a sis-sister.” Flug expertly lied. It was incredibly easy to lie when one’s normal state is already a ball of nervous tics and stutters. It was nothing out of the ordinary to hear Flug stutter or ramble on occasion.

“Yes, Helena.” Aurelio mused. “She’s off studying abroad in Spain.”

“C-cool.” Flug said, not bothering to mention how false that was.

Not that he knew anything about that. It wasn’t as if Flug had any knowledge about Aurelio’s sister Helena. It wasn’t like he knew she was currently in rehab for meth and had been there for a few years now and Aurelio in particular didn’t like word of it going around or being reminded that his sister was not, in fact, off studying abroad in Spain. Or that he hated pretty much all forms of smoking and drug use because it’s a constant reminder of how his sister had wasted away from the addiction polluting her mind and making her hair fall out and her eyes sink in and how weak she had been last time anyone saw her.

Yet alcohol was fine with him. Priorities, am I right?

It wasn’t as if Flug knew any of that. How would he have ever found that out? It wasn’t as if Flug had spent his high school nights locked in solitude finding out virtually everything possible about him or his family. No sir. That most assuredly was not what he did when he wasn’t looking at porn or working on an invention. Nope. No one could prove anything.

“By the way, Rocinante, did you happen to see a woman run through here? Red and green hair, in a black coat?”

“Oh De-Demetra? Yeah, I just saw her. That way.” Flug pointed down the hall.

“Ah, gracias hermano.” And Aurelio took off, the crowd parting for him like he was Moses come to split the sea of red drunken faces.
Flug followed behind, not really having anything else to do now that Stoner-henge was gone.

He ducked into room after room, trying to catch up to Aurelio, who was trying to catch up to Demetra, and only after the first few rooms did Flug realize he didn’t really know why Aurelio was even looking for Demetra. Sure, she seemed to be in a hurry for some reason, but how did he know about it? What did he know about it? Was she in some kind of trouble? Where was Black Hat? Why had they left him? Where had they gone and why hadn’t Flug just trailed after them like the lost puppy he was because the only other thing he had to do was wander aimlessly until he found a familiar face and even then all he did was sit outside the circle not talking to anyone because he didn’t have anything to say even if he wanted to talk.

Man, he couldn’t find Aurelio anywhere. Just how far ahead had he gotten in his search for Demetra? He was so out of practice it was almost pitiful.

Another room, with about three adjacent rooms connected to it. How many rooms _were_ there in this place, it was starting to feel like a funhouse. But it was quieter in here, and Flug could hear two voices speaking to each other. They weren’t whispering, but it wasn’t quite normal volume either. A man and a woman. They were in one of the adjoining rooms, so Flug could listen in without being discovered until one or both of them stepped out to leave.

“What do you even see in him?” The man’s voice asked. Aurelio. “He’s a complete freak.”

They probably weren’t talking about him, but Flug’s incessant paranoia made him think they might’ve been talking about him.

“Oh and how’s that? He’s always chivalrous, he listens to me, he knows how to dress, and i don’t give a damn what you say he is at least a nine and a half.” A woman’s voice. Demetra.

Ok, they _really_ probably weren’t talking about him. No one would ever rate him above a high 6. At least, he didn’t think so.

“You have got to be kidding.” Aurelio said with an exasperated sigh. “Is your eye fucked up so bad that can’t actually see what he looks like? He has the complexion of a burned out house, and I’m pretty sure he doesn’t actually have a nose.”

Black Hat?

“I don’t think he does either, but damn if anyone can pull off not having a nose it’s him. And then maybe Michael Jackson.”
“Have you ever asked him about it? You’ve been out with him haven’t you?”

“Oh my god dude you can’t just ask people why they don’t have a nose.” Flug swore he could hear her roll her eyes. “That’s really fucking rude you know.”

There was another sigh and Flug swore he could sense that Aurelio was rubbing his eyes in his frustration. Although what he was so frustrated about Flug couldn’t say. What were they talking about?

“Just, just explain why.” Aurelio said. “He looks like a complete creep. He’s a fucking weirdo. He’s definitely not normal, I don’t know why no one’s just come out and confronted him about it. His skin is fucking gray and he has sharp teeth and yet he does... nothing . He just walks around and talks to people like it’s totally normal.” Was Aurelio saying this to Demetra or was he just thinking out loud?

“And it might as well be! No one seems to pay him any special attention. He’s a dark creepy freak just walking around like it’s no big deal and everyone just lets him. He’s always completely covered, he’s obviously hiding something , so what is it? What do you know about him? What could he possibly have that makes you and Flug overlook how abnormal everything about him is?”

“Overlook? Ha!” Demetra laughed loudly, making Flug flinch from the sudden noise. “He’s high class, not like you Señor Can’t-Keep-Your-Hands-To-Yourself! I like him cuz he ain’t a single thing like anyone else. And he doesn’t give a damn about what you or anyone else thinks of him for it either!”

She was right, Black Hat wasn’t anything like anyone else Flug had ever met. Not physically, and not anything else about his personality was quite like anything he’d ever seen before either. Blunt, but not tactless. Oddly dressed, but nowhere near unfashionable. Flug agreed with her as well about Black Hat not caring what anyone thought about him. He couldn’t imagine a guy who dressed to the nines as part of his daily attire caring at all about the opinions and views of other people. Even more so because of how different he looked from everyone else. If he cared about how strange he looked to others, he wouldn’t be able to walk so confidently, with his head held high and not a care as to the disapproving stares at his back. Flug admired that about the man, he was completely sure of who he was and what he was going to do. He never seemed to doubt himself, or even Flug for that matter. He knew who he was and he wasn’t ashamed to be himself. He was someone who didn’t care at all about what anyone else thought about him. Flug wished that he could be more like that. He wished that he could be so... free .

Even things like being a supervillain or living in a giant hat, while he admitted they were bizarre and downright crazy notions, he didn’t try to justify them exactly. He didn’t list the reasons why he was going to do these things or even try convince Flug that he was right to do so. He simply stated that it was what he wanted to do, and that therefore he would do it. He wasn’t looking for anyone’s approval, probably not even their acceptance of his goals. Flug doubted if he cared about even a single other person thinking that he was justified in his quest to dominate the world. So long as it remained his objective, he would do all that he could to accomplish it. He wanted to watch his man grow his ambition, he wanted to help it to thrive if he could.
“So if you don’t mind,” Demetra spoke again. “He’s probably looking for this. So you can stop now.” Flug could only assume she was talking about the coat. So she was wearing Black Hat’s coat. “Hey, I said to stop.”

“Oh but why? It’s a party, you should be having fun. What are you afraid of?”

“Aurelio, I said to stop. Let me go now.” Oh God this wasn’t sounding good. Flug couldn’t see what Aurelio was doing but Demetra sounded very angry and he couldn’t imagine what Aurelio was doing. Oh Jesus he didn’t want to hear this! But it wasn’t as if he could just leave.

“Oh, what’s the matter? Are you afraid your scary boyfriend will find you?” Aurelio asked. “Are you afraid of what he might see?”

“The only thing I’m afraid of is that I fuck up my nails because you can’t handle losing the Best Dressed category in the yearbook.” Her voice was beginning to tremble slightly, but Flug couldn’t tell if that was from rage or underlying fear. “Now let go before I make you.” Oh shit no one ever talked to Aurelio liked that! Not twice anyway…

“No, I don’t believe I will.” Aurelio said. “I hope he does find you. I hope he finds you right here. With me.”

Ok Flug couldn’t handle doing nothing and just listening to this! He had to do something before this became something really really really serious and he had no clue what someone weak like him could do so he just did the same thing he’d done weeks ago when Aurelio was making a woman uncomfortable before.

He strolled in on the situation and took in the sight of the two of them with their arms wrapped around each other, their mouths mere inches apart and their bodies pressed flush together. Even if Demetra’s eyes were wide and her limbs shook from the force of her trying to reject the way Aurelio puppeteered her body.

Flug didn’t even have to fake his gasp of surprise, or the little jump he did. He didn’t know what he had been expecting, he knew things were getting bad between them and that Aurelio was probably forcing her to stay still or something, but actually seeing it was just…

“Oh! Uh, I-I-I didn’t m-m-mean to, um, that i-is, i, um...” He fumbled his words in the usual way, maybe overdoing it to really play up his shock at “walking in” on the two of them. “Am I interrupting s-something?”

“No, no Flug not at all!” Demetra said, yanking free and booking it out the door. “I was just leaving!” She called back. The coat was falling off her shoulders a bit and she had to hike it up. Hopefully she’d find Black Hat soon. She probably shouldn’t be alone right now.
That left Aurelio standing stiffly in place and Flug awkwardly staring at him. He didn’t know what he should do now, if he should follow her lead and get as far out of range as he could, or stay and maybe see if talking to the man could prove useful. But how, when he didn’t know what at all a normal person says in response to what he just overheard and witnessed?

“So, um,” Flug said, still having no clue what it was he was going to say. “We found her.” He offered a nervous smile. Ok no, that was awful. Try again, and say something that actually had a point to it this time! “Guess I’ll j-j-just…” He pointed away and began gracelessly fidgeting back the way he came and the way Demetra just fled. Because clearly that was the only feasible option now. To leave.

“Rocinante, wait.” Aurelio called out. Flug stopped, if only out of some twisted curiosity of what the man would have to say for himself.

“Please give me a chance to explain.” Aurelio walked them both out into the open hallway, which made Flug feel a bit safer. If anything happened he’d have some witnesses. They made their way down the stairs, where it was louder and Aurelio had to lean in to be heard.

“I’m sorry you had to witness that. What happened back there was...a complicated situation.”

I’m really not sure it was all that complicated. Just unflattering. For you.

“So, um, you t-t-two know e-each other?” Flug asked, raising his voice a bit. Which didn’t help his stutter any.

“Just met her about two weeks ago when she and that, uh, Black Hat came by the lab to pick you up. Which reminds me,” Aurelio led them into the kitchen, where it was considerably quieter compared to the rest of the place. It had cleared out a bit, for whatever reason. That chick on the counter everyone had been doing body shots off of was gone. Maybe she was the main draw.

“I don’t mean to pry into your, well, personal business, but I was just wondering.” Aurelio got himself and Flug drinks. “What exactly is the deal with you two?”

“M-me and Bl-Black Hat, you mean?” Flug asked nervously, taking the cup from Aurelio’s hands. Oh God he could even be a hand model- *Stop it stop it stop it get a hold of yourself Flug!*

“Yes. I’m sorry, but I couldn’t help but notice you spend a lot of your time more or less by yourself. Even in your club, surrounded by colleagues, it seems like you prefer to work alone rather than collaborate or just mingle with everyone else.”

“Heh, y-yeah I guess. I-I didn’t even r-really want to join in the f-f-f-first place. One of my teachers
back in high school really pushed me to check it out and then I guess I kind of got roped in and just never left. I was practically in before I even enrolled.” Flug took a swig from his cup. This tasted different from whatever he’d gotten before.

“Do you not enjoy being in the Engineering Club?” Aurelio asked. “You’re very good at what you do, and everyone acknowledges your skill.”

“Th-thanks.” Flug said staring into his cup. “And I do enjoy building things. I guess I’ve just never really been interested in hanging out with everyone else.”

“Except Black Hat?”

“H-huh?” Flug asked, looking up with wide eyes.

“Like I said, I don’t mean to pry, but, well, this guy who no one really knows very well seems to be the only one you actually do talk to. You said you texted him to go get you and take you home at nearly midnight, and no one else in the club besides Manuel so much as has your number or has been to your place.” Aurelio sipped from his own cup before he continued. “They would’ve taken you home, you know. If you had asked. A few of us carpooled together later that night, it wasn’t difficult.”

“U-U-Uh, um, w-well, you see, th-the thing i-i-is, erm,” Flug tried to steady his shaking hands. He really didn’t know how to respond to any of that. Of course they would’ve taken him home, they were nice people. The reason he hadn’t asked was because he was caught off guard by Aurelio’s presence and hadn’t been thinking straight and Black Hat had seemed like a perfect way to escape at the time. Looking back, it would’ve been just as easy if not easier to make up something about being tired and ask if anyone else was ready to clock out and just not involve Black Hat at all. Maybe it was because they had been talking about him that the man had popped up in Flug’s mind?

If he had done that, he probably would’ve continued ignoring Black Hat’s texts for at least another day or so, he wouldn’t have gone with him hours away to see the site of their future evil lair, he probably wouldn’t have signed away his soul, and hey, maybe none of them would even be at this party right now. He’d be his normal, able-to-sleep self who was not currently sporting a collar full of fading scabs.

So why was it he had ran towards a man no one, including himself, really knew anything about in favor of those he did? If only just because he had been around them longer. Why had he chosen to go with Black Hat and set himself on this course?

“Just to make sure I haven’t misread things, did Black Hat give you those bite marks on your neck?” Aurelio asked. Flug jumped at the mention of them.

“Ah! W-Well, um, you see, uh, a-a-about th-that, well, we were both drunk, an-and I ha ha, I, uh, I-I-I, uh, I…” He trailed off, not sure what excuse he was trying to make or even why he wanted to make any excuses. He was an adult, he could make his own decisions. And what he did
wasn’t anyone’s, including Aurelio’s, business but his own. Why was he trying to overcomplicate the situation when the answer was so exceedingly simple? He took another swig of his drink to settle his nerves.

“Yes. Yes he did.”

“So, does that mean that you are...ehhh...you know.” Aurelio skirted around actually saying it as much as possible. “That you...?”

“Am I gay you mean?” Flug asked, quickly chugging the remaining liquid in his cup in a fit of panic, throwing it off to the side because this question required all of his nerve to answer. Some of whatever he just drank dribbled out of the corner of his mouth and he wiped it away with all the fluidity of a dancer. “Yes, I’m gay. Do you have a problem with that?”

“Oh no no not at all!” Aurelio insisted. “I just didn’t want to assume anything. Really, Rocinante, I have no issue.”

“Good to know.” Flug mumbled. He felt a little bit like a weight had just been lifted from him. He didn’t think he had said that out loud since he and Julio had gotten together. Black Hat had already kind of known, so he hadn’t needed to come out to him exactly, Demetra had just assumed he was gay and he never told her he wasn’t, Flug didn’t think he’d ever really told anyone else.

So he just came out to Aurelio Cruz. That was unexpected.

“Another?”

“Sure, why not?” Flug took the drink that was offered and took a large gulp. He came to party, damn it. Why the fuck not?

“So, you and Black Hat then,” Aurelio started. “You two-”

“Let me stop you there, Lio.” Flug said, holding up his hand and continuing to drink. “We went out, we had some fun. That’s pretty much it. If you ask me about him and Demetra, I know even less.”

“So...that’s it? Just fun?”

“Yeah pretty much. I know I enjoyed it. Least I’m pretty sure I did. Night’s kind of a blur. I woke up shirtless in the middle of nowhere with my fly down and all these.” Flug motioned to his neck. “Pretty sure we had a very good time.” Flug said with a lopsided smile. Maybe he should quit while he was ahead. He just barely caught Aurelio mumble “good to know” to himself. Good to know indeed that you find the fact that I like men and am not in any serious relationship good to know. Good to know. He he he he he!

Yeah that was pretty good to know! It’s pretty good to know you’re so invested in what other people think of Black Hat! And good to know you’ve apparently been watching me a bit, enough to see me with him and get so concerned! Not as much as I’ve watched you though! I watched you for a loooong time! But I did it the smart way! I bet you never even saw me before this past year, huh? He he he hehe he he!
“What’s so funny?” Aurelio asked.

Oh damn, had Flug been laughing out loud about all that? At least he didn’t say any of it. Hopefully he didn’t.

“Pfft, I don’t know.” He said. “It’s cute how concerned you are about my relationship status. Oh, don’t give me that look, you know damn well how goddamn hot you are.”

Oh shit maybe he should stop now. Maybe he shouldn’t be taking that next swig out of his cup. Maybe he should excuse himself and go throw up in the bathroom. Maybe he should eat a little more. Maybe he should stop giggling like some school girl (boy). So many maybes man. And all of them things he probably wasn’t going to do.

And all thought went out the window as the music turned up and he could hear a woman’s voice rise up and sing.

» It was a Friday night and I wanted to go out to
A brand new club in town, a Discotheque I’d heard about through
A friend of mine who told me the place was a circus act for sure~ »

Well, apparently Demetra was over whatever happened upstairs. She brought the karaoke party from the back porch to the living room. Did she actually have a microphone with her? She seemed her usual cheery and bright self. And was a much better singer than Flug would’ve imagined. This song choice was a little odd, though. It had gotten on some concerned parents list because of the lyrics and how it “promoted crime and unethical lifestyle choices”. It’s just a song, guys. Calm down. No one was actually going clubbing with Charles Manson and Chris Brown. Mainly because if Flug wasn’t mistaken at least one of those guys was dead. And even if they weren’t they didn’t seem like they’d be buddies.

» I can’t keep partyin’ ‘round, keep partyin’ ‘round,
Keep partyin’ partyin’ partyin’, »

Fuck it, it was a party. Break out ALL the music their parents didn’t want them listening to!!

Flug just kind of watched her for a bit, forgetting for a second about Aurelio behind him. She really had a lot of passion and energy. She wouldn’t be bad as a legit performer. The crowd seemed to think so too, as they were getting pumped up with each passing verse and singing along as well as their drunk and high asses could. Flug took another swig, nearly emptying the cup this time. He had no idea what he was drinking but damn was he getting into it! He was about ready to start singing
along too if he could remember the next verse!

Aurelio turned him around, and it took a second for Flug’s eyes to focus on him. “Hey, hey!” He snapped in front of his face a few times. “How you feeling Rocinante? You feeling good?” He asked with a grin.

“I’m feeling good!” He declared.

“You having fun?”

“I’m having fun!” Flug threw both of his hands in the air to further emphasize how much fun he was having. Which spilled the remainder or his drink on himself. Not that he really minded anymore.

“You drunk?” Aurelio asked with a laugh.

“I’m drunk!” Flug proudly stated. “And you’re... sexy .”

Aurelio laughed some more. Hey, maybe he was gay too? He liked to claim online that he was bi or pan, but considering how many lesbians he harassed Flug doubted it. He just thought everyone should want to fuck him and if you didn’t want to fuck him well fuck you! Which Flug might take him up on. Hey, maybe he was just drunk. Flug could work with that.

Aurelio handed him another drink, which Flug eagerly took and instantly spilled half of on himself. Ha ha, he was such a fucking mess. But hey, if he wasn’t getting shitfaced tonight, why the fuck had he come?

Ooooh...ooh oh oh wow actually he was starting to feel a little...lightheaded. Well, he had already been lightheaded but now he was feeling...drowsy. Huh, the world was spinning. Wait, it was always spinning. That was how the world worked. Did the spinning change? The room felt different and Flug reached out to steady himself on something, the closest thing in front of him just happened to be Aurelio so that was what he latched onto. Ooh his chest was firm. Felt nice. He on the other hand wasn’t feeling so hot.

He could feel his eyelids flutter shut and the world started to come and go in flashes of black and white and loud noises and sometimes the world was just gone but he was still conscious that it wasn’t there or maybe he wasn’t and it was. He had no idea what any of that last sentence meant but it made sense as it was happening. He couldn’t think straight and didn’t know what was happening.

Ok he got a flash of black, and he knew words were being said but he couldn’t really make them out. A face. Black Hat’s face. Oh, that was Flug’s hand. Ok they were moving. Something had a hold of him and he felt his body moving but he didn’t really know what he was doing and he couldn’t see. Then everything was black and quiet for a while until his eyes opened for a little bit and he felt like he was still moving but his body wasn’t. Huh. There were more voices, and he knew those voices and he knew who they were! He tried to say something, to ask what was going on or what was happening to him or the world but he didn’t think any words really got out. Someone was holding
him, might’ve been poking him in the face. Things faded out again.

When things came back into the little bit of focus they could Flug thought that maybe his legs stopped working. He was trying to move them but whatever was in front of him wasn’t getting any closer. His arms felt sore, but still numb. Like they were supposed to be sore but sore wasn’t really something he felt for really reals anymore so his body was just telling him that if he could feel it, it’d be sore. He heard a loud ding that made him jump a bit, then things were gone again.

He couldn’t see, it was hard to open his eyes. But he could hear and by now he was starting to realize what was happening, at least a little. He wondered where he was, who was talking (he knew who it was but couldn’t put a name or face to the voice), and what was happening right now. His head was swimming and thoughts were hard to keep straight. Well, he’d never been straight to begin with, ha. He thought he might be laying down, but couldn’t really say for sure. It was a bit scary that he had no idea where he was who was with him what either of them were doing and even concrete things like words were getting difficult to think of. He just had... feelings.

He struggled to open his eyes, to look at who was talking to him. He didn’t manage to open them all the way, but he managed a quick glimpse of something black. He shot out with all his collective energy and managed to lightly paw at whatever it was. At least, he was pretty sure he did. He could’ve sworn he felt something on the tips of his fingers. He managed to mumble out one slurred word.

“Quedarse.”

He felt something on his forehead that gave him some comfort and he heard soft words, clear and cutting through all the hazy fog clouding his being. He forgot them as soon as they were said but he knew he had to do what they told him. Whatever that had been. His eyelids grew heavier and he could feel himself going limp and fading away again but he felt calmer about it this time. It was something familiar, something he knew how to do it was just he hadn’t done in a while and it took a second for his body to remember how. But it was okay, it was going to be okay because this is what that voice told him to do and he had to do it and it was ok.

Flug fell into a dreamless sleep and thought no more.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

gracias hermano = thanks brother (Spanish)

Quedarse = stay (Spanish)
Stay

Chapter Summary

Aurelio's party. Black Hat POV. Many, many, many revelations.

Chapter Notes

Just to be clear, this is a freaking long chapter. If you're on a bit of a time crunch, I know school just started back up for a lot of us, just...leave you browser/tab/whatever open.

“Wait wait wait, so he decided the best thing to do in that scenario was to hit him with fucking paper plates!?” Black Hat asked incredulously, trying not to break out into full blown evil laughter.

“That’s what I said!” The guy across from him exclaimed. The entire group burst out laughing and spilling their drinks. “He had the whole cafeteria to hit him with, the tables, the chairs, the other people, even the freaking plastic trays and shit, but nope! He went with the paper plates!”

“Oh my fuck.” Black Hat said, face-palming.

“Hey, no one ever said being telekinetic made you smart!”

Another round of laughter as Black Hat cradled his face in his hands and kept his laughter as light as he could manage. Dem, who’d pulled him off to introduce him to some friend from high school she recognized, was next to him and leaning on him heavily as they both lost their shit listening intently to this guy Marco, who seemed to have the best stories of all the things Black Hat hadn’t been around to witness. All in all, not a terrible way to spend his time. Especially up on the third floor where it wasn’t as noisy or obnoxiously crowded.

He was wondering, though, in the back of his mind, just a passing thought, nothing more, what Flug was up to. He wasn’t a social person by any means. Black Hat was fairly certain that the he and Dem were about the only people here he really spoke to outside of school. Well, the other members of his club were here, somewhere, assuming that they even came, so maybe he’d find them and they’d all spend a few hours huddled away being antisocial together.

Unlike Black Hat, who was kind of forced to be social. Not that it wasn’t entertaining, but there wasn’t much substance. Just dumb fun. Made sense that these were people Dem knew. Their names all blurred together, he just remembered Marco because he was the one who was drawing everyone in. He was funny, the downside was that there didn’t seem to be much else to him. Same for everyone, in a disappointing sort of way. They seemed to just be ordinary students at a party having fun. Which admittedly is what Dem probably seemed to them as well but Black Hat was still
watching her closely. And he was starting to see something.

He saw restraint.

Sure, she seemed as relaxed and carefree as much as the next young woman, but Black Hat could see the very subtle tell-tale signs that she was holding something back. The laugh that was done more because it was appropriate to laugh rather than because something had been funny. The responses so flowing but so...automatic. Like they’d been rehearsed. Even her posture, if seemed she was clinging to Black Hat not strictly because she wanted to, but because it was what was expected when you come to a party with a guy you like.

Felt like she was putting on a show. Being in the moment, but not exactly there.

He wondered what it was she needed to hide from her supposed friends.

He couldn’t wonder about it for too long though, because someone (her name might’ve been Dolores) screamed in her drunken stupor that they should all go swimming and everyone else seemed to think it was a great idea. For a bunch of drunken idiots to go down two flights of stairs and stumble their way outside. As amusing as it was watching these morons try and stumble their way towards the stairs (Oh please knock each other down like dominos), he had no interest in joining them.

Dem, however, was adamant that they go down with everyone else.

“Yeah, no, I’m not going swimming.” He said in a monotone voice.

“Why not?”

“No.”

“That’s not a reason!” She pouted.

“It’s a refusal.”

“Well I refuse your refusal!” She said, placing her hands on her hips.

“I refuse your refusal of my refusal.”

“Well then I refuse your refusal of my refusal of your refusal!”

“Ok I lost all sense of where to go from that, but my answer is still no.” Black Hat took one of the not empty shot glasses laying around and downed it. Oh damn, whoever was mixing the drinks knew their shit because that was strong.
“I just realized,” Dem said with a wicked grin. “I’ve never seen you without your hat.”

Black Hat grabbed his hat with both hands. “Don’t you even fucking try.”

“Oh what, is it your favorite out of all 30 of your identical top hats?”

“No, it’s my only one.” He said with a narrowed eye. And he’d already had Flug mess it up once, he didn’t need this loon putting her grubby hands all over it!

“Ugh, fine.” She rolled her eyes. “Keep the hat on but let’s go!” She tried pulling him up again. Well, she got him up but he still wasn’t going. What, was she going to try and get him in the pool with his hat still on? No way in HELL!

“Hey, I’d respect your no.” he said, still resisting the insane woman.

“I am respecting your no. You can leave your hat on if you really want but everything else has to go!”

“No, I refuse that as well.”

“Why not!? And give me a reason this time!”

“I can’t swim.” He lied.

“Oh.” Dem stopped trying to drag him for a second. “Well, just stay in the shallow end, you’ll be fine! Or, I could teach you.” She smiled seductively. It had no effect.

“Dem, I’m not going down there.” He said plainly.

“Oh come on, it’ll be so much fun!”

“You just want to see me naked don’t you?”

“Noooooo, ” She said, fiddling with her hood. Black Hat noticed that she had a spiked scrunchie holding her ponytail back. “But, you know, it’d be such a shame to get such expensive looking clothes wet.”

“I know. That’s why I’m not going.”

“Oh for the fucks sake Black Hat why wont you do this!?” She said in an actual angry tone this time. Damn, where did this girl get off? “Do you have some body image problems or something?”

“What makes you say that?” He said, a bit offended. And not willing to admit to how true it may or may not be.

“Because you won’t do this.” she hissed. “What, are you self conscious? Worried about what everyone else would say behind your back?”

“You really think I give a damn at all what anyone else thinks of me?” He replied in a bored voice.
“Nope.” She said with a shake of her head and a swish of her hair. Goddamn, you could make a whip out of that. “Which is what I don’t understand. If you don’t care, what do you have to hide?”

“What do you?”

“Wh-what are you talking about?” She asked with a rather forced, carefree-sounding laugh.

Black Hat got close enough to whisper in her ear. “You’ve been holding something back all night. I don’t know what it is, but I can see you’re struggling to keep it under wraps. You’re trying so very hard to make sure no one else sees anything but some dumb punk girl who doesn’t care about anything besides having a good time. Congratulations, you’ve got everyone else fooled. I really don’t think a single other person has caught on. So what is it? What is it that you have to keep from your supposed friends?”

Dem was silent for a beat before responding. Her voice was shaky. “You don’t know me half as well as you think you do.”

“Yeah, I guess if you ignore all that stuff you told me about your family and your high school troubles and your dreams of being a musician, I barely know you at all.” Black Hat said. “But I can see you.”

“Oh yeah? And what do you see?”

“The same tells I had until I got called out on them enough times to hide them better.”

“And what is it you’re hiding?”

“I asked you first.”

“Uh, no you didn’t. I did.”

“Mmmm, no, I’m pretty sure it was me.” Black Hat said.

“Oh ho ho, no. It was definitely me who asked you first.” She said, getting back into her usual attitude.

“I don’t know, I think I’d remember that.”

“Well I remember it, and I remember that I asked you first.”

“Are you sure you’re remembering that right?”

“Are you, after all the shots you’ve had? You know you’re the designated driver, right?”

“It’s a party. I came here to party.”

“So you’ll get undressed? Cool! Let me help!” She began pulling at the sleeves of his trenchcoat.

“No no no. I did not consent to this, no.” He protested blandly. Maybe he was a little drunk, he wasn’t fighting her off as much as he could be. She actually did get the coat off. “I’m not taking off
my clothes.”

“Why not?”

“I have this thing, where I don’t get naked in front of crowds of complete strangers.” He replied hotly. “Do I look like a stripper to you?”

“Nah, more like a male escort. High end, you know? The kind that cost you thousands.”

Ok Black Hat didn’t care if she meant that as a compliment, she basically just said he looked like a hooker and that would not stand.

“Give me back my goddamn coat.” He said in an extremely annoyed tone.

“No way, not unless you can give a legit reason why you won’t do this with me.”

“I’m not interested in you and I don’t want to take my shirt off.” He said, getting angrier. He was trying to stay calm, trying not to cause a scene, but damn this woman was testing him.

“In me specifically or any women at all?”

“Mainly you.”

“You are so fucking rude!”

“ I’m being rude?! You want to talk about rude?! You’re the one trying to strip me against my will!”

“C’mon, it’ll be great! If it’ll make you feel better I’ll start right now~” She unzipped her dark blue vest, revealing a white tank top. Black Hat could vaguely see that her bra was a neon pink sort of color.

Was she always wearing a spiked choker?


“Oh, I don’t think so,” She slipped the black garment over her shoulders, only for it to slip off to one side. “I think it looks better on me.” She struck some ridiculous pose.

Black Hat shot her his patented I’m not fucking around with you anymore glare, and she just sighed dramatically. Really, was that all the reaction he was going to get? Usually people were afraid, they shook in their shoes, their eyes went wide and they fumbled to comply with whatever it was he wanted. Hell, a few of the people around the two of them were starting to back away, like they expected things to get physical.

Was he losing his edge? Or was she just stupid?
It seemed that she would be returning his coat though, until a voice from somewhere behind Black Hat spoke up and made her freeze in place, her eyes zooming in on whoever had spoken.

“Demencia?” The voice said. “Is that...is that Demencia?”

Black Hat silently took note that her hands had slightly twitched, before turning and seeing who was talking.

It was...some guy. He was kind of short, average build, stupid haircut, dark tan. He was with that guy from before, the one who was throwing this little get together. Leo-something. No, that wasn’t quite right...

“R...Rufio.” She managed to get out. Her breathing was getting shallow, Black Hat noticed. And she rushed to zip her vest back up.

“So, is this the latest guy you’re throwing yourself at Demencia?” Rufio asked in a mocking tone.

Black Hat was confused. Demencia? He might not remember what Dem’s full name was, but he was sure it wasn’t Demencia. If he wasn’t mistaken, “demencia” referred to a mental illness, usually one characterized by memory loss or impaired judgement/thinking skills.

He looked between the both of them, hoping someone would clue him in.

Dem wasn’t really speaking, she was still frozen in what seemed to be immense shock. Her hands still twitched ever so slightly, and she was trying to get words out, but they seemed to get stuck in her throat.

So Rufio turned to him. “Let me give you some advice, buddy; Get out now. This one goes through men like a snake in a hen house. She’ll be on another guy in a week. Oh wait, more like under!” He laughed at his own joke. Which was both pathetic, and not at all funny.

He raised an eyebrow at Dem, who cringed and tried to hide under his coat, pulling it around her tighter and hoisting it up her shoulders. It wasn’t staying, not with her hands shaking so badly.

“Is that your coat?” Oh, yeah, this guys name was Aurelio. He was pointing at Dem.

“Yeah,” Black Hat said with a shrug. “Looks better on her anyways.”
“Heh, you could stick trash on her and she’d look better than she does in her torn up old raggedy-ass shit!” Dem visibly shook now, hiding her face in the upturned collar of the coat. Her hands were twitching even more noticeably now. Not that Black Hat was at all concerned. It wasn’t like he really cared at all about her.

Still, this was rather confusing. Dem didn’t strike him as the type to just stand there and take abuse like this from...whoever this guy was. Someone from her high school?

Wait, was she crying? She was starting to tremble and her breathing was very uneven.

“Rufio, would you grow the fuck up?” Aurelio said, not sounding like he really cared about what he was doing either, just bored.

“Aw, c’mon Lio, it’s not like Demencia can’t take a joke! Ain’t that right, Dem?”

And then she exploded. She lashed out and was on him so fast Black Hat could’ve sworn he actually missed the impact itself when he blinked. Dem had one hand on Rufio’s throat and the other lifted up above her head. Her face was the image of unbridled rage.

“MY-” She punched him in the face. “-NAME-” Punch. “-IS-” Punch. “DEMETRA!”

She got right in his face and screamed “And you don’t get to call me Dem!”

Rufio screamed like she’d hit him again or something, and then Demetra just ran off. Leaving Black Hat coatless, and dumbfounded. He felt like he’d just witnessed a meltdown a long time coming, but he had no idea what led up to it or what about this particular time had broken her down and made her snap.

Aurelio didn’t even help his friend up, he just ran after her.

Rufio pulled himself up rubbing the side of his face. He drew his hand back, revealing blood and a few slim gashes across his cheek.

“That...that fucking bitch!” He yelled. Everyone just kind of went back to what they were doing before. “She fucking scratched me! That little whor-”

He was interrupted by Black Hat’s fist colliding with his face. The guy went down immediately, but Black Hat had no intention of leaving it at that.
Black Hat took a minute to examine his face first. He was surprised to see just how deeply Demetra had been able to cut him with just her bare fingernails. Now, she was deceptively strong, but Black Hat wasn’t convinced that brute strength alone would be enough to slice someone’s cheek open this cleanly. She had actually managed to slice a few thin slits in the side of the man’s face. Nice, straight cuts, not jagged like one might expect. She had not scratched him, she had clawed him.

Very interesting.

The man (Rufio, wasn’t it?), opened his eyes hazily. Black Hat rather harshly grabbed him by the throat. He barely responded.

Black Hat punched him in the face again. His head knocked into the solid wood floor and his eyes rolled into the back of his head. Black Hat hit him again, and his nose made a sick cracking sound. As well as bent at a funny angle.

Black Hat continued to beat him until he was lying unconscious in a small pool of his own blood.

Was he holding back? Oh so very much.

Did it make for a decent enough show? Yeah, probably. It would be satisfactory enough for all the witnesses, gave them something to talk about.

Black Hat picked Rufio up by the collar of his shirt and tossed him off into the corner somewhere. Hey, he was nothing if not considerate. Rufio would interrupt everyone else’s good time if he was just sprawled out in the middle of the floor. It would be a trip hazard. And with all the booze going around, no one needed anymore of those, funny as it would be to watch them stumble around his limp body.

He couldn’t stay for that, he had to go find Demetra now. Lord knew that after what he just saw, he wasn’t forgetting her name any time soon. Find Demetra, get his coat, and perhaps some kind of explanation. He very calmly exited the room and just managed to catch her bolting down to the second floor, followed by Aurelio.

Well, after what his buddy Rufio did, Black Hat liked this Aurelio even less. Black Hat at least had the excuse of being confused and having no idea what the situation between Rufio and Demetra was, and he beat the guy to a stain on the floor anyway. What was Aurelio’s defense?

He followed after them fast as he could, pushing and shoving his way through the people in the halls. One hand on his hat to ensure it didn’t fall off or get caught on anything. Once down the stairs, he looked around and didn’t see either of them. Ugh, it should not be this hard to spot a woman with bright green hair as long as she was tall, and wearing his coat. Or to just spot the guy half the school was fawning over. Seriously, Black Hat could understand that he was very attractive, but it escaped him why so many people seemed to want to bend over backwards for him. Was he missing something? Was there something to the man that Black Hat just wasn’t seeing?
Oh wait, there he was! So Demetra had probably gone this way! Black Hat ran down the hall, just in time to be hit by the scent of recreational drugs and pass by the group of people who’d been smoking them. He passed by Aurelio, he noticed. Fine by him, meant he had a better chance of catching up to her first.

He figured that maybe she had run into one of these rooms, but damn, would these people never get out of the way?! He was going to start shoving people to the ground if need be! It was such a chore to have to go through every room one by one trying to find her.

In one, however, he found someone surprisingly familiar.

“Phoenix?” He asked in confusion.

The petite redhead waved off whoever she had been talking to and approached him. Yeah, that was her. There was no mistaking that caramel skin and vibrant red curls. Even if he was used to seeing them tied back in a long braid.

“Hey Black Hat. Try not to use that name in public. Call me Phoebe.”

“Oh, ok. What are you doing here?” He responded back in her native tongue of english.

“Looking for you,” She said simply. “Dr. Morte has a message.”

Oh fuck what did he want now? Black Hat liked the guy, and owed him a lot, but Black Hat could never tell what his motives were until he’d already gotten what he wanted from him. And he’d gotten...some things that Black Hat would’ve rather kept to himself. Which made being around him extremely nerve-wracking because Morte, while being sort of nice, was also about 1,000 years old and incredibly bored. The only reason he didn’t just allow himself to wither away to dust was his passion for bringing misfortune to others.

And that was not limited to heroes or civilians.

“What is it?” He hesitantly asked.

“He wants to know if you’re coming to his birthday party.”

Black Hat’s face scrunched up in confusion. “That’s in April.”

“Yes. He wants to know if you’re coming.”

“...It’s November.”
“Your point?”

Black Hat sighed. She was as impassive as ever. “Yeah, I’ll be there.”

“Oh good.” Phoenix took out a small pad and pen. “Have you found someone willing to sell you their soul yet?”

“Yes actually.”

“Cool, usually that takes longer. Will they be attending as well?”

Black Hat thought about it. On the one hand, Dr. Morte was kind of an ass who would take every given opportunity to amuse himself at the expense of others. Including his own staff and guests. On the other, Dr. Morte was a very sophisticated and accomplished villain and pulled out all the stops for his birthday. Black Hat had been to his birthday party once before, and it was a night he often looked back fondly on.

Hey, it would technically be Flug’s first villain-gathering! Could he really ask for a better opportunity to impress him with all the side of evil had to offer? Hey, Maestro would surely be there! She’d never pass up an opportunity to show off! Syren too! Blade might show, if he was around. He wondered if the Nightmare Demon would make an appearance. Oh, so many possible partygoers!

It’d be a terrific chance to get Flug acquainted with their future clientele.

“Yes.” He finally said.

“Ok cool, Black Hat plus one. That’s all I really came here for.” Phoenix put the notepad and pen back in her pockets.

“You couldn’t have just called me?”

“You know the doctor. Still so old fashioned after all these years.” She took a second look at him. “You know, you look like Lucifer’s bartender without your coat.”

Black Hat ignored the comment. “Speaking of my coat, did you see a woman with bright red and green hair come through here wearing it?”

“Try the third door to your right.”

“Thank you Phoen...Phoebe.”

“See you at the party.” She called as he left.

Well, that had been unexpected. But hey, now he had something to look forward to in a few months. He was going to have to update his calendar-

He ran smack into Demetra in the hall.
“There you are! What was all that? Who was that guy? Why’d you just run off like that? Why was he calling you...” Black Hat trailed off as she just stared up at him, tears welling up in her mismatched eyes. She was clinging his trench coat around her body like a security blanket.

Greeeeeeeeeat...

With a sigh, he put an arm around her and walked her down to the first floor. He led her to the backyard and they sat down together a few feet away from the pool, neither of them speaking yet.

He thought perhaps he should leave her alone, let her get it all out (whatever it was exactly), but she reached out and grabbed him tightly by the arm.

“Can you just...can you just stay with me, for a while?” She asked, still huddled up pathetically in his coat.

“Sure, I’ll stay with you.” Black Hat said, a bit annoyed that he had to console this lunatic. But, she was in a very vulnerable state right now. He could possibly use that to get her to divulge a bit more about herself. Maybe get closer to finding out what it was she was hiding from everyone else. He begrudgingly adjusted his coat so that it wasn’t sliding off her shoulders every five seconds. Besides a few sniffles here and there, it seemed she was calming down.

Not really knowing how else to get something resembling a conversation started, Black Hat said, “I want that coat back eventually.”

Demetra barked out some shaky laughter. “Yeah, yeah, sure. You and your coat fetish.”

They were silence for a little while until Demetra spoke again. “You want to know what that was all about, don’t you?”

“It’d be nice to know what I knocked that guy out for, yes.”

She stared at him in shock. “Y...you-”

“Beat the guy who called you a whore to a bloody, bleeding pulp? Yeah. What of it? You did a decent number on him too, you know.” He gave her a mad grin. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone leave cuts that clean with just their fingernails.”

He noticed that she quickly hid her hands. Hmmm...
“I, uh, I went to high school with that guy.” She said, looking away. “He, and a few of his friends, used to pick on me. A lot.”

“Was that the first time you fought back?”

“Against him, yeah. It’s stupid, but...well...” she searched for the right words. “It’s like...I’ve wanted to beat Rufio into the dirt for so long. But every time before, I stopped myself and just let it happen until they got bored and left. I was always told that’s what you’re ‘supposed to do’ when someone picks on you. Just ignore it and they’ll stop. Guess what never happened?”

She fixed him with the saddest smile he’d ever seen on her.

“I fought back in primary and middle school, it always just landed me in more trouble. Eventually I guess it just wasn’t worth it to have my classmates and my family treating me like shit. Just easier to let it happen and move on. Especially when all it is is just words. See, the whole ‘Demencia’ thing started back in school. Even back then I was a freak who didn’t fit in with anyone.” She offered a bitter smile. “And I guess ‘Demencia’ was a more latin name than ‘Demetra’ so, it just stuck. Heh, I swear, one of the teachers slipped up and called me that once.”

Black Hat said nothing, but he felt a scowl coming.

“And...I’m used to being called crazy. And weird. And a whole bunch of other things.” She gave an involuntary shudder and wrapped Black Hat’s coat around herself tighter. “They made fun of me for anything. Even the few normal things I liked. Like I wasn’t allowed to have any normal things. There was always some way they’d twist them around to make it more weird things to make fun of me for. Or say I was just pretending to like them. But, when he called me ‘Dem’...I don’t know. I just had enough. It was one thing I wasn’t going to let him twist around this time.”

Black Hat laughed a bit. “I wished I hit him sooner.”

“I wish I had stuck around to see that.”

“Well, you got me down here. Can that be enough right now?”

She chuckled and leaned against him, resting her head on his shoulder. “Take off your shirt and we’ll call it even.”

“Call what even? What did you do for me?”

“I got you down here.”

“I didn’t want to come.”

“You’re smiling.”

“Shut up.” He said as he faced away.
He felt something being wrapped around his shoulders. He looked down and saw his coat haphazardly back on him. He slipped his arms through the sleeves and decided that one revelation deserved another. It would put her more at ease and coax her into speaking plainly with him again. That was all there was to it.

Even if he was meeting her autobiography with a footnote.

“Look, uh, the real reason I don’t want to take anything off is...” He rubbed the back of his head awkwardly. “I have a lot of scars and I don’t like to show those off. Or really talk about them at all.”

She frowned. “Flug has scars. No one gives him shit for it.”

“I have...more.” He said, without his usual confidence. He wasn’t lying, he really didn’t like talking about them. He didn’t like them. And unlike Flug, who could explain his scars quite simply as being from a plane crash and leaving it at that, Black Hat...couldn’t. There were things lining his body that just couldn’t be explained away so easily. Black Hat much rathered keeping them all under wraps.

“What from?”

“Didn’t I just say I don’t want to talk about it?” He said angrily.

“Sheesh, ok ok!” She put her hands up. “Sorry for showing an interest in your life!”

They spent a few more moments sitting in silence.

“But thank you for telling me.” She said.

“...Whatever.”

“For the record, scars are a major turn on.”

“Why don’t you ever flirt with Flug then?”

“Pretty sure I’m not his type.” She said with a knowing smile. “And I tried once, I think it went right over his head.”

“What makes you think you’re my type?”

“Nothing.” Demetra said simply. “But damn if I don’t shoot my shot before Flugsy steals you away for good.” She latched onto his arm, much more naturally than she had before. That smile was genuine. Her little laughs weren’t forced anymore.

She looked much better to him now.
“Demetra!” Called a voice behind them. They turned and it was one of the guys from before. Not Marco, someone else. Tony? Terry? Black Hat was pretty sure it started with a “T”.

“We got your song all queued up girl! You up for it?”

“Oh yeah I’m there!” Demetra jumped up and ran to the patio where all the sound equipment was. Was she going to sing? Could she sing? Black Hat got up and moved closer, so that he had a good view of whatever it was she’d be doing.

♪ It was a Friday night and I wanted to go out to ♪

Oh god, Club Villain. Black Hat knew this song. Hell, the year it had come out it had been nearly inescapable! Most of the major radio stations refused to play it, on account of all the controversy and protest from concerned parents, but the ones that would to capitalize on the shock value and appeal to young, impressionable, rebellious 16-25 year-olds played it on repeat almost indefinitely.

Seriously, you just couldn’t get away from it! All these kids were either calling in demanding to hear it, or downloading it themselves and blasting it for the rest of traffic to suffer through. Singing along and acting like it made them actual villains. When it reality, if any of them so much as saw what an actual villain get together was like, they’d scream for their lives and run in terror. They had no idea what an actual villain party was like! No matter the caliber, high or low class, blood would be shed!

♪ He waved us in, and we randomly met the Mr. Hannibal Lecter, he was handlin’ records In the DJ booth asking which was the best selection To make an impression on the Wicked Witch of the West and the Witch was ♪

Honestly, even when it was between cordial acquaintances, it was understood that not everyone was making it home. If not, it would be considered a dull affair. Be it either the nights entertainment or a squabble that couldn’t wait, someone was dying. It made for good stories to tell at the next get together. Black Hat would always remember his first evening out, how the ballroom had been splattered like a morbid Jackson Pollock and he and the rest of the survivors had laughed. And then finished off the rest of those little sausage things. Damn those were good.

And boy oh boy was he looking forward to what would go down at Dr. Morte’s birthday party. Morte could do some incredible things, when prompted.

Black Hat hadn’t even really disliked the song the first time he heard it. It was... okay. Nothing special but nothing that really appealed to him as an adult. Nothing to get worked up about either. It
was just a song. But he just heard it over and over and over and it was just everywhere it was just too much. It was oversaturated and it got stuck in his head and he was immensely embarrassed by the fact that had this song come out years ago, he’d probably be one of these annoying brats, trying to impress their friends and just trying so very hard to be “edgy”. Oh god his face screwed up in horror just thinking about it.

♫ Catwoman and Harley Quinn I swear I saw those hoes kiss

I laughed at Jason Voorhees rockin’ glowsticks

And Dr. Octopus was also gettin’ physical with Ursula

The two were makin’ out and touching tentacles ♫

Admittedly though, Demetra was not a terrible singer. Nor was she bad at performing. She had mentioned that it had been her dream to be a musician, and that she had taught herself to play the guitar. Had she taught herself to sing as well? Had she focused intently on the tv, memorizing the way singers moved and motioned and practiced doing the same? Had she spent nights watching herself in the mirror, copying the moves and poses until she liked what she saw?

She had some actual stage presence. Her long flowing hair making her a spectacle that was embraced by her asymmetrical outfit and only further shone from her personality.

It was a shame that “Demencia” held such bad memories for her, otherwise Black Hat would suggest she use it as her stage name. It would be rather fitting for for her.

♫ I looked up and saw Venom doing Jager Bombs on the ceiling ♫

Black Hat shook his head. He really shouldn’t be getting as into her performance as he was. He shouldn’t be smiling as he watched her get the party pumping and singing along. This song was just some wannabe kids fantasy of what a life of crime was like. Some pipe dream of villainy. Completely unrealistic. Unfounded. Utterly ridiculous. Pure nonsensical daydreaming.

But god dammit, Demetra made it seem like she herself was living out the dream and everyone here wanted to follow her lead. Like they’d all followed her back inside. The girl could lead a crowd, who’d of thought.

Black Hat turned his head and- HEy was that Flug? And...Aurelio?

♫ That’s when I saw her there, from across the room

Poison Ivy doing Jello shots with Dr. Doom

Like the Eye of Sauron, I couldn’t look away
Black Hat tried to catch Flug’s eye, but the man wasn’t looking at him. He was watching Demetra, too wrapped up in the show to notice him. Meanwhile, Aurelio was getting them more drinks and-

And did he just put something in one of the cups?

Shit.

SHiT.

Goddamnit Black Hat didn’t like the way Flug was slumped over on Aurelio like that. He didn’t like it one bit. Fuck. It didn’t seem like he could stand on his own. Fuuuuuuuuuck.

Well shit. He was gonna have to go over there and slap a bitch up.

Get the fuck out of Black Hat’s way peoples, shit’s going down.

Pushed Elmer Fudd out the way, so that I could get closer, and

I don’t mean to be a Predator, but I gotta get at her

Wait, was Aurelio trying to take Flug somewhere? Um, ha ha, nooooo I don’t think so motherfucker. The only place that boy is going is home. Which you don’t know where that is so there.

Yeah Black Hat might’ve been a little drunk. Fuck those shot glasses and their tiny portions.

I took her home, and she and I spent the night chillin’

Up in the bedroom partyin’ with one hot-ass villain

Black Hat approached, said nothing, and smacked Aurelio across the face. The fiend unhanded the villains subordinate and stepped back with a rather shocked look on his face. Which Black Hat paid no mind to as he tried to see if Flug was capable of supporting himself.

“Flug. Flug!” He called, shaking the man slightly. “Can you stand?”
The man struggled to open his eyes, squinting through his horn-rimmed frames at the world. A bit of recognition seemed to come into his eyes the longer he looked at Black Hat, and he might’ve tried to say something. He reached out as if to touch Black Hat’s face, until he collapsed forward.

“Ok, so, that’s a no.” Black Hat said to himself, holding the smaller man against him so he didn’t crash onto the floor. What a pain. He leaves the guy alone for a few short hours and look what happens!

“What the hell?” Aurelio said, very agitated.

Black Hat completely ignored him and started making his way towards the door. If anything, he should be the one asking him that! Thankfully Flug was very light and pretty easy to carry. The position wasn’t the best, his feet were dragging, but with everyone so transfixed on Demetra the danger of Flug being trampled on was acceptably low.

“Hey, I’m talking to you!”

Black Hat continued ignoring him. He had more important things to deal with right now. The man could wait until Black Hat took care of Flug.

“Where are you taking him?” Aurelio asked angrily, grabbing a hold of Flug. Black Hat fought the urge to glare at him and scream that he was taking him away from the man who just drugged him. And subsequently punch said man through a wall. Then through the floor. Assuming there was anything left to punch.

“Home, obviously.” He said calmly, rolling his eye. “I really thought he’d learned his limit after how drunk he got when we went out. He’s such a lightweight.”

Aurelio chuckled a bit. “Yeah, so I see. It’s really not necessary for you to cut your own evening short just for him. I was about to put him in one of the upstairs rooms myself. It’d really be no trouble for him to crash for the night.”

*And what would you do to him once you got him upstairs and away from prying eyes?* Black Hat thought. *What were you planning on doing while he was drugged up and in your house?*

“It’s no trouble for me to just take him home.” Black Hat countered. “I’m sure he wouldn’t want to impose.”
“Oh it’s no imposition. Truthfully.”

“He’d be really uncomfortable putting you out like that.”

“It’d be fine.” The pleasantries were quickly dying down and the two men were beginning to let their true colors show. Black Hat fought to keep his responses short and to the point. Who knew what he’d say if he spoke for too long.

“No I think I should just take him home.”

“Really, he can stay.” Aurelio said, his frustration bleeding out.

“He wouldn’t want that.”

“And you know what he’d want?”

“Probably a bit better than you would.” Black Hat said. “Or else you’d know he hardly ever goes out and had to basically force himself to come here tonight. And he only did because it was you that invited him. Tomorrow, he’s going to be so embarrassed that he made a fool of himself in front of you, why not spare him the shame of having to wake up and realize he also spent the night in your home? Why make him feel like a burden? He does that enough to himself, he doesn’t need you adding to the weight he carries.”

Aurelio tried to come up with some kind of counter argument, but was at a loss. It was evident on his face that everything Black Hat had just said left him with nothing. Even if it wasn’t any trouble to put Flug up for the night (Black Hat wasn’t convinced at all that was all he had in mind), the man himself would never want to. Especially not after he (as far as he knew) got blackout drunk right in front of this guy. Whoever he was, Flug held him in high regard for some reason. Black Hat didn’t have to know why to be able to piece together that waking up in the man’s home would be a situation he wouldn’t be able to handle very well. Leaving out the drugging, Black Hat had a decent enough idea of how he’d react, and it wouldn’t be good for his underling’s health.

As part of the contract, Black Hat had agreed that he would protect his subordinate. He wondered vaguely if Flug had realized that was part of the deal. If he had read that part when the two of them went over it and understood what it meant. They hadn’t talked about it exactly. It seemed to Black Hat as something that went without saying, that he would protect what was his. It was in the contract because he believed himself fully capable of taking care of his mad scientist. If he couldn’t even look after him here, how was he supposed to keep him alive and working and pumping out machines of war in the future?

Flug was going home and that was final.

“Black Hat! Black Hat!” A high pitched voice called. He and Aurelio turned to see Demetra making her way through the crowd towards them. Her face fell when she saw Aurelio and how close he was to the two of them. Her gaze fell to Flug, still slumped in Black Hat’s arms. “What’s, what’s going on?” She panted.

“Flug is passed out” He said. “I’m taking him home.”
“Really, it’s no trouble for him to stay in one of-”

“No!” Demetra yelled, surprising both men. “I mean, he wouldn’t want you to go out of your way like that. He really should just go home. Besides, you should never leave a person passed out at a party. You never know what could happen to them.” She seemed to stare very intensely at Black Hat at those last few words. Like she was trying to send him a psychic message or something.

“Dem, would you mind cutting the evening short?” Black Hat asked. “I feel a bit partied out myself.”

“Oh count me in! This party was a bore anyway!” She said enthusiastically. “You need any help with him?”

Before Black Hat could say yes, or she could just grab him, Aurelio butted in with a “Please allow me.” Black Hat locked eyes with Demetra, and it seemed neither of them liked Aurelio being close to Flug like this. Touching him. Black Hat made a mental note to ask what turned her off from the man, she seemed just as starstruck as anyone else when they’d all met.

Aurelio “helped” to carry Flug out of the house and to Black Hat’s car. Aurelio gave him an annoyed kind of look, maybe because he parked on the grass, but didn’t say anything about it. They put Flug in the backseat and Demetra crawled in with him, to hold him steady she said. She sat there with Flug’s head in her lap, holding him almost protectively. Black Hat didn’t fully get it, but he trusted her far more than he did the man next to him.

That being said…

“Well, thank you for your help,” He said, trying not to gag on his words. “We can take it from here. So off you go, back to your party. Good night.”

“Are you sure?” He asked. “I’d be happy to come along and see him home.”

“Yes, very sure. Totally sure.” Demetra called from inside the car. “You can go now, he’s with friends.”

Hmm, friends. An interesting concept to be sure. Black Hat would go along with it for convenience.

“Yes, friends.” He said. “Besides, do you really want to leave your own party just for him?”

“Well, it’s more for him actually. Him and all the rest of the Engineering Club members. To celebrate how well today’s demonstration went.”

“How thoughtful of you,” Black Hat said, not even bothering to mask the disgust and sarcasm in his voice.
“You got a problem, hermano?” Aurelio got right up in Black Hat’s face.

**Bitch I might** is what Black Hat would’ve said, had Dem not butted in with, “Yeah, actually, I do. Flug’s getting kind of restless back here and I think it’s all this not-at-all-subtle fighting over him the two of you are doing. Can you guys do this later, he can’t swoon right now!”

Black Hat looked in through the corner of his eye. Flug did seem to fidgeting a bit, twitching his head back and forth. Hey, maybe Aurelio used something really weak and he’d wake up in the car. Well away from him. And Black Hat and Demetra could tell him *their* version of the nights events.

Black Hat smirked a bit. Perhaps Aurelio would think it was just in response to Dem’s teasing. Fighting over something that was already his, how silly.

“Well, you heard the lady.” Black Hat said with a grin. “We’d best be off.”

“I-”

“Lio! Lio!” Said an annoying and broken voice. The three conscious ones looked over to the front door and saw that guy Black Hat beat up earlier rushing towards them. He had a hand over one of his eyes and there was still blood running down his face. He also reeked of alcohol.

What was his name again? Rudy?


“Lio, Lio this asshole- GAH!” He screamed and threw his hands up when he saw Black Hat. It made him chuckle a bit.

Aurelio turned to him with fire in his eyes. “You did this?”

“He insulted my friend.” Black Hat said with a shrug.

“So you broke his nose?”

“It’s just the kind of guy I am.”

“Hell yeah!” Demetra yelled from the car. Flug made some kind of grunt.

“Lio, I need to talk to y-you.” Rufio said, keeping his distance from Black Hat and still eyeing him like he thought Black Hat was going to jump him and give him another beating. God Black Hat had missed seeing that fear in people’s eyes. It had been too long.
Aurelio gave him another glare, but walked off to see what his little toady wanted.

Now was their chance. Black Hat got in swiftly and started up the engine. He was out of there within the span of a few seconds.

“Gracias a Dios.” Demetra said from the backseat. “I thought we’d never get away from him.”

Yes, it had been a struggle getting Aurelio to leave. He was so insistent on seeing to Flug. What was up with that? Was there some new development between the two of them that Black Hat had missed?

“He seemed awfully...concerned, didn’t he?” Black Hat asked. “About Flug?”

“Maybe he wanted to make sure Flug kept his mouth shut about what he saw.”

“What?” Black Hat’s ears perked up. This sounded important. He just barely noticed the car coming up in his rearview.

“Ok, so, after...what happened with Rufio, I was running around, looking for somewhere to be alone. I was just throwing doors open, trying to find an empty room. When I didn’t find one, I just kept running. I finally get to someplace that seems empty, and I figure I can just hide in there for a while, maybe cry a little until I can go back out there with everyone, and Aurelio comes in not long after I settle down and curl up in your coat. By the way, your coat is, like, so super comfortable and warm. Can I have one of your least favorites?”

“Demetra, please stay focused.” Black Hat said, flicking his gaze between the road ahead and his rearview mirror. That car made the same turn as he did.

“Yeah yeah ok, alright.” She said. “So, Aurelio comes in, and at first I think he’s trying to help me. He apologizes about Rufio and helps me stand up all gentlemanly, but then I’m frozen and can’t move my body and he starts asking me all these weird questions about you and Flug.”

“Me and Flug?” Black Hat asked. Was...was Aurelio jealous? Was he jealous of how close the two of them seemed to have gotten over the past week or so? Was that what all this was about? What did Demetra mean she couldn’t move?

“Yeah, like, what’s the deal with the two of you, why do he and I hang around you when you’re so weird looking, why do we not have a problem with it, stuff like that. For the record, I think you look terrific. Nose or no nose. I’m sure Flug feels the same.”

Black Hat noticed that Demetra was poking Flug in the face. And he was shifting around trying to make her stop. Was that the same car from before? It was a bit farther away, so it was difficult to tell.

“And then?”
“I guess he didn’t like that?” She said with a shrug. “He didn’t seem happy, and, um...I kept telling him to let me go, to stop moving my body like he was...but he wasn’t stopping.” Demetra seemed very... afraid right now. “He was coming closer, and making me move closer, and...” She trailed off.

Well, now, Black Hat wanted to make what he’d done to Rufio look like a scraped knee. He wanted to put Aurelio in the hospital. Preferably the morgue. He was just a total ass who for some reason seemed to have something against him and was taking it out on his acquaintances. How pathetic. If Aurelio had a problem with Black Hat, he should just take it up with the man himself.

Although he still didn’t fully understand what she meant by Aurelio moving her body.

“So, um, Flug walked in right then.” She continued, gaining a bit of her composure. “And he let me go after that. That’s when I ran into you, heh.”

“And then he drugged Flug.” Black Hat muttered to himself.

“What?”

“And then he went after Flug.” Black Hat said, a little louder. He didn’t want to tell her what he’d seen just yet. He still wasn’t sure how he could best use that little tidbit of information against the man. He would be keeping it to himself for the time being.

“Wait...” She said. “You don’t think that he was going to...?”

“He was trying to take him somewhere when I stopped him.” Black Hat said. “You’re guess is as good as mine as to what he was going to do.”

Demetra cradled Flug’s head closer to her. She looked so worried and concerned for him.

“I just... wanted to get him away from him. Cuz he’s clearly a bad guy. Not like you.” She said. Oh girl, please don’t insult Black Hat like that. He was no saint. He was being “nice” now, but that was just because he had a personal stake in what happened to Flug. The only reason he tolerated Demetra’s presence was that she was mildly entertaining and a bit intriguing. Useful on occasion. He still hadn’t figured out what it was she was hiding, but he was closer. Tonight had surely rocketed him so much closer to the idiot revealing her secrets to him. They truly seemed like they’d be worth the time and effort he put in. And once he’d found that out, if there was nothing else of interest to him, he would cast her aside with extreme ease.

“We might not have done even that.”

“What do you mean?”

“That car has been following us ever since we left Aurelio’s.” He stated.
Demetra whipped her head around to see. Yeah, it was definitely the same one. Which could only mean that Aurelio had jumped in a car and was now following them. Jeez, what was this guy’s problem?

“Son of a bitch!” Demetra cursed. “Black Hat! Shake these losers like a bad case of fleas!”

“Since when do I take orders from you?” He snarled.

“Do you want him following us to Flug’s apartment?” She replied testily.

“Well...no...”

“Then drive, handsome, drive!”

He tried to lose them. He really did. It always seemed that no matter what insane last second turns he made or whatever street he took, they always found them again. Black Hat was tempted to start running street lights, damn the traffic laws, but ultimately didn’t want the added attention. Or have to suffer through Dem whining about it. If she even would. Hell, she might encourage him.

Buuuuut...it may cause unnecessary trouble for him if he was witnessed doing something even so insignificant as running a red light or five. On top of being a bit under the influence. With a guy passed out in the back.

**Uuuuuuuuuugggggghhhhh why was this so needlessly complicated?**

“Screw it, I’m taking him home anyway.” He said.

“What?!” The harpy screeched. “You’re just gonna let him follow us?!”

“He tries anything, I’ll show him first hand how badly I messed up his little cronie.” Black Hat said darkly.

Dem was silent for a full minute before she spoke again. “You know about his Gift, right?”

“No really no.”

She shook her head. “It’s like this; he touches you, and suddenly you can’t move on your own. But he can move you. However he wants. And you can’t do anything about it.”

Oh. So that’s what she meant before. She was being literal.
Well...wasn’t that just fucking dastardly. If he wasn’t starting to loathe this guy so much he might ask him to become his subordinate. There may be something to this Aurelio Cruz guy after all.

“So don’t let him lay a hand on me.” Black Hat said calmly. “Got it.”

“I wouldn’t want to touch him either.”

“Does it work through clothes? Because I’m pretty well covered.” Black Hat said with a raised hand, flexing his gloved fingers.

“I...I don’t know.” Demetra said. “When he did it to me, I think he just held my hand and that was it.” She examined her own gloves. Both the black leather glove on her right hand and the red striped arm warmer on the left had the fingers exposed. “Maybe he needs it to be skin-to-skin to work?”

“Well now, aren’t you glad I kept all my clothes on?”

“Ehh, yes and no.” She said with a smirk.

They were coming up on the block. That car was getting closer. Shit, they mobilize fast. What now?

Not really having a plan besides “Get out, fuck them up if they try anything, get Flug home and get on with his night.” Black Hat parked right outside, asked Demetra if she had a smoke, and leaned against the outside of his car nonchalantly, waiting to see what these pests would do. Were they really going to go so far as to park and get out? What was the plan then? Drag Flug back? Good luck explaining that one.

“At least tell me what it is you’re going to do!” Demetra whined.

He shrugged. “Depends on what they do.”

“So...you have no plan?” She asked, sounding very unimpressed.

“I’ll get him to back off.” He said, taking a long drag. “Just leave it to me.”

That quieter her down. Just in time too, as the Creep Squad was just pulling up. There were four of them present; Aurelio, Rufio, and two guys Black Hat didn’t know. While the Rufio found a place to park, Aurelio and the two unknowns got out in front.

Black Hat blew some smoke and very casually said “Well, you’re persistent.” There wasn’t much malice in it, unless one really looked for it. He could see just under the brim of his hat Aurelio and his buddies giving him dirty looks. “Why exactly are you here? I told you I’d take him home. No need for the escort. Are you here to supervise? Make sure we don’t get up to anything naughty?” He asked with a thin smile.

Black Hat and Aurelio locked eyes, both of them fixing the other with the stare of “Back the fuck off.”
“Hey! So, is anyone actually going to actually get this guy home? Or are you both too busy comparing dick sizes?” Demetra asked from inside the car.

Black Hat cracked a toothy grin as he flicked his cigarette off. “I assume you’re going to want to ‘help’ carry him again?”

“I’d probably be a bit more helpful than she would.” He said pompously.

Black Hat wouldn’t be too sure about that. Regardless, he opened the car door and motioned Dem to bring him out. She gave him a confused look, like What the fuck are you doing???, but complied. As he picked Flug out of her arms he leaned in and whispered “Stay here and make sure no one follows us in.”

As he pulled back she nodded to show she understood. She still had a bit of doubt lingering in her eyes, she didn’t know what he was up to or what his plan was but she wanted to believe that whatever it was he would do, he’d be getting Aurelio to leave their “friend” alone.

Why that involved the two of them taking Flug inside together, she’d never guess.

Black Hat offered a malicious smile, which quickly morphed into something more neutral as he turned to face Aurelio. Black Hat supported Flug on his left side while Aurelio took him from the right. The two of them carried him through the doors, Demetra doing as asked and stalling the two others when they attempted to follow them. Black Hat directed them to the elevator, and instructed Aurelio to hit the button for the third floor.

Flug stirred a bit while in the elevator. He kicked his feet out like he was trying to move or walk. His head lolled unsteadily from side to side, never fully lifting. Black Hat wondered just what it was Aurelio had slipped him. And felt bile rise in his throat at the thought that he was leading the man who drugged his mad scientist to that same scientists home. But, this was most likely his best chance to get the man to leave the both of them be without violence. He really wasn’t in the mood to hold back right now and killing the people around him was a great way to get himself found out as a villain. What would he say, that Aurelio fell down the stairs? And managed to break every bone in his skull somehow? No, couldn’t do that. Black Hat needed to settle this without raising any more hands tonight. His comfort depended on it. Luckily he had just the thing to get this man to take a hike without Black Hat having to do very much at all.

Black Hat was a fan of the old adage, “Show, don’t tell.” He believed that actions were far more convincing than mere words. Anyone can just say something, it’s far more effective to show people instead. That was what had ultimately convinced Flug to join him, after all. He showed him how serious he was. In most instances, what a person does is far more telling than anything they say.

Leading the man to apartment 302, pulling out his keyring, and unlocking the door told a lot without Black Hat having to say hardly anything.

And when words were a necessity, they should be chosen wisely.
“He’s going to be thirsty,” Black Hat said as he flicked on the light. “Why don’t you get a glass of water for him? Kitchen is to the left. Glasses are in the cupboard to the right of the sink.”

Aurelio hesitantly released his hold of Flug and walked with slow steps off in the direction Black Hat said. Like he wasn’t sure Black Hat would be telling the truth. Or perhaps it was that he wasn’t sure if the location of the small kitchenette and it’s drinking glasses was something Black Hat would know in the first place.

“Where are you going?” He asked suspiciously as he noticed Black Hat stealing off with Flug.

“To the bedroom.” He said with a roll of his eye. “Where else? Would you rather I leave him on the couch?”

He huffed and went on his way down the hall, but it did NOT escape his eye how questioning Aurelio looked right now.

Oh this must just be so odd for him! To see Black Hat so well acquainted with Flug’s living space! He’d already been aware that Black Hat knew where Flug lived, and it wouldn’t be unthinkable for Black Hat to know which apartment specifically it was, but to see Black Hat just nonchalantly going, “Kitchen’s that way, bedroom is this way,” must be putting all sorts of ideas in his head! Questions of how often Black Hat had been in here. Why had he been here. What he (and Flug) had been doing in this unsettlingly closed off apartment.

And how familiar Black Hat was with the bedroom.

Although seriously, Flug, did you not think covering every window with old newspaper might come off just a tad bit odd? Could you be anymore obvious that you’re hiding something? Why else would you go to such lengths to ensure your privacy? Black Hat would have to think of a way to work that topic naturally into a conversation somehow, maybe he should see if Flug would object to his coming over tomorrow. He could just pretend that it would be his first time inside and make some remark about it. He’d call him sometime in the early afternoon under the guise of checking up on him and just ask if Flug would mind if he came over. Oh wait, didn’t he have a shift at his part-time job tomorrow afternoon? Perhaps an evening visit would work better.

Black Hat flicked on the light and glanced around the room a bit. It was a bit different being here in person again after peeking in from a computer screen over the last few weeks. As his gaze fell on the desk and laptop, it clicked in his mind where he’d seen Aurelio’s face before. And he felt an even greater rage shoot through his mind and it took some real restraint on his part to gently deposit Flug in his bed and not storm out to rip that bastards head clean off. He removed Flug’s glasses and set them aside in their usual spot on the nightstand with the practiced false calm of a man who regularly shoved down his anger.

Oh, Flug. You fell for a pretty face, did you? A pretty face that sought to steal you away for some nefarious purpose. Damn him, that’s what BLACK HAT was doing! He got to him first, asshole!
No matter. Black Hat would make sure that the aggressively annoying puppeteer was no longer a bother.

Aurelio came in shortly after. As he handed the glass to Black Hat, Black Hat pondered on what he should say here. Should he confront the man now? Or wait and see how Aurelio behaves around both him and Flug after this? Would it be more advantageous to hold off until a later time, where it could potentially be used against him with even higher stakes? In what scenario would the fact that Black Hat saw Aurelio drug Flug be the most incriminating? What would have to happen for it to be something so damaging that Aurelio would have no choice but to do whatever Black Hat wanted to keep it secret?

Perhaps...if Aurelio tried to approach Flug again, it could become more potent. Black Hat didn’t like the thought of this guy trying to put the moves on Flug, and was already brainstorming ways of coaxing Flug to avoid him on his own, but if he had something like this in his back pocket then perhaps he could make the man back off if it came to it.

Black Hat decided that he would hold off on letting Aurelio know he had been witnessed. He wanted to see what the man did from this point, leave him thinking that no one was the wiser to his misdeed. No reason for Black Hat to waste his one bit of leverage so soon in the game. However, there was something burning in Black Hat’s mind that he did want to address.

And maybe he could just act like he only maybe knew about what Aurelio had done to Demetra.

“Dem tells me you’re quite curious about Flug and I.” He said nonchalantly, leaving the refreshing beverage on the nightstand. “About what we are to each other.”

Aurelio averted eye contact. “Yes, well, Flug himself cleared the situation up.”

“Did he now?” What had Flug told him? Shit, he’d been drinking. He hadn’t gone and told him about Black Hat being a villain, did he?!

“Yes. In his own words, the two of you are nothing serious. Just fun.”

Ah, well, he supposed that was accurate. They didn’t have any strong emotional attachment to each other. That one drunken night of passion had been just that; one drunken night of passion. It most definitely had been fun for Black Hat. It made him smirk to know that Flug enjoyed it as well. As much as he could, with what little he remembered.

At least Flug hadn’t went and outed himself as a newly-minted villainous henchmen. Although he might’ve accidentally outed himself as gay. Oh well, there wasn’t much Black Hat could do about that.

Outwardly, he shrugged. “That’s true. It’s not as though I own him or anything.” Although he did. “What’s it to you?”
“Oh, nothing.” Aurelio said coolly. “I was just curious.”

“If you want him, go ahead and make a move. Don’t let me stop you.” He said. Although Black Hat had no intentions of allowing him a fair chance. Black Hat would get to Flug first, and would quickly work on getting him to reject any advances the man may make. Perhaps he’d tell him what he’d seen and let things work out on their own. Although he didn’t like losing the one thing he had on the man so soon, if he was going to tell Flug he should do it quickly. The longer he waited, the less it would be about Aurelio and become more about why Black Hat had kept such a thing secret for so long. Truthfully, the only other thing he could think of at the moment was wooing the man himself. Maybe a better plan would come to him in the morning. As fun as it would be to have Flug’s heart as well as soul wrapped around his finger, it would undoubtedly get messy down the line. Little more than a hassle to maintain.

While stringing him along would be a very evil way to gain his unwavering loyalty in all things, it potentially opened a can of worms Black Hat would rather just not. They had a decent thing going for them so far, why muck it up needlessly? That and Flug himself was maddeningly delicate, in emotional terms at least. He needed to be handled with care. It would be a long con with no guaranteed benefits, and the potential risk of overcomplicating things should they go sour. There was no need to get such trivial things as feelings involved without good reason. If it was going to be just sex, then let it be that. No need for either of them to get overly attached like that and fuck things up for nothing.

“I never said I wanted him.” Aurelio said, a bit defensively. Oh, playing coy, was he? Well, what else would your end goal be, hmm? Were you asking for a friend or something?

Black Hat played with the ends of a few strands of Flug’s hair. “Whatever you say.” He said quietly. He was about to leave and usher Aurelio out with him when Flug’s arm reached out for him. He heard him mumble out one sad-sounding word.

“Quedarse.”

Well, with Aurelio watching him like he was, how could he not? And how could he just leave it at a mere reply?

Black Hat crouched down and cupped Flug’s face in his hands. He lightly kissed him on the forehead and whispered to him, “Sure, I’ll stay with you. Now go to sleep.” In a voice that was just barely audible he added “That’s an order.”

He thought Flug might’ve smiled a bit, but perhaps he was just seeing things. He could see Flug’s body go limp as he drifted off. Black Hat smiled down at him, content that he was out for good.

Don’t worry, Flug. He thought. Your soul is mine. My orders are absolute. You couldn’t disobey me if you tried. You rest easy while I get rid of this piece of filth that dared to come into your home.
Never mind that it had been Black Hat that let it in in the first place.

And it looked *greatly confused* by the display of tender affection. Black Hat couldn’t resist smiling wider at it. He walked past him calmly and put his hand on the lightswitch. “Well, come on,” he prompted. “Do you intend to stay the night and let all those morons leave your home a wreck?”

He chuckled. It sounded completely fake. “They will anyway.” But he got up and left as Black Hat turned out the light.

“*Do you* intend to stay?” He asked him in the living room.

“I was asked to.” Black Hat said simply. His eye fell on the spot where Flug had bled out the night before. Honestly, what *had* he been thinking? He was such an intelligent man, what made him think he should test out his inventions on himself, and alone no less! Black Hat nearly ran over to save his stupid ass (in very fetching white lace), but didn’t. He’d been too transfixed seeing Flug move himself, even though it was clearly with great difficulty and he’d needed to watch for a while to make sure he wasn’t just imagining it. Perhaps his soulless desensitization had played a part in how he was able to accomplish such a feat.

He couldn’t resist texting him out of the blue, just to check that he was indeed ok. He hadn’t put cameras in the bathroom, he wasn’t *that* big of a voyeur. The daring little thing had the nerve to give him half-answers, vague and not entirely untruthful. Black Hat was impressed. Obviously he had no plans to ever tell Black Hat what he’d done (and had no way of knowing that Black Hat had seen him), but he wasn’t outright *lying* to him about it.

It was very intriguing, and Black Hat quickly ended the conversation to ponder on it more freely. His eye traced the open wounds of his future doctor on the screen, thinking how he’d looked on the floor; helpless, powerless, at the mercy of his own machine. Until he wasn’t. He *could* take care of himself.

Aurelio put a hand on Black Hat’s shoulder. The contact irked him, but at least he had some protection against the man’s ability.

“You admitted that there’s nothing really going on between you two. Nothing serious, at least. So what was that in there? Seems you’re more serious about things than you let on.”

Hmm, what explanation to give? How should Black Hat respond to that? Should he say that yes, he is serious? He was, if you looked at it from the perspective of how seriously he wanted the man out of this apartment and out of Flug’s life.

“Maybe I am.” He said, brushing the hand off his shoulder. “Up to Flug if he wants either of us in
end.”

“Yes, it is up to Rocinante.” It wasn’t lost on Black Hat how he’d said Flug’s first name. How smug.

“And, you know, I’m not sure he feels as strongly as you might.”

“And what makes you say that?”

“He seems rather...shy, about those little ‘love marks’ you gave him.”

Oh was he serious? Was that what this was all about? Black Hat left Flug with a neck full of marks and this guy noticed and got jealous? It’d be funny if it weren’t so trite. Would it make him feel better to know that Flug pleasured himself to his pictures fairly often? That he was the object of his fantasies?

Something that would be changing. Count on it.

Black Hat damn near shoved Aurelio out, saying “Oh, by the way, tell Demetra she’ll need another ride home.” Before he slammed the door on him.

Yeah, kind of a dick move on his part. And after she was such a big help, too. Oh well. Perhaps it would make it clear that he just didn’t want her. He swore, he couldn’t tell if she wanted him to date her or Flug. It seemed to change every time he saw her. One day she was gushing over the two of them, the next she was flirting with him. Maybe she was trying to swing for a threesome.

Black Hat mulled over Flug’s disposition. He would probably never agree to something like that. Even if Black Hat did begin seducing him, and succeeded.

Hmph, given how he’d responded to Aurelio, perhaps that was the way he should go about things. Let him think that Black Hat really was after him in that way.

Perhaps he could get Flug to agree to play along, if he couldn’t get his interest genuinely. If all else failed, he could just order Flug to stay away from the nuisance. To hell with what he might think of it. It’d be a challenge to slip it into a normal conversation without revealing the supernatural compulsion he held over him though. Black Hat imagined that Flug would have a...less than thrilled reaction to just how much he was really owned. How much power that contract gave Black Hat over him. Black Hat wanted to see what he could do on just his wits and charm first, see what he could get Flug to do on his own.

Get him to play along...seduce him...Black Hat could feel a devious plan begin to take shape.

It was just a shame he couldn’t plot in the privacy of his own home, where he could let his guard down. Even when the only other person in this apartment was fast asleep, Black Hat didn’t feel fully secure. He hardly ever did when he was around other people, no matter who they were. He felt a large amount of pent up aggression take shape inside him. A dark weight that he wouldn’t be able to shed until he was back in his own space. Or, more accurately, he’d be able to get rid of it once he
He settled in on the couch in the dark living room, his shoes removed, already dreading what his back would be like in the morning. Maybe if he woke up early enough he could stretch himself out. Fully, letting his tentacle-esque protrusions flex a bit. That always relaxed him, letting go for even a few minutes out of the day. They got antsy, if that made any sense when speaking about limbs. They craved to be unleashed. They longed to be free to move.

Black Hat removed his hat and set it on the small coffee table.

Flug would probably want an explanation as to how Black Hat had gotten into his apartment. As well as how he’d gotten there, what had happened at the party, and just how much had he embarrassed himself in front of the man he jerked off to.

Whatever should he tell him?

And when would he let him know that the man he lusted after drugged him?

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Gracias a Dios = Thank God (Spanish)

Quedarse = Stay (Spanish)

And, the song that Demetra/mencia sings in full, Club Villain by Your Favorite Martian
The Morning After

Chapter Summary

Flug wakes up in bed, with very little recollection of how he got there. Luckily Black Hat is there to fill him in. Somehow.

Things happen. They get to talking. One thing leads to another and...well...just keep reading.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Flug awoke with a splitting headache. Oh God, what had he done now? His mind felt fuzzy, his mouth was dry and had some nasty aftertaste of... something ... and he wasn’t sure what exactly was going on.

To take it from the top, his name was Rocinante Flugslys. He was 22 going on 23. He was home, or at least in a bed that smelled familiar. He worked part-time at Radioshack. He was also employed by a super villain with the goal of world domination. He enjoyed wearing female underwear, he also thought he looked pretty good in it but that was beside the point. The room was blanket ed in grayscale, so he most likely didn’t have his glasses on. He felt like shit.

And this scenario felt oddly familiar. Had he awoken feeling terrible before? What had he been doing at the time? He couldn’t really remember what he had done the night before (at least he assumed it was daytime, the room was mildly dim what with the windows covered and only letting in a filtered fraction of the outside light) so perhaps thinking back to something familiar would help.

Well, he once woke up hungover in the middle of nowhere. Shirtless and covered in bite marks from his intimidating and well-dressed evil boss who’s name he couldn’t pronounce. So he called him “Black Hat”, due to his trademark black top hat. Maybe that should be their company logo.

Wait, hadn’t he sold his soul that night? To said villain in permanent formal attire? And did that not rob him of the ability to sleep?

So...how the hell was he waking up from anything?

Sitting up in bed, and once again feeling the world around him spin on a dizzying axis, he was able to confirm that he was in fact at home. In his familiar bedroom in his apartment. He was also still in his jeans and chucks. Odd, it wasn’t like him to just go to bed immediately with all his clothes and
even his shoes still on.

Coughing a bit as Flug tried to rid himself of the feeling of cotton in his mouth, he tried to think back to what he’d done last night.

Ok, he remembered the demonstration Friday afternoon for his Engineering Club. Shaky start but things ended alright. Then Aurelio invited him (everyone, but it included him) to a party at his house to celebrate how well it had gone, and Flug ended up getting dragged along to a college house party because God forbid he was allowed to continue his life as the human equivalent of a hermit crab.

Because no, he had to go out to a party and get drunk. At least, he assumed he had. Why else would he be waking up with a splitting headache with only vague memories past a certain point. He didn’t even remember leaving Aurelio’s house.

Well, he was home now. Safe and sound in bed. The only question was how?

Aaaaaand what were those sounds coming from the other room?

Flug tried to call out in his broken and cracking voice. “H-Hello?” Oh God he sounded horrible.

He heard footsteps growing closer and the door opened to reveal Black Hat, holding a bowl of cereal and eating from it nonchalantly.

“Oh good, you’re awake.” He said, still eating. “You’re almost out of milk, by the way.”

...

Ok, a few questions. First and foremost probably being how in the hell did he get into Flug’s apartment?!!! Second, why was he in Flug’s apartment?!? And just casually eating Lucky Charms like this was their morning routine? Third, what the hell happened last night?!?!

“Wh-what happened? W-why-” Oh that hurt his throat. Black Hat motioned with the spoon and Flug noticed that there was a glass of water on the nightstand, which he quickly drank. It was room temperature but damn did it feel good!

“Well, let’s see, where to begin?” Black Hat asked between spoonfuls. “What’s the last thing you
remember?”

“P-Party.” Flug said, trying to think back to what happened. “I, um...I was drinking with...”

Oh shit he was drinking with Aurelio Cruz. And past that everything was hazy. Holy fuck what had he done after that? Just how much of a fool did he make of himself?!

Flug must’ve look pretty out of it, as Black Hat picked up from there.

“That Aurelio guy, right? You know, Demetra told me something kind of interesting on the drive over here about him. Do you remember anything about what that might’ve been?”

Flug remembered. He shivered thinking back on what might’ve happened if he hadn’t been there. What might’ve happened to Demetra. What Aurelio might’ve done if he hadn’t walked in when he did.

Wait...on the drive over?

“I-Is she here too?”

“No, she stayed downstairs while me and Mr. Perfect carried you up.” Flug noticed a whole lot of sarcasm when he said “Mr. Perfect”.

Did he mean Aurelio? Did he mean to say that he and Aurelio carried him up to his apartment? IS HE SAYING AURELIO WAS IN HIS HOME WHEN HE WAS PASSED OUT?!

Oh and Black Hat was there too. Which brought Flug back to his original question…

“Black Hat?” The man lifted his head from the bowl of oats and marshmallows. “How’d you get in?”

“Mmm.” Black Hat balanced the bowl and spoon in one hand and fished around in his pockets with the other. He pulled out a keyring and held up one key with an evil grin. Although it was difficult to tell without his glasses, Flug was pretty sure that wasn’t his keyring. It didn’t seem to have his plane charm on it.

It took Flug’s addled mind a minute to realize what it was the villain was showing him. When it finally hit him, he groaned and flopped back down on the bed, covering his face.

It was too early for this. Flug had no idea what time it was but it was surely too early for this.
In all honesty, he should’ve expected something like this. Hell, he knew this guy was an evil villain from their first conversation, he shouldn’t really be surprised that he made a copy of his apartment key. If anything he was more concerned with when he did that. When had he so much as had the opportunity? How often had he used it? And for what reason?

Shit did he bug the apartment? If Flug found any cameras in his bedroom he was going to have a nervous breakdown, swear to God.

“Do I even want to know why you have that? Or for how long?” Flug asked, slightly muffled.

Black Hat chuckled into his cereal. Which is to say, Flug’s cereal. “I’m happy to tell you if you really want to know.”

Flug decided he didn’t and peeked through his fingers to see the man put the spoon aside and drink the remaining milk out of the bowl. Jeez, how much milk does he have with his cereal? Flug never had to gulp the rest of his milk down.

“So, after drinking with Aurelio, what else do you remember?” Black Hat asked, sitting down at the foot of the bed casually. Flug noticed that he’d taken his shoes off and was wearing argyle socks with what looked to be little skull patterns. Cute.

“Not much.” Flug said, straining to think back and apply some sort of sense to his garbled memories. “Everything kind of...fades in and out after a point. How drunk did I get?”

“Very, from what I could tell. I tried to just take you home without a fuss, but no. He had to follow along.” Flug could only assume Black Hat was talking about Aurelio. “And then Dem came to make sure you were alright, and apparently Aurelio has lackeys like some cheesy cartoon school bully who just had to come with him, and I count myself lucky that it was just the two of us who actually came up and not the whole damn entourage.”

Black Hat leaned back on the bed and gave Flug an almost threatening grin. “He seemed very concerned about the two of us. Dem said he even asked her about us. Didn’t seem to like what she told him. Now why was that?”

Flug gulped. “I...I don’t know. But he asked me about the same thing. I, uh, I didn’t really know w-what to tell hi-him.”

“Hmmmm, I had to think about it as well.”

“W-what did you say to him?”

“I told him if he was so interested in you he should just make a fucking move.”
Flug snorted. “Y-Yeah, like he’d ever be interested in me.”

“Well, he’s after something. And I doubt it’s me, so what else is there in the realm of possibility?”

Flug wanted to keep laughing. Because Aurelio wanting to go out with him was certainly not in the realm of possibility. The very notion of AURELIO CRUZ showing interest in him was so asinine it was completely ridiculous! No way! Not in a million years! Not if he was the last person on earth would Aurelio Cruz ever be interested in Rocinante Flugslys.

But the more he thought about it, and the more he played back certain interactions between the two of them; when he asked Aurelio to use his Gift on him, Aurelio inviting him to go out, Aurelio inviting him to a party at his house, Aurelio drinking with him, how Aurelio was always calling him by his first name even though everyone else pretty much kept to calling him “Flug”, Aurelio straight up asking about the situation between him and Black Hat. The more he considered it the more it seemed to be that the idea might not be so far fetched after all. Aurelio had been acting rather... interested ...towards him lately...

His mental reaction to this revelation could be summed up in a single reference: Does Not Compute.

What...what was there for Aurelio Cruz, stupidly hot, stupidly popular, stupidly cunning and stupidly loaded, to see in Flug? He had the body type of a twig, half his face was scarred over, he had all the social skills of a house plant, and he had no future aside from the one where he developed weapons of mass destruction. A fact that really didn’t bother him, which was something that actually did bother him a bit. Was he always ok with the prospect of profiting on bloodshed?

“Do you not think he’s attractive?” Black Hat asked out of nowhere.

“W-WHAT!?” Flug nearly screamed. “I-I mean, I mean, y-yeah I, I, um, I d-d-do think he’s at-attract-att- oh Dios mio -attractive!” It really shouldn’t take that much to just get a sentence out. “I d-do think that h-he is. D-Doesn’t ev-every-ry-one?”

“Then why don’t you ask him out or something? Don’t let me stop you.”

“I, uh, I-I d-d-don’t think I co-could ever do s-s-something like that.”

“Oh? Why not?”

“Heh, I can barely t-tal-talk to the guy. Hell, I can ba-barely talk about h-h-him. And I don’t like lots of at-atten-atte- oh for the love of -attention! I don’t like getting a lot of attention. And he, well, he g-ge-gets a l-lot.”

“You can talk to me, for the most part.” Black Hat pointed out with a sly smile. “And we get a few odd stares ourselves, you know.”

“Not as much as he does. Or I would, if I was with him. H-Hell, the few times I have t-talked to him I felt like I was on-on-stage or something.”
“Did you now?”

“Yeah, like, like everyone was just w-w-wa-wa-watching me.” He shuddered at the thought of being so... seen. “I re-really don’t like it.”

“So, then, do you want him to leave you alone?”

“Wh-what?”

Black Hat faced Flug more directly, although he didn’t move from the foot of the small twin bed. “If you’re really not at all interested in pursuing anything with him, wouldn’t it just be easier to tell him to leave you be?”

“I, um,” Black Hat made a fair point. If Flug didn’t want the attention that would come from being close to Aurelio, and if he didn’t want to take the chance that he was in fact interested in him, then he should just say so and tell Aurelio to stop playing with him and back off. “I gue-guess so. Yeah.”

Yeah. Yeah he’d fantasized about him for so long, but he couldn’t really be around him. Everytime he looked his way it made him feel like there was a spotlight on him, that he was being scrutinized and examined. His presence made him a nervous wreck. Well, even more of a nervous wreck. He couldn’t just be himself around him. Hell, before last night Aurelio hadn’t even known Flug was actually gay. Not definitively at least. And Flug didn’t really know for certain which way Aurelio swung, or if he preferred a certain sex, or if he was just experimenting. Surprising, given everything else he knew about him.

Wait...why would Aurelio...?

Wait...had he...had he came out to Aurelio last night? Or was he remembering things wrong? Oh God what had he done?!?

Well now he had no idea what he would say the next time he saw Aurelio! How could he face him at all?! What was he supposed to say? Should he say he was just drunk and that’s why he had said that? Well, Aurelio hadn’t had a problem with it, so should he still try to hide the fact that he was gay? Why was he hiding it at all? Well, he wasn’t hiding, per se. It’s just that it wasn’t really anyone else’s business but his own, so he never talked about it with anyone. Why would he? He never intended to ever get that close with anyone. What did it matter to people he’d never see outside of school? What was he supposed to say about it anyway? He was gay. There. What more was there to it?

“If you can’t get the words out,” Black Hat said, interrupting Flug’s mental collapse. He absentmindedly tapped Flug’s shoes. “Perhaps showing him would be a better alternative?”

“Wh-what do you mean?” Flug asked, a bit worried about whatever this man would suggest he do.
He took his shoes off, more just to have something to do with his hands.

“Well, this apparently all stemmed from those little marks I left on you.” Flug self-consciously rubbed at the fading marks. “I could give you some more. Show him that you’re mine. If he asks, say the situation between us that he was so perturbato by has changed. Say it got serious or something. Gives you an excuse to tell him to back off or turn him down if you want.”

Ok the very idea of Aurelio Cruz asking him out was mind-blowingly ludicrous as it was, but the thought of Flug actually turning him down was just about to make his brain melt in his skull. Why would he ever do that when it was AURELIO CRUZ asking?!

Well, did he actually want him? Flug wasn’t sure if he wanted the actual man, or just the idea of him he’d built up in his head. Logically the better course of action would be to put some distance between the two of them, enough for Aurelio to lose what little interest he maybe had and for Flug to get back to his normal life of not even being a blip on Aurelio’s radar. That’d be better for all of them, wouldn’t it?

“So, what do you think of that?”

“You’re suggesting...” Flug said slowly. “That, you give me more bite marks...so that, so that Aurelio thinks we’re t-together...and, what, we pretend to be in a relationship, basically, to get Aurelio to leave me alone?”

“The Cafe Triste staff would happily confirm it without having to be asked.” Black Hat said with a wry smile.

Flug barked out dry laughter. “Yeah, yeah they would.” It felt to Flug like a very underhanded prank they were pulling, making Aurelio (and everyone else) think he and Black Hat were an item. When in reality apparently neither of them really knew what to call each other in public. “Could be useful too.”

“Oh? For more than just keeping Wannabe Playboy at bay?”

Flug chuckled. Was Black Hat actually jealous? Was that why he was going out of his way to get Aurelio to back off? It was an amusing thought, but some of the things Black Hat did made him wonder. Wonder if Black Hat’s interest in him went farther than just wanting his intellect and scientific capabilities.

“Yes. Acting like we’re, y’know, together would provide decent cover for why we are always, well, together. Can’t very well say that we’re villains, plotting world domination over lattes.” Flug laughed a bit more. Black Hat seemed to find it funny, too. “Why not have the rest of the world see us as a happy couple spending all our free time together, as couples do?”

“Yes,” Black Hat mused. “Yes, why not? I’ve always had a knack for hiding in plain sight. This would be rather devious, pretending to be an unassuming couple when we are in fact planning the demise of the world.” The man grinned evilly, staring off into space. Probably imagining the feeling of pulling another one over the eyes of the mindless average citizens. It brought a bit of a smile to
Flug’s face as well.

“Gives us a decent cover story if we ever need to make anymore weekend trips.”

“Yes, yes this is a truly ingenious idea!” Black Hat gloated, fixing Flug with a mad look in his eye.

“Shall I do it?”

Flug blinked. “Um, d-do it?”

“Shall I bite you again? Give you some hickies maybe?” He asked. “We can come up with whatever stories we want for how we spend our weekends together, but it would really sell it if I continued, well, leaving marks on you.”

“Oh, well, I, um-”

“Flug, we don’t need to have you bruised and battered every week.” Black Hat held up his hand, cutting Flug off. “Just often enough that to anyone observing, we have an ongoing, and I suppose quite passionate, physical relationship. It doesn’t have to go any farther than your neck if you’re not interested in me either. I just suggested it because, while drunk at least, you did seem to enjoy when I did that. So I thought you might be open to the idea of me doing it again.”

Flug’s face flushed. Black Hat just said that so casually! “Oh, uh, ok. So, then, you think w-we, that is, you, should ma-mark me again? Right now?”

“I think it would help to make it really convincing.” Black Hat said. “The ones from before are fading, after all.” Yes, yes that was true. The old marks were fading, even though Flug had reopened them with that little stunt he pulled, so they’d have to make new ones. It made sense. It was just to sell their story. That was all it was.

So why it it make Flug feel so…

“Do you agree?”

“I’m-I’m sorry, what?” Flug asked.

“Do you agree that marking you again would be beneficial to our plan of masquerading as a couple?”

“Oh, y-yes, I suppose I see how it would help to make it con-convincing.”

“So then...” Black Hat let his voice trail off as he crawled fully onto the bed and closer towards Flug, never taking his eyes off of him. That shit-eating grin lessened into a more relaxed and dare Flug say, sultry smile. He was on his hands and knees, just hovering above Flug’s calves. “May I?”

Flug felt like he might’ve forgotten how to breathe for a few seconds. Was Black Hat really suggesting that he bite him (and perhaps do more, and continue to do so for God knows how long) in order to make them seem like a happy couple? Well that’s just...oh God he didn’t even know what to call it. Black Hat was frank, and gave off a kind of “just business” vibe to the whole ordeal. They
wouldn’t be doing this out of any attraction to each other, they’d be doing it to make their lie more believable. Flug wasn’t really sure if that was reassuring or uncomfortable. On the one hand, if it was just business and just to give a reason for why they were always together, then there was no pressure to get feelings involved. No reason to make it more than it was. As Black Hat said, they didn’t need to have any physical relations beyond making it look like they were hot and heavy with each other.

On the other hand, it struck Flug as kind of...weird to be, well, close to Black Hat in this way without feeling anything about it. There was having a casual relationship that was strictly physical with no strings, and then there was this. Being physical up to a point and not really doing it for the pleasure of the contact but to get others to leave them (him) alone. Like wearing a wedding ring to keep away fuck-boys, not because there actually is a husband or wife.

And on the OTHER other hand, was Flug just supposed to turn his dick off and not enjoy what Black Hat would be doing? Was he supposed to not get turned on by getting attention like this? Granted his Soulless Super Powers made that an option, maybe, but he wasn’t really that great at controlling them and he wasn’t really sure if he actually wanted to go through with it without feeling anything. Even if it was just for show, it had been some time since he’d felt...well, someone else.

And as nervous as he was about actually going through with this, if it meant that even just for a little while, even if it was just necking and nothing more, if it meant that he’d get to be... close with someone...and someone he was somewhat ok around, why should he deny himself? He was so, so very tired of being all alone with himself. Even if he wasn’t completely sure about it, shouldn’t he at least give it a shot once, just to see? To see if it satisfied the burning desire within him? If only just his need for another’s touch?

Could he actually do something like that?

Flug swallowed down his fears. He craved this, well not this situation or circumstances specifically, but he wanted to feel someone else moving alongside him. Moving against him. He wanted someone else’s touch on his body. Even if it was something rather impersonal like this. It excited him, as much as he regretted admitting it to himself. He didn’t want to be embarrassed by what his physiology longed for. Didn’t want to have to hide what it was he wanted.

And here was someone who was all too willing to give him what he wanted. What he needed. Who hopefully wouldn’t comment too much on his desperation to at the very least pretend he could be okay with this.

He looked Black Hat in the eye, that same eye that was always so analytical, like it was constantly trying to look inside the mind of its subject and dissect their deepest desires. He couldn’t see the faint rim of color around it anymore, it looked completely black and Flug couldn’t tell if it was because the world was in black and white with various faded colors right now or if Black Hat’s pupil was so expanded it was taking up his entire iris. He couldn’t gleam what exactly it was that Black Hat was thinking but he could see desire in that eye.

He wanted this. Black Hat wanted to touch him in this way.

And Flug found he...wanted him to as well. Circumstances be damned.
He licked his lips, dry lips, and gave a small nod.

Black Hat advanced, crawling up the bed on his hands and knees until he and Flug were face to face, only a few centimeters separating the two men. He was smiling, but Flug couldn’t tell if that was just from bemusement or something more. He wasn’t as apprehensive as Flug was about this, that was for sure. He ducked his head down, down to Flug’s neck. Flug sucked in a breath in anticipation of what was to come as he tipped his head back and bared his neck for him. Technically they’d done this before, but Flug hadn’t been fully aware for it. He wondered how exactly he’d reacted while drunk. Would Black Hat be expecting him to act similarly?

Flug felt his face heat up even more, if that was even possible, his legs tensed as a familiar pool of heat began building in his gut. Small, for now. It was growing hotter the longer Black Hat went over the expanse of flesh Flug was generously presenting for him.

Black Hat was taking his time, going over the skin of his neck lightly, only just barely making contact with his lips. Occasionally his tongue would dart out and lick at the unmarked skin on this side. Fresh territory to deface and leave open. It tingled a bit, but maybe Flug was imagining it. He was quickly losing the ability to form coherent thoughts.

And when Black Hat’s teeth grazed his flesh oh so gently Flug was about ready to smack that top hat off his head. It felt good, hell it felt amazing, but by God he was going so slowly! It felt better than anything so... nothing ...should feel. Maybe it was just the anticipation of the thing. The promise of breaking the skin. Of making him bleed. Of marking him as his. Flug was quickly becoming more and more amiable about that phrasing the more Black Hat toyed with him about it.

*Oh will you hurry the fuck up and just do it already?*

Flug gasped as Black Hat’s hand began lightly exploring the rest of him. He ran his gloved fingers over his chest through his shirt, he squeezed his inner thigh with the sweetest pressure Flug had ever felt, and settled on rubbing circles into his pelvis with his thumb while his other hand held his body steady over his needy partner. Flug could feel his legs shift a bit of their own accord, spreading themselves to allow Black Hat to lessen the space between their bodies even further. Now if only he would take it...

Flug wanted both of his hands on him. He wanted his mouth on him. He wanted to feel a strong body between his thighs. He wanted the contact to shift just a little more to his groin and-

Fuck he wanted more.
Flug wasn’t sure what, if anything, he was expected to do for this. Did Black Hat want his participation? Did Flug even want to participate? It felt weird to just hold himself still and not do anything while this happened. As if he was just along for the ride, a mere passenger for what was essentially another time he and Black Hat would be somewhat intimate with each other. Or rather, Black Hat would be intimate while Flug just kind of laid there.

Yeah this was gonna be so much weirder if Flug did nothing the entire time.

But what exactly was he supposed to do???

Black Hat’s breath on his skin was sending shivers down his spine. Down into his hips which jerked automatically, wishing Black Hat himself was closer between them. As it was, there was still a few inches that prevented him from receiving that delicious friction he so desired. And boy was he cursing those inches that kept him and his release apart.

“Mmmm.” Flug whined in a voice that was higher than he usually sounded. Why was Black Hat not moving with him? Why was only his hand on him? Why was he being so gentle? That wasn’t what he wanted from him. Or was it? Did Flug really want this man he barely knew to unceremoniously take his first time?

Wait, were they going to get that far?! What was it they were doing again? Wasn’t this supposed to be just about marking Flug as “taken”? That didn’t necessarily mean Black Hat was going to, well, take him did it?

"Did it"!

“Say it.” Black Hat said in an erotic whisper. Flug wished he was closer. Would move. Would thrust against him with every other word. “Say it, say it, say it, say it.” Flug was feeling embarrassed that he was the only one who seemed to have any sense of urgency to get this damn show on the road. Black Hat acted like he was content to just lay suspended above him for the rest of time while Flug stared off at the walls trying to control himself. Trying and failing miserably on astronomical proportions.

“Nothing happens until I hear you say it.” Black Hat accentuated his message with a soft kiss to his jugular.

That did it. “M-Mark me,” Flug said. He damn near pleaded for him to just get on with marking him. This gentle stuff was like an appetizer, just foreplay until they got to the main event so to speak. And Flug was ready for it.
Black Hat got the message and held nothing back. He bit down on his collar so suddenly that Flug couldn’t possibly hold back his cry of relief. Finally, they were doing this. He treasured the feeling of Black Hat’s sharp teeth cutting into his shoulder, the way his tongue lapped at his markings and only further claimed him. Flug gripped the sheets tightly, he loved the sensations of the skin splitting and the blood leaving him to disappear down another’s maw. It felt like he truly was giving himself to him. And what it felt like was beyond words.

When Black Hat removed his teeth, Flug came down from his high a bit. Only to be rocketed back up when those jaws closed down again and open him up further. In more ways than one. Flug felt his entire body shift, open and inviting to his charcoal skinned...what could he call him exactly? What were they to each other? What did this make them?

Said man had gone to sucking and lapping at the skin, hopefully to leave a multitude of wet bruises to go along with the weeping wounds. He drank down the sweat just as easily as he had the blood, although it didn’t feel nearly as deep without that tongue dipping into the flesh.

He could stop himself no more. Flug was so worked up he actually wrapped his arms around Black Hat and pulled him close. Close enough that he could finally feel him between his legs and could rut against him properly. Pulled him so they were flush against each other and Flug could hold him tight against his thin frame. And let the pleasure explode so he had to bite his lip to keep from moaning too loudly. He didn’t want any of his neighbors to get any ideas should they have witnessed Black Hat and Aurelio bring him home last night or see Black Hat leave today.

Flug could feel him grin. Could tell from how difficult a time he was having continuing with his marking of him. Flug’s already spinning head was just barely comprehending the fact that Black Hat was probably laughing at him for being so aroused at this. No doubt it had been obvious from the start but Flug had broken down and began dry humping him and Black Hat couldn’t contain his triumphant glee any longer. What a joke.

Black Hat pulled himself up, to look Flug directly in the eyes. The eyes that could make out his face exceptionally well without his glasses. It was nice, being able to see something so clearly without the use of prescription lenses.

Flug could see a bit of his blood dripping from the curving ivories of the man pushing him off the edge with only the bare minimum effort.

Black Hat spoke, in that same gloating voice he’d used before. “Well, someone’s enjoying himse-”

He was cut off by Flug gripping him by the back of the head and crashing their mouths together. The skin was rough and coarse and he could feel small hairs prickling at his palms. Flug opened his lips wide and ran his tongue across the sharp teeth to taste his own blood mixed with the burning saliva of his partner, something Flug could think about later because all that mattered right now was coaxing the others tongue to come back and taste him all over again.

He could feel it, the long slimy appendage rubbing itself on his own tongue in a show of dominance to make it clear that this was it’s domain. Flug’s tongue relented and allowed it to sizzle his taste buds
with its unique acidity. When that no longer satisfied it, it pushed its way into Flug’s mouth, where his tongue was more than happy to let it roam freely across his teeth and venture to the very beginning of his throat. It eventually slid out, so that Black Hat could nip at Flug’s lower lip and coax more droplets of blood to leave his body.

Flug’s back arched as he whined, prompting Black Hat to wrap around him and deepen their embrace further. Everything was closer, their mouths, their groins, their chests, their legs, their tongues were intertwined and lapping against each other and the room started to spin as Flug melted into the strong arms holding him against that firm chest as his hips spurred into motion against him. God, he wanted him. God, please let him have this, if nothing else.

Black Hat pulled away first, staring at Flug’s red, panting face with something that could only be described as reverence. Like he was some rare specimen that only he had the good fortune to observe. A gloved thumb stroked the scars of his right cheek.

Flug was mildly irritated that Black Hat had stopped, and made his displeasure quite known with his own insistent movements from under him. He’d do anything to get back those feelings between them.

Black Hat chuckled lightly, smirking a bit. “More?” He asked with a raised eyebrow.

“ Cállate...y hazme tuyo.” Flug said with a slight smack to his arm. He was out of breath and panting heavily but he wasn’t going to let this stop for anything.

“ Sí insistes, ” Black Hat said, lowering his head down to Flug’s neck again.

Black Hat shoved him down so he could be fully on top of him, biting and sucking at his neck so that it would be clear that Flug belonged to him. His gyrations increased and Flug felt the euphoria of being held down and claimed. Oh God it was perfect, he was perfect, he gave him exactly what he needed from him. The feeling of his hands gripping him, directing how his hips would rut against his own, having those gloved fingers roam over the curve of his ass and squeeze so hard Flug wouldn’t be surprised if he left hand shaped bruises.

He also would not care. As a matter of fact, he’d probably love it if it did leave him bruised.

Flug wrapped a leg over Black Hat’s body, the change in angle causing both men to groan in ecstasy. The vibrations from Black Hat’s mouth in his flesh like a growl causing Flug’s arousal to grow deeper. He liked this, he liked having someone else move his body for him and make him feel so good. Black Hat seemed to know just how to angle him to give him the most out of their little session and Flug had no intentions of stopping him. His body was his to play with.

Both of Flug’s arms held Black Hat tight, like his body was the only thing keeping him sane. Like his touch was the one thing in life he couldn’t do without. Like all he needed out of this world was this trenchcoat-sporting form pressing against him and he could survive. His head was swimming and he didn’t want it to stop. Blunt fingernails dug into the coat and wished they could feel flesh splitting for themselves.
Which clearly meant that Black Hat was overdressed. Flug took the liberty of snaking his hands across those toned shoulder muscles and slipped that long coat down to Black Hat’s elbows. Oh God his body was magic, he could feel the hidden flesh almost hum and move like waves under the soft fabric.

Black Hat pulled himself up yet again, much to Flug’s dismay, but it was only for a second and he got to see the beautiful sight of that long black garment being shed and tossed aside. Giving Flug a much appreciated view of Black Hat’s form-fitted gray waistcoat and button down dress shirt. It was a long sleeve, did this man ever show any skin, but the red fabric splashed across Flug’s vision like a layer of dripping fresh blood.

God that was hot.

As soon as the obstructing outerwear was removed Black Hat was right back on top of him where he belonged, leaving Flug’s neck bruised and bloody and the rest of him just bruised. He had an iron grip that demanded submission and Flug was only too eager to give in.

His eyes were closed and he could barely think but he could feel and it was like nothing he had ever felt before in his entire life. Nothing compared, not anything he’d ever fantasized not anything with his hand there was no competition that the real thing was a thousand times better than anything he’d ever been able to imagine.

So intense. So good. So perfect. So everything.

Flug felt his arms pulled up and felt something being lifted over his head and still the only thing on his mind was Where was Black Hat’s mouth and why was it not on him? Said orifice was promptly returned to its rightful spot and parts beyond as he felt that moist tongue going over his Adam’s apple and dip lower towards his chest. God would the wonders never cease? Flug certainly hoped not.

As that sickly sweet singeing sensation worked it’s way down to his exposed nipples he arched his back clear off the bed and held onto Black Hat’s shoulders for dear life. He felt lips close around it and sharp teeth delicately handle his body and moaned shamelessly.

“Master,” He said in a long throaty moan. He could hold himself back no longer. He resigned himself to speech. It was pointless keeping things to himself. He wanted Black Hat to hear him. Hear the sounds he was making just for him and no one else. Let him hear the fruits of his labor.

Black Hat hummed in approval while he worked his mouth around Flug’s chest down towards his navel. Licking and sucking and lightly nipping at the fresh expanse of flesh to deface. He came back up and busied his teeth on Flug’s earlobe, producing delicate gasps from his eager partner.
As nibbled away at the soft skin, he whispered darkly into Flug’s ear. “Are you mine?”

“Yes sir,” Flug replied immediately. Maybe a little too immediately. But God the man was good. He was hiking up Flug’s legs around him higher and squeezing his ass and Flug didn’t want to do anything but spur him on further.

“Do you want this?”

“Yes sir,” He said in an equally desperate tone. Oh God just don’t stop. Not for anything. Just keep doing what you’re doing and give me the strength to hold on.

“Do you want me?”

“¡SI DIOS SI!” He said in an even louder moan.

That seemed to do it. Black Hat pulled away at light speed and Flug felt his hips lift and fall back down so quickly it was barely noticable. Maybe it was just a delay from everything else he was feeling. He was still feeling the world spin around him, maybe even worse when he didn’t have Black Hat to cling to.

But that didn’t matter because Black Hat was soon in his rightful position on top of him and between his legs. They squeezed around Black Hat’s waist tighter and Flug could feel fabric moving against his bare flesh. He felt still-gloved fingers squeeze his bare thighs and it was just utter bliss until Flug came to a certain realization. It occurred to him that Black Hat hadn’t taken anything more off after his coat.

Taking even more initiative, Flug slipped his hands around Black Hat’s neckline. He fumbled around trying to get his tie off. Black Hat snickered at his timid movements but picked himself up just long enough that getting the damn thing off was possible. Loosening it was about all that Flug could end up doing and he just pulled it off over his head. The hat slipped off with it, and Flug got to see what Black Hat looked like without a hat for the first time.

He had combed back short black hair just a few shades darker than his skin, which had probably been pretty neat and tidy before but was now ruffled and unkempt like it was coming undone as much as the man himself might be. A few strands fell into his face, which was strangely blank, although Black Hat was still panting from their passionate tryst. It was like he froze once he was hatless.

Strange, he looked almost...worried.

And he still was wearing his monocle. Ok, kind of weird. How was that even staying on? As a matter of fact how had the hat stayed on as long as it had?
Flug brushed a hand against Black Hat’s cheek, and the man...flinched? Why was that? He relaxed after a second, but not before Flug took notice of the strange reaction. He looked at Flug’s hand as if it was something unknown, something he wasn’t sure about.

Flug ran a thumb across his high cheekbone, right under the monocle. He didn’t say anything, but Black Hat seemed to understand what it was he was asking. He raised a hand and took the monocle off, revealing an eye clouded over and unfocused staring blankly ahead beneath a half-opened eyelid. If Flug could see colors right now, it would most likely be a pale shade of blue.

Well, that answered one question.

Flug wrapped both his hands around Black Hat’s head and kissed him deeply. Black Hat hesitated a moment before kissing back, softly at first before he started kissing him hard. Hardest he had yet. So hard he was damn near forcing Flug down into the mattress and all Flug could do was just hold on and take it. His moans were swallowed by his partner, who was running his tongue over every inch of his mouth like he was trying to map it out and remember which actions produced the sweetest noises from him. Flug ran a hand through Black Hat’s thick hair and found it...rustling? Was there a fan on? The windows weren’t open so-

Flug quickly found his hands pinned down by his wrists on either side of his head. Held firm by Black Hat’s still gloved hands like vices. Black Hat didn’t say anything, or stop what he was doing. He did however move that blessed mouth down his chin and neck.

But Flug wasn’t going to complain, because Black Hat’s grip on his wrists and his mouth on his collarbone were pushing him farther and farther towards the edge and he’d be damned if it wasn’t just getting better and better. He had no plans to move from his grasp, but Black Hat tightened his grip anyway. To the point it was almost painful, but a good sort of painful. Flug felt Black Hat stroke his palms with his thumbs, like his hands were precious things that he needed to be delicate with even as he held them down tightly. Black Hat moved up again and panted hotly into Flug’s face. Oh God he just wanted him everywhere! If only he could just encompass his entire being with his own!

“You know, it occurred to me,” Black Hat whispered. “If I’m the Master, what does that make you?”

Slave, Flug’s mind whispered.

He quickly tried pushing the thought out of his mind, as arousing as it was. It was exciting and thrilling and something that promised he’d enjoy himself and they’d do this again and it’d just get better and better and he’d like it so much if he just said it then it could be real and he’d be so happy. He’d be so happy serving his Master and letting him use him like this. It wouldn’t be as if he wouldn’t be getting pleasure and satisfaction from it. Not as if it was something he didn’t want. He wanted this.
As great as it was, he was starting to come down from the initial high a bit. Starting to think about what was going on a bit more. He was still in the throngs of passion and lust, but switching between a mind clouded with desire and a mind clear from emotion and feelings. And it seemed to the latter half that the situation was escalating at a rate he might not be ready for.

Take for example, his lack of experience. Flug hadn’t really gone this far with anyone in years. Scratch that, he’d never gone this far with anyone ever. He’d been kissed, he’d groped and been groped in a consensual setting, he’d done over-the-clothes type stuff like what this had started out as but in all honesty hand and mouth stuff was as far as he’d ever really gone. But this was quickly getting to be more and getting to possibly mean more and he wasn’t sure he really wanted it to mean anything or if it was wrong for it to not mean anything or what exactly it was he wanted in the first place.

Fuck, was he ready for this?

“I see you have a thought.” Black Hat remarked, bringing Flug out of his thoughts. “Care to tell me? Want to tell Master what you are?”

Flug was still trying to focus on gulping down the air, which was feeling hot and stuffy in this closed off apartment. Was it always so steamy in here? Had he just never noticed because there was never anyone else with him? The sweat was pouring down him in buckets, he felt.

He felt like he was slipping. His two minds were clashing and he couldn’t decide whether he wanted to let this go on or stop it right now and he wasn’t saying anything because he didn’t know what it was he wanted to say.

Black Hat released his grip on Flug’s wrists and rose to his knees. He was staring down at him, as he undid the single button on his waistcoat and slipped it off. “Don’t want to say?” Black Hat asked, as he slowly began unbuttoning his blood red dress shirt. Slowly, slowly, ever so slowly undoing each button and giving Flug a gradually expanding view of what his bare chest looked like. Flug tried not to look so entranced by the action, tried not to be so obvious with how much he craved to see Black Hat shirtless and feel his skin on his. He could feel a few of his inhibitions being silenced as things progressed.

Master…

The final button was undone and the red garment was slipped off of well defined shoulders and
down toned arms. And Flug got an eyeful of what Black Hat’s body was like.

Instead of a pristine expanse of carved ebony, it was marred and marked and full of scar after scar on top of scar tissue and very little was left untouched. Flug was amazed, what had done all this? What had Black Hat been through in his life? How was he even still alive with all of these? He could see things that were quote unquote “normal”, such as what looked to be bullet or stab wounds, but there were some that were just plain bizarre. A few horizontal marks going around Black Hat’s side looked suspiciously like claw marks. And that ring of indentations on his shoulder looked like they could’ve been made with teeth. Teeth that didn’t look human. Canine, perhaps.

Black Hat was silent as he ran a few gloved fingers over a particularly deep looking scar going across his abdomen. He lowered himself on top of Flug again but didn’t kiss or touch him. He stared at Flug with his one good eye, maybe trying to gauge his reaction. Trying to see what he thought about him. His body. Flug had his own scars, albeit not as many, which unlike Black Hat he couldn’t hide so casually.

Rocinante stroked a scar on Black Hat’s chest lightly, the skin was slightly damp with sweat but had that same rough uneven texture he knew from his own scars. Even if this one was much bigger and deeper. How had it not pierced his heart? Rocinante moved his hands around, feeling those things that looked to be teeth marks and wrapping his arms around Black Hat to pull him into another heated kiss. He felt more scars on his back, long curving marks that he followed down gently. Overlapping and cutting into each other. Black Hat was as passionate and strong as ever, forcing his way into Flug’s mouth with no room for debate and pressing the two of them firmly together. Flug was just barely able to keep his head up and kiss him back, he was on the verge of fully relenting and just laying back as Black Hat continued with his sinful assault on his pleasure center. He was content letting him set the pace and enjoying everything that was going on so far so Black Hat should just take his pants off and...and then what?

Were they, were they actually going to have sex? Here? Now? Was that was this had been building up to? Did Flug want that? Did he want to have sex with Black Hat? How could he not, with how vehemently he declared that he wanted the man? With how passionately he’d kissed him? With how he’d moaned for him? How hungrily he watched him undress. It seemed like the answer should be an easy yes.

But there was still a sliver of unsure fear lurking in the back of his mind.

Did he actually want this? Here? Right now?

Toy, whispered a voice through his brain, massaging it with promises of pleasure and release. He tried not to think about what the word meant too hard. He thought he might not like it.

Black Hat pulled away and crouched over him leaving that unwanted (or was it) sliver of space between their near-bare bodies. Black Hat stroked his scarred right cheek with his gloved hand, making Flug mewl and lean into his wondrous touch. He felt he was about to go limp, he could barely keep his head up.
The clouded over haze of his neglected sexual desires was overtaking him and it was difficult to keep track of what was happening and what he was doing in response to it.

“Are you ready?” Black Hat questioned.

Flug nodded his head, not fully understanding what Black Hat was asking but wanting it all the same. It was getting harder and harder for him to think, or to just lift his head up. His arms limply held onto Black Hat for support, like literally every drop of blood in his body was being directed into his blue and white striped panties. Making him harder and harder.

Black Hat smiled, removing his hand from Flug’s face to trail it down his body. Lightly thumbing his nipples and running his fingers over his stomach. He began running the expensive glove leather over Flug’s exposed thighs and playing with the hem of his matching kneesocks as he helped wrap his legs back around him. Flug felt like something out of a shojo wearing them.

Or rather, a yaoi.

Flug moaned from the feeling of hands on him and allowed himself to give in, Black Hat still playing his sick teasing games with his body and leaving him to grab onto him for dear life. He wondered faintly why Black Hat had kept his gloves on, while strong hands latched onto his ass and kneaded it through his panties until Flug was moaning like a cheap porno slut and the thought of that just made him want to sink into the sheets even further and just let whatever was going to happen happen.

Everything made his brain feel fuzzy and words were a chore. He didn’t want to think. He just wanted this.

*Slut,* his mind said, making Flug question whether or not he truly *did* want this as much as he thought he did.

Black Hat seemed to be going a bit spastic, his hands switching between holding him by the hips to wrapping around his waist to fistng handfuls of Flug’s hair to move his head around and wrapping around his neck as he kissed him. It was like he couldn’t keep his hands still or decide what it was he wanted to hold onto. He kissed him passionately, and Flug wrapped his arms around him to bring him deeper. Just like his mouth opened to let him in deeper. His body pushed against him to be closer.

It came so naturally now. Was this what sex was always like?

Black Hat kissed Flug’s scars tenderly, the gentleness of his mouth such a contrast to the firmness of
his hands that Flug let loose a contented sigh with “Master” falling from his lips again.

“Tell me,” he said in between deep kisses. “What are you?”

Doll, said the voice. Flug didn’t dare repeat it. Black Hat continued until the voice came up with something else to whisper through his mind.

Slave,
Slave Boy,
Sex Slave,
Sex Toy,
Puppet,
Fuck Puppet,
Slut,
Whore,

“What are you?”

“P-Pet,” Flug said, in unison with the voice in his head. “Pet,” he repeated when Black Hat raised his head to confirm what Flug had told him.

“Pet,” Black Hat said, letting the word roll across his tongue until he was satisfied with it. “My Pet,” He said, sighing as the word escaped his lips. It seemed they had found what they were to each other.

“Let Master take care of you, my Pet.” Black Hat whispered in Flug’s ear, sending liquid fire to his cock and nearly making him come all on its own. They both tightened their grips on each other, like that would keep them grounded to this moment. “Let me be everything you need. My precious Pet. Let me give you what you need.”

Flug was in no position to argue or debate, he could barely breathe and only caught his Master’s words because they were right in his ear. He kept on talking; saying he would keep him safe, he would always be there for him, he would always be safe and sound with his Master, he just had to let him in. And he wanted to. He was slipping down and thinking was difficult even with his mind
going 40 kilometers over the speed limit. He had thoughts, but there were fleeting and nearly impossible to latch onto for more than a few seconds. He just wanted to let go and let Black Hat have him.

But could he? Should he?

Flug could feel hands on him still, and a voice in his ear still whispering sweet nothings. He wasn’t sure anymore what was going on though. He thought it felt good but now he wasn’t sure. He thought he wanted this. Didn’t he want this? What was wrong? Was something wrong? There shouldn’t be anything wrong. He was safe with his Master, wasn’t he? Wasn’t he safe? Didn’t he feel safe? He wanted to feel safe here, underneath his Master’s arousing touch.

His Master that he didn’t really know all that much about.

What did he know about Black Hat anyway? What did he really know about this man? This man he had made out with twice now. And was currently in his bed. He couldn’t pronounce, spell, read, or even really remember what his name actually was. That was kind of awkward when he really thought about it. He was essentially making out with someone he didn’t even know.

Well, he knew Black Hat. He’d known him for, um, a few...a few weeks now. Uh, he was from...shit he didn’t really know that either. He could remember that the name of his home country was something equally indecipherable as his own, but that was about it. He didn’t know anything about what kind of place it was. Black Hat never really talked about himself beyond being a villain. Flug didn’t know if he had any family or anything.

Well he was here now. And lived...Flug didn’t know where. He’d never been and Black Hat had never made mention of his current abode.

Who was this guy on top of him?

Shit, he didn’t even actually know how old the man was. He seemed to be older than Flug, but that was more from the way he carried himself. He had one of those faces that was kind of just ageless. Flug couldn’t really gauge how much older Black Hat was.

Ok that's, that's actually a little concerning. How little he knew.

And then there were the scars. They themselves were not the issue. It was just, well, there were so many. So many going over and under each other, scar tissue on top of scar tissue and certain things were just plain strange. Like these ones Flug was tracing down Black Hat’s back. They felt long and thin, swiping down the expanse of dark flesh. What were they from? How long had he had them?

He said he would take care of him. He wanted to believe that. He wanted to believe that this man on top of him (who he knew next to nothing about and yet really wanted to give himself to for reasons...
he didn't want to fully admit to) could be trusted to, well, be with. He was lonely, oh so alone and so desperate for another's touch. His body gave above and beyond the standard positive reactions. If anything it felt like his touch sensitivity had been heightened rather than subdued.

Heightened more than he could take and he didn't know how to stop it. He couldn't focus, his mind was whirling and he barely felt what was going on specifically he just felt this person touching his body and felt his body scream out for more.

He potentially caught a break when the heavenly touches seemed to cease. He peeked up through heavy eyelids to see Black Hat joining him in stripping to his underwear. He had on black boxer briefs with what was perhaps a deep maroon red waistband. It was a bit hard to see when the colors weren't vibrant.

Wait...when did Flug take his clothes off? He didn't remember doing that...

Black Hat. Had Black Hat?

Flug’s eyes shot open and he came to the realization that Black Hat had, indeed, stripped him of his clothes. His chest was bare and speckled with nicks and wet spots and he had nothing on but his matching blue and white striped panties and kneesocks. His chest was rising and falling at a rate that was probably much too fast but there still wasn’t enough air for him. It was all going in and out too quickly for him to actually get any of that sweet sweet oxygen he needed.

Um, Black Hat was eyeing him like he was the sweetest treat in the world; hungrily and eager to dig in. Flug wasn't sure if it was arousing or terrifying and wondered in some back corner of his mind if there was a word for something that was equally both. He came back quickly, locking their lips together without warning and leaving Flug to kiss back more on reflex than out of want. He wrapped his arms around Black Hat but he wasn't fully convinced that this was what he wanted anymore.

Yes, yes it was getting to be far too much. Far far far too much Flug couldn't take this he couldn't do this right now he couldn't just sleep with him just like that he had things like self respect and dignity and other made up concepts to use as excuses so that he didn't have to say that he was scared. He was scared to do this because he didn't know who this was he didn't know what this really was for either of them anymore cuz it had gone way farther than was planned and he didn't actually fully know how.

He wanted to trust that this man knew what he was doing, trust that he could be trusted, but how could he trust someone he didn't know? How could he give his first time to a complete stranger?

How could he have sex with a stranger like...like some whore?

He felt his panties being dragged down and he just broke.
“W-wait wait wait wait wait stop s-st-st-o-stop stop please stop please st-stop stop!” He cried out, pushing Black Hat off of him. He scrambled to pull his underwear up and cover himself and the fact that he might’ve been leaking precum.

Flug tried in vain to get his breathing under control but it seemed like it was just getting harder and harder and like he might pass out if he didn’t get any air soon. Black Hat was confused and might’ve been asking what was wrong but Flug couldn’t discern words right then he just needed to breathe. Breathe. In and out, in and out, in and out and shit did he need to put on a video to remember how to breathe?!?!?

Black Hat reached out to touch him but Flug wasn’t having any of it. He slapped his hands away and tried to calm down on his own. He tried backing away but there really wasn’t anywhere else to go except maybe the floor so he was pretty much trapped on the bed and he couldn’t escape and he couldn’t breathe. It wasn’t working, shit it wasn’t working, why wasn’t it working why couldn’t he breathe? What would make it work? What would-

“NO Stop st-stop stop let go let go l-l-let g-go let go no stop no stop!” Flug cried out in muffled panic as Black Hat held him tight against his chest. He could still feel his raging erection and thought for a moment that Black Hat would try to resume where they left off so he started pushing and shoving and hitting weakly trying to wrench himself free to no avail. He was too strong. He couldn’t fight him off. It was like shoving against a wall, he couldn’t break away.

Flug could’ve sworn he felt a tear go down his cheek, as he resigned himself to whatever Black Hat was going to do to him. He held onto him even though he was afraid, even though he didn’t know what it was he wanted or didn’t want any more, he clung to Black Hat because damn it he was the only thing he could hold on to, as confused and afraid as he was. His rock in the tempest of sensations and emotions and wants and needs and other things he couldn’t put into words. He’d be good, he swore through sobs, he swore he’d be good.

Flug didn’t know how long it took him to calm down, all he could tell was that gradually he was able to catch his breath. Black Hat had not moved, had not made any attempts to touch him any further than keeping him pressed against him, he hadn’t even said anything. When Flug hadn’t lashed out after a few minutes and had relaxed against him somewhat, Black Hat opened his arms and let him go.

Flug didn’t pull away for a second, trying to wrap his head around the latest events that had transpired between the two of them.

Had that whole marking thing really just been a cheap trick to get close to Flug? Get him to allow Black Hat to bite him, more or less consensually? Take advantage of the fact the Flug liked it? Had Black Hat’s end goal been to sleep with him all along?

Well, Flug technically had made the first move. Didn’t he? He had kissed him first. But that wasn’t an excuse to jump into... that. Not so soon! Not so immediately! It was just a kiss. A heated one, but
it didn’t mean they had to go further.

But...Black Hat had asked him if he wanted to continue after that. He had pulled away and asked if Flug wanted him to take it further. He asked if Flug wanted more, and Flug had told him yes. So, had Flug led him on?

Well, Flug did want more. He had wanted things to go on, hadn’t he? It was like sifting through a whirlwind of memories, all jumbled and caught up in the heat of the moment and covered in a thick haze of lust and pent up desire.

And then Flug up and called him “Master”. In the midst of a heated embrace. Well, how many ways can someone interpret that? It comes off as a clear sign to keep going, that the other person is enjoying it and wants more. And Flug... was enjoying it. Wasn’t he?

And he...he had allowed Black Hat to take his clothes off. To strip him to his underwear. He had been vaguely aware that that’s what was going on, but wasn’t thinking about it enough for it to really sink it. The implications it held. But he had let it happen.

And then...Black Hat had taken his shirt off. And they’d quietly held each others gazes as Flug took his body in. Flug could’ve said no, that this was going farther than he was ready for, he could have. Couldn’t he have?

But, well, Black Hat had looked... nervous. Like he thought the sheer amount of scars on his form would scare Flug off. Make him change his mind. Like things were going good, until he took his own clothes off and then Flug decided he didn’t like it anymore. Didn’t like him. Which was not true! Flug didn’t mind them, he had his own, it’d be pretty damn hypocritical and shallow if he had any sort of problem with Black Hat’s scars! But, maybe he should’ve still said something.

There were moments where Flug could’ve ended it. Flug had more than enough times and chances to tell him to stop, but he hadn’t. He’d had multiple chances to end things before they went too far, but he hadn’t. Flug had the opportunity to tell Black Hat “No,” many times, but he hadn’t. The man himself had paused things to ask if Flug still wanted things to go further. He could’ve said no. Could’ve spoken up. He could’ve made his rising fears known, explained why he felt things should stop here. Tell his partner he wanted him to stop or at the very least slow down a bit so he could get his bearings. But he never did. As a matter of fact, he’d encouraged him. Told him to continue. Told him to take it further. Told him to really make him his. Told him he wanted this. He thought he had. He had thought this was what he wanted.

He’d done this to himself.

Whore.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
oh Dios mio = oh my God (Spanish)
perturbato = perterbed (Italian)

Cállate... y hazme tuyo = Shut up... and make me yours (Spanish)

Si insistes = If you insist (Spanish)

¡SI DIOS SI! = YES GOD YES! (Spanish)

"It started out with a kiss, how did it end up like this?" (Where my Killers fans at?) Oh, and I got a tumblr! in case anyone wants to scream at me a bit more directly. Literally, just got it like, this past week. Will be posting fanfic updates and even previews, so follow me!
We Need to Talk

Chapter Summary

Following the events of the last chapter, Flug and Black Hat find that they may need to actually talk about what just happened. And figure out where to go from there. Black Hat has an idea.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“You can say no.” Black Hat said. “You know that, don’t you?”

Black Hat had stayed in the middle of the bed, closer to the foot. Flug looked up at him through cautious eyes. Since he’d calmed down, he’d crawled away at the head of the bed and had been silently holding himself in his arms. He didn’t know what to think about anything. He had no idea what he could say to explain how he’d reacted, why things had suddenly broke down when they should’ve just gotten better and better. Neither of them had spoken until this.

Black Hat fixed him with a serious stare. “I had no intentions of forcing you into my employ, and I have none about forcing you into bed either. I may be a villain, and I say that with pride, but I have standards.”

It comforted Flug to hear that.

“I told you before, it didn’t have to go further than your neck if you didn’t want it to. You could’ve just said you wanted to stop. I can handle being told ‘no’.”

“I...” Flug tried to speak up. “I thought...I did...want to. Want you. I thought, but then...” He tried putting what he felt into words but he just didn’t know how on earth he could explain something he himself didn’t fully understand. “I don’t know. I...it, it was good, and I liked it, I-I did li-like it. And t-then-”

“Did I talk to much?”

“Huh?”

“Did I...was it something I said?” Black Hat asked, looking uncharacteristically...sheepish? Was that the right word to describe that expression on his face? “Did all that ‘let me take care of you’ stuff make you uncomfortable?”
Flug felt his face flush. Oh yeah, he remembered hearing all that. “Uh, n-n-no, no tha-that wasn’t it. I-I thought that was, uh, fine.”

“Just fine?”

Uh oh. Was that not what he wanted to hear? What was Flug supposed to say? Well, it wouldn’t make sense to say he found it reassuring when immediately after he started screaming and pushing him away. But in reality, that was kind of what had happened. All that stuff Black Hat had been saying to him; *Let me take care of you, Let me be everything you need,* calling him *his precious pet,* that had made him feel *safe.* Like he could potentially *be safe.* Safe with his *Master.* Oh God he swore he could feel his face heating up even more just from thinking that! All this blood rushing from his groin to his cheeks couldn’t be good for his health. Why was he thinking these things?

And that’s really what it boiled down to. He had felt some degree of safety, some semblance of security in this man’s arms, and he’d gotten scared. He’d gotten scared and started messing with his own mind until he burst and pushed Black Hat away before he could get any closer to him.

Because as much as he wanted to give in, he had no idea how he could.

How could he feel safe with someone he knew so little about?

“Y-Yes, um, I was f-f-f-fine with you saying th-things like that.” He said.

“Then what was it?” Black Hat asked hotly. “What changed?”

Flug flinched at his tone. He sounded mad. Hell, he probably was. It was pretty damn obvious in hindsight where all that was heading, why was Flug so shocked by it? He was probably pissed about Flug changing his mind right at the last minute. Right when things were going to get *good.*

Black Hat muttered something Flug couldn’t make out, then said, “Flug. Flug, look at me.”

Flug lifted his gaze up to Black Hat’s eyes. It was odd, seeing him without his monocle and hat. His head seemed strangely bare without them. And his left eye was a little bit distracting. Flug tried not to stare at it too much.

“Flug, I’m not mad.” He said, sounding like he was trying very much not to be mad. “I’m just trying to understand where exactly it was that things changed.”

Flug didn’t know what to say so he remained silent. Black Hat’s face scrunched up exasperation.

“It wasn’t just me that was enjoying that, right?” He asked. Like he needed to make sure he hadn’t accidentally misread the *entire* situation. “*I did* ask if you wanted things to go further, didn’t I? You *did* say yes, did you not?”

“So...can you just...” Black Hat struggled to put what he wanted to say into words. “Just tell me what it was that was...too much? Can you do that? Because I really have no idea what it was I did wrong.”

“N-nothing!” Flug said loudly. Louder than he had meant to. He self-consciously covered his mouth. “You, you were great. R-Really. It’s.”

“Flug, you don’t need to spare my feelings or some crap like that. Just tell me-”

“I’ve never had sex before.” He blurted out. And immediately felt his face bloom like a ripe tomato. His ears were burning like they had just been set on fire. Oh God just let him crawl under a rock and die.

“Oh.” Black Hat said, averting his gaze. His right eye was blown wide open. “So I suppose this was all a bit...much, then.”

“Y-yes,” Flug said, relieved that Black Hat acknowledged it too. “I think it w-was a little t-t-too fast for m-me, heh.” He chuckled nervously. And immediately stopped laughing when he remembered that he’d helped Black Hat to undress, a little. And had kissed him back. And had held onto him. He’d participated as well. It wasn’t as if he’d just laid back and let things happen. He’d had a part in it too.

It was his own fault.

“As I said before,” Black Hat said, without his usual bravado. “We don’t need to be physical with each other. It was just to make us look like we’re romantically involved. It’s not necessary for us to actually kiss or do anything further.”

“Thank you,” Flug said. He was feeling much better now. Much more relaxed. It was ok. Things were going to be ok. He nearly forgot that they were both in their underwear.

Until his eyes flitted down and saw that there was a nearly naked Black Hat sitting across from a nearly naked him. In bed.

Oh God he was so flustered! He wanted to just curl up and die! What would his parents think of him having some stranger in bed with him! He just almost lost his virginity to a man he barely knew!

A man who was still sporting a fairly impressive bulge, Flug noticed.

OH shit Black Hat caught him staring! Shit, he was staring! He’d been staring at his...underwear. Flug made a very undignified squeaking noise and covered his face with a pillow. Dios, mátame ahora. Obviously he should just die now. Of pure unadulterated shame. God, just smite him down where he was; curled up in matching panties and kneesocks and borderline suffocating himself with a pillow because facing the nearly nude man before him was too to take in much right now.
Actually, just the man himself might’ve been too much to take in if you know what I- OH MY GOD STOP THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR CHEAP SEX JOKES!

“Flug?” Black Hat asked. “Flug, I’m coming over, ok?”

Flug didn’t move. He felt the bed dip in places as Black Hat crawled towards him. He allowed Black Hat to pull the pillow away. His eyes were shut tight, he didn’t want to look at him right now. He felt so utterly humiliated. He wasn’t even sure if he was ok with Black Hat looking at him right now. Looking at his exposed body. Seeing how he was with Black Hat looking at him right now. His eyes gradually opened. As he was still curled up, all he could see were the tops of his knees, peeking out from the blue-striped hem.

“Flug?” Black Hat asked from above him. “Look at me.”

Flug took a deep breath and raised his gaze up to look at Black Hat. At least from this angle there was no risk of seeing anything below his waist. But that still left him with a rather muscular chest to check out before he got up to his face. The man wasn’t a bodybuilder or anything but he had a very nice physique. Scars and all. Flug noticed that they weren’t contained to his torso, there were a fair amount of scars going down both of his arms. He wondered vaguely if there were any on his legs as well, he hadn’t thought to check.

And his face...well, Flug had seen that. It was new, to see his other eye. Flug hadn’t ever asked why he wore the monocle, it had never come up and it seemed rude to ask about out of the blue. He suspected that Black Hat might’ve been blind or missing the eye, given the opaqueness of the thing. It was definitely a contrast, with his functioning eye being such a deep, dark reddish color and the other being such a milky shade of what was probably a pale blue. The shape of them too, was also interesting. Black Hat had a bit of a pull to his eyes, making their shape rather angular and his gaze all the more piercing when they weren’t blown wide. Even the blind one, under it’s half-opened eyelid, gave off the impression that it was still looking right through him. Even if it couldn’t properly focus on him.

Black Hat had apparently brushed his hair back. It was now all neatly out of his face. His face that was rather unreadable right now. What was going through this man’s mind? Flug squirmed under his gaze, feeling all the more exposed. On display. So seen. God he was uncomfortable.

“Flug,” He said. “May I kiss you again?”

Flug averted his eyes. “Y-You said w-w-we didn’t ha-have to do th-things like that.”

“We don’t.” He agreed as he lowered himself down to be at eye level with him. Oh God he was so close! “That’s why I’m asking. I want to.”
Of all the things he could’ve said! Flug looked back to him, very unsure and very confused. Did he really want this? Did Black Hat really want to kiss him again? Was that a genuine desire of his? He hadn’t seemed to show any interest in him before this, not counting the night they both got drunk. Flug had chalked that up to just that; both of them being drunk. Black Hat hadn’t been acting overly…amorous towards him since. Had he? Had Flug just not been picking up on the signs? Had there been signals the whole time that he had just brushed off, thinking himself so below anyone’s interest?

He couldn’t glean anything from Black Hat himself. Aside from the fact that he just said that he wanted to, and had been a very active participant in their little tryst just now. His face, as before, didn’t reveal whatever it was that he was truly thinking. And Flug didn’t have the nerve to try and see if there was still lust deep in that eye.

And…did Flug want to kiss Black Hat again? He was immensely grateful that Black Hat continually gave him a choice in the matter. That he wasn’t just going to take what he wanted from him without so much as a warning. That he wasn’t just going to shove him back down, force his tongue back into his mouth…oh, that tongue. That tongue that ran across his teeth and made him moan. Made his body feel hot. So hot he was burning up. He burned so hot and his touch only fanned the flames. He wasn’t going to hold him down, move that tongue down his chest again, rip the panties right off of him, maybe with his teeth, and-

-Okay. Stopping that train of thought right there.

He should really give Black Hat an answer.

“…Okay.” He said, unfolding his knees so they weren’t blocking Black Hat anymore. “But, but just a ki-kiss. Alright?”

“Just a kiss.” He repeated as he slowly bridged what little gap there was between them. “Alright.”

It was different than before. It was, dare Flug say, soft. Simple. Slow. Very much just a kiss. Black Hat had very thin lips, not that Flug’s were very plump or full or anything. He never thought of his own as any especially kissable. Thin though they were, Black Hat’s lips weren’t by any means unpleasant. It was a good kiss, as odd as it was to think that. Flug found his eyes slipped shut as he kissed him back. Well, it would just be even more uncomfortable if he just stayed still and didn’t kiss back, wouldn’t it? That would just make things even weirder between them. Black Hat had said that he wanted to kiss him, and maybe Flug wanted to kiss Black Hat as well. Feel him when he was fairly certain that his mind was somewhat clear.

A sigh escaped his lips, opening them a bit.

He gasped as he felt sharp teeth handle his lower lip delicately. It felt so nice, how they just barely punctured the skin. Not a bite, hardly even a nibble. It made Flug want to go limp and allow this man
to hold him again. To take him in his arms, lay him down, and let his mouth go where it pleased. He felt that blessed tongue lap at his teeth, asking if it was still welcomed inside. Flug gingerly allowed his jaws to relax, to allow it entry and to intertwine with his own in a slow, almost calculated rhythm—

---It was strange, but not bad. It was his first time ever doing this, hell, he’d never even kissed anyone else before this at all. He didn’t dare to try sneaking around like this at home. But now that he was away, and had hit the ultimate jackpot, he was eager to try out everything he’d fantasized about. Julio had a bit more experience with this kind of thing, he actually did have the nerve to sneak around and steal kisses behind his parent’s backs, so it was like a fun learning experience! Rocinante was nothing if not a fast learner.

It really was fun too. Stealing away at every opportunity, doing little things like this that just felt so much more thrilling with the secrecy of their relationship. It was just simple kissing, even if it involved their tongues, but it felt amazing after he’d been waiting for the chance to have even just this for so long. Lips on his and hands curiously snaking around him, testing out what felt right---

---And then he really did feel hands on him, coaxing his body to relent and lean back as Black Hat moved over him.

As tempting as it felt, the urge there to simply lie back and allow things to go where they would, there was still a very pressing matter that needed to be addressed. And it wasn’t the fact that he was thinking about someone else while kissing Black Hat. He doubted he’d ever address that with the man.

Flug pushed him away lightly before either of them could take it any further. “There’s, there’s something. Something else.”

“What is it?”

“It’s...” Oh wow, how to say this? I barely know anything about you besides that you’re a self-proclaimed super villain and that makes kissing you kind of weird? Add to that the fact that you’re my future boss-for-life and this is all kinds of awkward?

Fuck it. “W-well, it’s just that I, uh, I barely know anyth-thing about you. All I really know is that you’re a villain and...that you have a lot of money, I guess? It makes kissing you...a-and other things...very, strange, to me. A-And there’s the fact that, well, you’re my boss. And, I agreed to work f-for you for, uh, for the rest of m-my life. It p-puts me in a rather aw-awkward position.”

Black Hat considered his words for a moment, nodding his head. He proclaimed, “I understand.”

He then swiftly latched onto Flug by the shoulders and looked him dead in the eyes.
“Have dinner with me.”

Flug blinked owlishly. “¿Qué?” He asked in a small voice.

“You’re right.” Black Hat said. “I really haven’t told you anything about myself. I am, em essência, a stranger. So, have dinner with me.”

Flug was frozen. He understood the words, but they weren’t quite getting through to his brain. Black Hat just asked him (well, technically told him) to have dinner with him. Dinner. As in... a date???

Dinner was a very date-like meal, wasn’t it? Had Black Hat just asked him out? On a date? Did Rocinante Flugslys just get asked out on a date?!!?

“Um...” Black Hat said, maybe wondering about that oddly blank and confused look on Flug’s face. Or why he was still silent. “Would you please have dinner with me?”

“I’m sorry, would you mind slapping me real quick?” Flug asked quietly. “I need to know this is really happening and that I haven’t fallen into a coma from lack of sleep or something.”

Black Hat gave him a kind of weird look. Something Flug couldn’t dissect and name. But he drew his arm back and backhanded Flug across the face before he could think too much about what it might mean. The force caused his head to spin and for a second after the loud crack resonated he didn’t even feel anything. Physically, at least. Emotionally, he felt a bit calmer, like that slap had actually gotten it through his head that yes, indeed, this was happening. He had really just been asked out to dinner by his villainous boss, who was currently in his bedroom, while they were both in their underwear, right after they had a seriously hardcore make out session that very nearly almost led to sex. The morning after he had gone to a party at Aurelio Cruz’s house.

What a day. But at least he knew now that this was real life and not just some fantasy.

As a matter of fact, Flug was about to turn and thank Black Hat for doing that without any questions, until it hit him that Black Hat had in fact, just hit him. More specifically, he realized how he had hit him.

His eyes filled with tears as the sting set in. “You didn’t have to pimp-slap me!” He sobbed out, holding his right cheek. His skin felt slippery. That slap might’ve opened a few scars up.

Black Hat recoiled in confusion. “You asked me to slap you!” He said incredulously.

“I didn’t think you’d do it like that!”

“I didn’t know you had a preference for how you’d like to be slapped across the face!”

“What is wrong with you?!”

“I’ve never had anyone ask me to slap them outside of sex!” He said. “No one else complained about how I did it!”
“We aren’t having sex right now!”

“We’re in bed! That’s close enough!”

“Stop shouting!” Flug shouted.

Once they’d both quieted down, and Flug did his best to mentally lessen the stinging in his cheek, Black Hat spoke. Strangely nonchalantly. “So, about dinner,”

Flug laughed out loud and fell back on the bed. “You’re really asking me out to dinner after you just slapped me?”

“Well, now I have to make it up to you.” Flug could hear that mock-seductive smirk he had on. That maybe wasn’t so mock.

Oh God it was like a bad romantic comedy. Which Flug found himself laughing at anyway. Even though he couldn’t imagine going out in public with another man so coolly. On what was so obviously a date. Hell, even with Julio he never really did anything like that. If they ever went out, it was with a group and they just stayed by each other semi-casually and snuck off as the night went on.

“Would you like to go to my place?” Black Hat asked.

Wait, Flug was confused. What?

“What?”

“You aren’t a very…” Black Hat searched for the right words. “Public person. Would it be better if we dined in the privacy of my home?”

Ok, Flug was a little mixed on that question. On the one hand, yes, a private dinner in his home was probably preferable than Black Hat trying to take him to some fancy restaurant or something. Which seemed like something Black Hat would do. Flug would never be able to relax with so many people around them. Not to mention the atmosphere of the place would put him on edge all night. He’d spend the entire evening worrying over whether or not he was doing something wrong, or if he was dressed properly, or if just the two of them dining together was eliciting stares from the other tables. Oh God it’d be a nightmare. On the other, he had no idea where Black Hat lived or what his (House? Apartment?) place was like. There was also the matter of being in his home, away from prying eyes. Simultaneously comforting and anxiety-inducing because he still had no idea what to really expect from this man. Where would things go after dinner? Was he going to try and get him drunk again? They’d already be in his home, near his bed.

Or a couch.
Also, if it was dinner at his place, did that mean Black Hat would be cooking for him? Ordering take-out wasn’t really what came to mind when Flug pictured a romantic dinner date.

“Can you actually make anything normal? Aside from burgers?” He asked. “No offense, but I literally have no idea what you have for lunch most days.”

“I can!” Black Hat declared, placing a hand on his chest proudly. “Why, my first year in Italy I got by working at a restaurant in Naples! Never mind that it was a front for the mob! I met some of the most amazing people and I learned to make a mean fettuccine alfredo. Among other things.” He smiled deviously. “Perhaps I’ll get the chance to tell you about them.”

Flug wasn’t fully sure what that was exactly but he assumed it to be some sort of pasta. It sounded pretty appetizing, to be honest. He had been in a kind of noodle-mood lately. Here’s hoping the man could actually make something that was edible to someone other than himself.

“Yeah alright.” He said, shrugging. “Dinner it is.”

“Great!” Black Hat jumped off the bed and began dressing himself rapidly. “Tomorrow good for you? I can pick you up around seven and I promise you a fabulous dinner by eight!”

“Tomorrow’s fine.” Flug said. Thankfully he didn’t work Sunday’s, so he could use the time to go shopping at his leisure and maybe pick out some nicer clothes. It may just be dinner at Black Hat’s, but he felt he should dress up a bit.

Wait, didn’t he work today? Shit, what time was it?

Flug hunted around for his pants (after getting his glasses on finally), which Black Hat tossed him after he’d gotten his shirt buttoned back up. Crap, his phone was nearly dead. And apparently on silent since his manager had actually called a few times, seeing as he was late. Damn it.

By the time Flug slipped his pants back on, Black Hat had already managed to get everything but his monocle and hat back. Damn he dressed fast. How was it he practically threw his clothes back on and yet seemed to look as suave as ever? Were his clothes even wrinkled? Did he iron them real quick this morning? Wait, did Flug even own a clothes iron??

Flug helped him hunt around for his missing accessories, finding the monocle on the left side of the bed on the floor and the hat on the right. Gaining them, he looked exactly as he had every other time Flug had seen him. Did he own any other clothes? If Flug went through his closet was he going to just find multiple sets of this same outfit like a cartoon character?

Not that Flug had any reason to be going through his clothes! Or, or thinking about what he looked
like out of them! Even if the image was a bit hard to get out of his head. That firm body with its many layers of scars. Perhaps Black Hat would tell him about a few of them over the dinner they’d be sharing. Together.

“Oh, Flug, I almost forgot to ask you,” Black Hat said, righting his headwear in the mirror. “What’s with the newspapers?” He pointed to the windows.

“I-I, I like my privacy.” Flug said, eyes downcast

“Me too, but you’re being a bit obvious.” He said. “I mean, you may as well have a sign up announcing that you have something to hide.”

“You let me w-worry about that,” Flug said, a bit darkly.

“Oh ho, ok then.” Black Hat said with a dark chuckle of his own. Welp, no contest. Black Hat was WAAAAY better at sounding intimidating than Flug was. That wasn’t even half as threatening and yet it was far more malevolent just by the way he said it. Maybe it was the voice.

Black Hat left the bedroom without a word, leaving Flug to trail behind him once he put a shirt on. He saw him on the couch, putting his shoes back on. Oh, so he spent the night here? On the couch? That couldn't have been all too comfortable. Did he have any blankets or anything?

“Well then, I suppose I’m off.” He announced, making his way through the apartment like he did it all the time. Fuck, did he? Did Flug really want to know how often Black Hat had just waltzed around his apartment like he owned the place?

“Black Hat?” The man turned back as he reached the front door. “How many times have you been in my apartment without me knowing?”

The man flashed an evil smirk. “Not counting last night, probably less than a handful.”

“Give me a number.” Flug said seriously. This seemed to just amuse him.

“Five, give or take?” He said with a shrug. The smirk never leaving his face and his eye never leaving Flug’s.

“Were there any...anyt-times that I...I w-w-was ho-home?” Flug nervously dared to ask.

Black Hat’s face fell. Instead of looking wicked, he just looked annoyed. “Flug, what sort of amador do you take me for? Really.” He rolled his eye as he turned and promptly left the apartment of his own accord.

That...that really didn’t answer the question! Sure, it sounded kind of like a no, but he never actually said no so what was that supposed to mean!? Maybe? Fuck maybe! Well, if he had, he couldn’t have
done it anytime since Flug became soulless and sleepless, right? Even if he was zoned out in front of his laptop screen, he’d have noticed a whole other person in the apartment with him, right?

Right??!

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Well, that was...unexpected.

Hell, calling it just unexpected felt like the understatement of the century. Black Hat genuinely had not woken up this morning with any intentions besides sucking at Flug’s neck. He hadn’t even had any strong convictions that he would get so much as that far with him. He wasn’t sure precisely how Flug would react to his words, and was greatly surprised at the level of just how positively he did. He didn’t just go along with it, he’d expanded the scope of Black Hat’s little game, without even realizing it! It made the vile villain smirk to himself, at the thought of how Flug essentially just assisted in his own acquisition. He was smart, downright conniving at times, but kind of gullible. A combination that Black Hat was eager to take advantage of again and again and again as he got closer to the future doctor.

Although, he had to say, it had really thrown him for a fucking loop when Flug went and kissed him. He never imagined Flug would do that right then. The man was always so...unsure. So worrisome and cautious. He questioned everything and made most of his (sober) decisions based on logic and practicality. Black Hat knew he’d enjoy the extra attention to his neck sure, but he’d figured the man would be more embarrassed about his excitement, more flustered and hesitant about continuing. He’d expected something along the lines of “Uh, um, o-o-okay, th-that’s enough? R-right? That’s en-n-nough for n-n-now?” Along with a burning red face and some meek attempt at hiding his arousal. Black Hat expected that he’d have to talk him into letting himself be played with a few more times before he became at ease with the idea of taking it further. And Black Hat had thought that he’d have to be the one to initiate things. He’d thought that he’d need to be the one pushing to be more intimate with him. Certainly not that Flug would throw himself at him so soon and let things progress so far. How desperate for another’s touch he must be.

And, Black Hat admitted to himself, he had enjoyed Flug’s reactions to his body. That Flug had not turned away upon seeing his scars. Black Hat didn’t like showing them off, he liked looking at them himself even less, but it was...nice...that another looked on his body with what was more curiosity than something trite like concern or (God forbid) pity. Black Hat didn’t want to be coddled about them. He appreciated that Flug had taken them for what they were and gotten back into the swing of things easily enough. That little moment of Flug drinking in the sight of him, his hand tracing a few that caught his eye and then drawing him back into that tight embrace-

Yeah, Black Hat made up his mind. He wanted more of that. He wanted to have the man. By Flug’s
own words, Black Hat was indeed his Master. He’d moaned it out multiple times, the ghosting of his arms and legs wrapped around him and that voice in his ear making his pants start to feel tight. And he had decided that he would be his Pet. Again, very unexpected, but not at all disagreeable. If that was what he wanted to be to him (he had been the one to say it, after all) then Black Hat would accept. *Gladly.* He was sure that he could make Rocinante Flugslys into a fine Pet, he just had to play his cards right.

Kind of like he had been all morning. Each word carefully chosen, giving the illusion of choice and leaving the cold inevitability of things in the dark. Even if he didn’t get the desired results *right now,* he had the opportunity to try again at a later time to get what he wanted. As a matter of fact, he had a marvelous chance of getting close to the stuttering scientist again the very next night. It meant so much more when Flug felt he was making his own choices. And for the most part, he had. Black Hat may have maneuvered certain things into action, but it was ultimately Flug’s decision to participate. And he’d gone above and beyond what Black Hat ever dared to picture he might do. Like he was calling Black Hat’s bluff, not that he had been bluffing in the slightest. *He* had kissed him. *He* had said that he wanted more from him. Hell, he up and said that he *wanted him,* proclaimed it loud and clear. God Black Hat wished he’d placed wiretaps in his apartment. He would’ve loved to play that back and listen to that throaty declaration again.

At least he’d still have the footage, of things going far past what he’d planned.

Until Black Hat messed it up.

He didn't care what Flug said, he felt like *he’d* been the one who ruined what could've been a terrific morning for the both of them. Clearly he’d gone too far, had rushed things like he'd already known not to, and Flug was just too inexperienced to tell him where it was he’d crossed the line. Perhaps he wasn't fully sure himself when exactly it got to be too much for him.

How had he forgotten that the man was still a shy virgin, beneath all the lustful spontaneity? How had he misjudged how Flug would react in such a huge way? Clearly he needed to ask more directly next time, because he was not at all interested in being shoved away in a panic again. Not from one who produced such provocative sounds and gave him such sensations. He’d thought it had been clear what he was asking, he thought Flug *had* indeed understood and consented. Obviously that hadn’t been the case, as it vexed Black Hat to admit. This dinner would be the perfect chance to get Flug to let his guard down and give Black Hat some *real* insight on how best to go about training him. Make him into his *perfect* soulbound pet.

Wait, was Flug going to accept it if Black Hat tried to call him that again? Had he changed his mind about that as well? Had that been part of what finally overwhelmed him? Would he reject his own chosen label? Would Black Hat have to coax Flug into relenting, or picking something equally salacious as being his pet? Oh come on, that was so fucking hot! He didn’t *want* to call him anything else! And he hoped that Flug would still call him his *Master.* Or Lord. He was fond of the sound of that as well.

Fuck, Black Hat wanted to hit something.
Black Hat climbed into his car, and was about to start up the engine when he hear a voice exclaim behind him “¡Buenos días fancy Voldemort!”

“GAH!” He swung out at whoever just spoke.

His elbow collided with Demetra’s face. As she knocked into the backseats Black Hat realized that, oh yeah, he left her alone last night to fend for herself against a dick and his probably asshole friends. Good to see she was alright. But why was she in his car? How did she get back in? Hadn’t he locked his car last night?

Also, why the hell was he just hitting everyone in the face lately? When did that become a thing?

“Oh, shit, sorry about that.” He said. “Why are you in my car?”

“Owwww!” She whined nasally. “What the hell is your problem? Did you wake up on the wrong side of Flug’s bed?”

*Oh I fucking wish.*

“I...wasn’t expecting you.”

“Well, when you ditched me for Flug, asshole move by the way, Aurelio and his dudes tried to get me go with them. Suffice to say, I was not having it. So I crashed in your car. Got a little cold. You’re lucky I don’t know how to hot-wire shit cuz I’d have just driven myself home and left you stranded. See how you liked it.”

“Did...did you fucking break into my car?!” Black Hat asked, equal parts surprised and kinda pissed. He could’ve sworn that he locked it last night after she’d taken Flug out and he’d gone upstairs with Aurelio.

“I kept other people from breaking into your car!” Her nose was dripping a small amount of blood. “Really, you should be thanking me. Rufio was the only one too scared to come near your ride. Guess he thought you’d have it out for him if he so much as tried to screw with it.”

Black Hat smiled evilly at her. “He’s right to think that.”

Demetra scoffed. “Yeah, well, I slept in a car last night, my phones dead, stupid iPhone, and I ain’t had breakfast. I expect to be taken out to make up for being so cruelly left to fend for myself against such brutes as I did!” She said dramatically. She pouted and tried to fix him with large, vulnerable looking eyes.

“The puppy-dog eyes aren’t going to work on me.” He said with a thin grin. “Besides, I’ve already got a date.”

“Not right now you don’t, or Flug would be with you and the two of you would be on it.” Damn it. Dem wiped some of the blood on her arm warmer. Sure, it color matched, but that was kind of gross. Unhygienic. “Glad to hear you and Flug are finally going beyond the coffee-date stage. Honestly, do you two ever do anything besides talk over coffee?”
“We do now.” Black Hat said, with every intention of doing much *much* more in the coming weeks. He would have to remind himself not to be too hasty. No sense in trying to rush things when he already knew it would just set his efforts back further.

“Oh, about damn time,” she said, folding her arms behind her head. What, was she expecting Black Hat to just chauffeur her around now!? Did he *look* like an Uber driver!?? “I’m hungry. You hungry? You like pancakes? I like pancakes. You wanna get pancakes?”

Eh, he could eat. Although he was *really* pushing his sugar tolerance.

“More of a waffle kind of guy.” He admitted.

“Waffles are just pancakes with abs.”

This was going to be a long day.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Dios, mátame ahora = God, kill me now (Spanish)
¿Que? = What? (Spanish)
em essência = in essence (Portuguese)
amador = amateur (Portuguese)

Black Hat, the master of seduction am I right? Hope you're all excited to see how their date night goes!
Oh, and I *got a tumblr!* And post excerpts of upcoming chapters every Tuesday! Or you can just talk to me, ask me stuff, send me fanart if you've made it please don't feel like you can't hit me up. I also have a ton of shit I find funny on there so ya know, it's just me being me.
Chapter Summary

"Tutto Finisce a Tarallucci e Vino" : "Everything Ends at Biscuits and Wine"
It's an Italian saying that basically means to say that everything will be alright in the end.

PaperHat date! More BH backstory! More Flug backstory! Stuff! Things!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Flug had to admit, Black Hat knew how to make a guy feel special.

And he rocked that black apron. Flug wasn’t even sure where he got a black apron, he’d never seen one before. Did he find it online? Did he just get a regular white one and dye it black, for some nonsensical reason?

Thinking about random things like that distracted Flug from how insanely out of place he felt in this penthouse apartment.

It had a very modern feel, architure-wise, supported by Black Hat’s decor. It was like walking onto some movie set or something. It had large windows nearly as tall as the entire room facing out to, and providing a terrific view of, the city skyline and pitch black night sky. It was a shame that they couldn’t see stars the likes of which they’d seen out in the middle of nowhere where Hatsville would one day stand. Flug bet that on nights where the moon was full and bright, Black Hat could just leave the windows uncovered and let the natural moonlight illuminate this whole place. Flug could imagine it pretty clearly and it looked amazing. Very film noir, with a sophisticated interior of reds and blacks and a nice variety of grays accented by a few flashes of tastefully arranged white. Easy on his eyes.

So, naturally, he felt very self-conscious about...well, just himself.

Black Hat had picked him up at 7 o’clock on the dot, which was really nice as it spared Flug the paranoia that came along with waiting for someone to show up. He liked his punctuality. And immediately Flug felt his outfit put to shame.

Black Hat had forsaken the trench coat, waistcoat, and tie and was wearing a red dress shirt that was a bit...different from his usual one. If Flug wasn’t mistaken, it was embroidered with gold accents along his chest and upper back. As well as had little gold cufflinks, that were all fucking sparkling! He’d also left a button or two undone, showing off a bit more of his neck. Nothing far enough to reveal any of his scars, but it was enough to make Flug’s face flush with the memory of them. And
him. Shirtless. On top of him. At least Flug now knew he owned at least *one* other shirt.

Even his top hat looked like it had been spruced up for the occasion! Flug didn’t know *how* exactly one spruced up a hat, but well, it looked like it had gotten touched up or something. The red band around it looked a bit brighter, the whole thing just looked a more lively shade of black, if there even was such a thing. Hell, even Black Hat’s *shoes* looked like they had gotten a shine! The man pulled out all the stops for this and it left Flug feeling a bit...underdressed. Flattered, sure, but he felt like he really didn’t compare. Or even come close exactly. Although Black Hat kept telling him he looked fine, he still worried.

Was he dressed appropriately? He’d thought this plain dark blue dress shirt and black slacks would be fine. Casual enough, but he looked presentable. Even if he stood out in a huge way against the rest of the color scheme in here. Now he worried that he looked *too* casual. Especially compared to Black Hat. Had he underestimated the amount of pomp expected of him here? Should his shirt be tucked in, or was it fine to just leave out like it was? Should he have worn a tie? How was his hair? He didn’t really do anything special, other than actually wash it. His natural brown curls felt plain, kind of... *unstylish*. Not to mention all his split ends. When was the last time he got a haircut? Should he have put in some extra effort to fix it up? Should he have gone to a barber and gotten something more trendy? He didn’t really know what was in style right now, he’d never paid things like that any attention before.

Then there was the matter of just himself as a person. Was Black Hat going to put on a similar air to what would be typical of a high end restaurant? Flug wasn’t sure he could handle that, even if it was just the two of them. He felt a little overwhelmed. Which wasn’t great. He hoped he didn’t start getting lightheaded and have a panic attack again. Especially since attending this little dinner was in part to make up for that *other* panic attack he’d had the day before. And also in part (mainly) because, well, he *was* kind of interested to get to know Black Hat a bit better. See where he lived, talk a bit more personally. He’d probably be expected to divulge a bit more about himself as well but that was really the least of his worries. He wanted to know more about Black Hat, and it was only fair that he share a bit so that Black Hat got to know more about him too.

Flug just kind of wished that Black Hat had...toned it down a little rather than dial it up to 11. The man looked good, *really* good. A bit too good. To put it into perspective; if you look like a hundred bucks, and your date shows up looking like a *million* bucks, it kind of leaves you feeling like a twenty someone found on the sidewalk. With a bit of gum on it.

And then he somehow managed to look even *more* captivating as he actually made them dinner.

He explained that the whatever it was he was making them really didn’t take very long and was best enjoyed freshly made, so he started cooking soon after they arrived. In a very sophisticated-looking and spotless kitchen. As mentioned before, he put on a black apron, which really made Flug take notice of the slight curves of his body and how they were accentuated by his wardrobe. He had rolled his sleeves up, to keep them clean of course, but it also served to give Flug a better view of his forearms. He was able to see the scars better than he had yesterday. As they went down to the wrist, they lessened in both deepness and frequency. There wasn’t much chance that Flug could see to them being self-inflicted. Even though those parallel lines on his left inner forearm near the elbow did make him pause and wonder. There were mainly clean, thin scars, like one would expect from a knife. Given that the majority were on the outer arms, Flug would guess that they were defensive wounds. As with his chest, there were scars on top of scars, making Flug wonder again how old this
man was and just how much of his life he had poured into crime.

Black Hat had apparently switched to a pair of white (or maybe just very light grey) gloves for cooking, which Flug hadn’t seen him do and was a bit perplexed by. It was a nice change, as sometimes it was hard to remember that Black Hat was even wearing gloves, they were nearly the exact same color as his skin, but it made Flug come to a certain realization. He’d...never seen Black Hat take his gloves off. Not even when they’d wound up in bed together had he taken them off. Maybe he just had a thing about germs? No, that made no sense.

But when had he switched gloves without Flug noticing?

Well, whenever that happened, Flug was content to just watch him make them dinner. It actually was kind of calming just watching him work like this. It sort of reminded Flug of how he could get when he was building things, how he just went into his own little world and let his hands do all the work. He looked so skillful, like it was something he could do in his sleep. He was right, at the rate it was going, they’d probably be eating by precisely 8 pm.

“It’s really a very simple dish,” Black Hat said. “Just boil the noodles for about ten minutes and while you’re doing that, melt down the butter and cream in the skillet on low heat.”

“And the cheese?” Flug asked, eyeing the block Black Hat was currently grating. It was the second block, actually. Were they two different cheeses?

“These go in a little later, along with the garlic .” Black Hat stirred around the buttery, creamy mixture, spreading it along the pan. He apparently wasn’t satisfied with it yet, because he left it to melt a bit more while he began mincing the garlic.

He mentioned he’d killed people before. How many exactly he hadn’t said. Flug wondered in the back of his mind if he could cut people with this same amount of precision and finesse.

And have this same calm expression as he did.

“Hmmm, just about,” He remarked as he gave the mixture another once over. Then he turned up the heat and added in the cheeses and the garlic, as well as salt and pepper. He stirred them with the perfected hand of one who’d done this same thing so many times before that it was just second nature.

“So, um,” Flug said, trying to make conversation. As nice as it was just watching Black Hat cook, it was a bit weird to just stare at him silently like this. “You said you worked in a restaurant? In Italy?”

“Oh yes,” Black Hat replied, not taking his eyes off the dish. “Not anything huge, it was mainly a front for the local mob, but Italians have a certain degree of cultural pride in their cuisine. Even if it’s just to launder money, they don’t mess around with the food. I tell you, there was no way that place raked in as much as it did legitimately. But they could make you believe they could with how good the food was. It was serious stuff.” Oh it was starting to smell great.
“Did you already know how to cook beforehand?”

“Not anything spectacular. But I pretty much always had to cook for myself, so I was familiar with working with cutlery.”

“Why did you have to cook for yourself?”

“My parents died when I was very young.” Black Hat said. “I didn’t have any family members who could take me in, so I was raised in an orphanage. And, let me tell you, that place was about the same as being on the streets.”

The timer went off. “Oh, would you mind stirring this?”

“Uh, sure.” Flug feebly took the wooden spoon from Black Hat and tried to emulate what he’d seen him doing as the man drained the noodles. God that was a nice shirt. Was it tailor-made for him? How expensive was it? He should really be focused on what it was he was doing but his eyes kept going back to Black Hat, just...doing his thing. Seeming to be totally in his element. And why wouldn’t he be? It was his home, and a dish he was well acquainted with. And Flug was just...just kind of here. In a place that seemed out of his pay grade and league, and with a man who he was starting to think was probably way out of his league as well.

“How’s the sauce coming?” Black Hat asked over his shoulder.

“Oh, it’s, ah, it’s coming.” Flug awkwardly replied.

“Has the cheese melted yet?”

Flug looked down, the cheese was mostly mixed in with the rest of the sauce. It still had a few bits of gooey cheese that hadn’t fully melted yet.

“Uh, for the m-most part.”

Black Hat came over to see for himself. “Oh, that’s fine.” He plucked the wooden spoon out of Flug’s hands and gave the sauce on it a little lick. He smiled and held the end out for Flug. Who opted to just swipe a bit off with his finger.

Oh.

Oh wow.

Oh wooooooooooooooooooooow.
Oh God that was yummy. No, he should probably say something a little more refined than just “yummy”. Uh, delicious! No wait, delectable! Maybe scrumptious? Mouthwatering.

“Oh wow that’s good.” He said.

Black Hat chuckled lightly. “Glad you think so.” He then tossed the cooked noodles in with the sauce and stirred them around until they were finely coated with the delicious creamy buttery savory garlic-y concoction.

Dinner was looking to be pretty damn good. Flug was happy he agreed to this little date. And felt a small smile tug on his lips at the rememberance that he was, in fact, on a date.

With a man who kind of stalked him, kind of broke into his apartment, and ate his cereal without even asking yesterday.

Ok that last one wasn’t too bad but Flug was still kind of peeved about it!

Now that the meal itself was finished, it was time to actually sit down and eat. Black Hat led him to a small (but very elegant) table set for two across from each other. And gallantly pushed Flug’s chair in for him. And served him. And poured him some wine, which Flug didn’t intend to drink very much of. He’d had wine once before, he didn’t really like it.

His actual dinner however, he had high hopes for.

From the very first bite, Flug had to restrain himself from just immediately scarfing up everything on his plate. Holy fuck.

“So, you like it?” Black Hat asked across from him with a confident smile.

“Oh yes,” Flug said eagerly. Maybe a little too eagerly. Screw it, this was fucking delicious. He was eager for a second serving already. “How long were you in Italy?” He asked, remembering that Black Hat mentioned he’d worked in a restaurant his first year.

“About three years,” Black Hat said, eating from his own plate at a slow and relaxed pace. “It’s a very beautiful country. I hated to leave. But, I couldn’t stay any longer.” He said wistfully.

“Why not?”

“Well, I actually had an underling there. His name was Alberto, not a bad guy. Favored guns. Was a good shot. Someone I thought could handle himself. That turned out not to be the case.”
“What happened?”

Black Hat got a bit of a dark look on his face. “He died, when the two of us were fighting this upstart hero.”

“O-Oh,” Flug said. “I’m...sorry to hear that.”

“Don’t be,” Black Hat said with a wave of his hand. “I killed that shark myself for him. It’s all in the past now.”

Well...okay then...

“So, after that, I figured it’d be best I took my leave. I’d gained about as much as I could, three years is a long time to tour a country after all. I cut most of my ties and left with the blessing of the biggest crime boss of the entire country.”

Flug paused. “You don’t mean...”

Black Hat grinned evilly. “Il Ratto? Sì. The rumors are true, by the way. The man I met was, to my knowledge, the sixth rat to take up the mantle.”

Well, Flug was impressed. The Rat was the head of the largest branching mafia centered in Italy, with connections across Europe and an underground network of members spread far and wide. Drug and sex trafficking, extortion, murder, the list went on. Rumor had it that the Rat himself was not one man, but an alias passed down as the bosses retired or died. Only those of the inner circle even met their enigmatic boss, according to the stories.

Was Black Hat really being serious, or was he just exaggerating his travels?

“You know what I really liked about him?” Black Hat asked, getting back into the conversation. “I liked the way he carried himself. After all the stories and rumors, I was expecting some condescending snob covered in jewelry and chain smoking every minute of the day. Someone who ruthlessly killed because he felt safe in the palazzo he inherited, of course I didn’t know if he truly did just inherit the name back then. I was expecting him to be vain and weak, deep down. I thought the man himself might be disappointing, given the power behind him. I thought he’d be the type of guy who let his lackeys do all the work while he stayed safe and kept his hands clean. That wasn’t what he was like at all.”

“Wh-what was he like?”

Black Hat shrugged. “Just an ordinary guy.” He took another bite of his dinner. “Who happened to have murdered his father and ran the largest criminal syndicate in the country.”

Flug stared at him. “You know, I think we have different definitions of ordinary people.”
Black Hat laughed freely. “Well, that was what I always thought of him before he revealed himself. And I saw him often. He looked perfectly normal, he was well mannered and even kind at times. Just a regular guy like any other you’d see.”

“Why did he reveal himself?”

“You remember how I told you the restaurant I worked at was a front for the mob?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, it wasn’t his. All his fronts are far more high-end. It was just a small, local business. Their ‘family’, I mean. He would come in every other week, just because he could, no one knew who he was and he was always alone. And it happened that he found me in a...I’m a little embarrassed to say this, he found me in a rather compromising situation.”

“What do you mean by ‘compromising’?”

“Ehhhhhhh, he caught me killing a guy in a back alley.”

“...How?” Flug asked.

“Strangulation.” Black Hat said simply. “It was kind of sloppy on my part, but what can I say? I was having a bad day. So anyway, he sees me. I figure I’m going to have to kill him as well, but we get to talking. Don’t ask how that happened. He tells me who he is and offers me a job. I don’t fully believe it, until the limo pulls up and we get in and he takes me to his place. The whole ride over he’s telling me all this stuff about how he came about ruling over his grandfather’s operation and how he inherited it by killing the Rat before him and the ins and outs of the business, and I’m pretty sure after all that I’m not going to be allowed to leave without accepting, and I don’t want to take my chances against all these guys with machine guns. Besides that, it was admittedly a pretty huge step-up from where I was before and seemed too good an opportunity to let pass me by.”

“So, you were working for him after that?” Flug went to take another bite of the deliciousness on his plate, only to find that it was vacant.

“Would you like seconds?”

“Yes please.”

Black Hat got up and served him another helping as he continued. “Yes, I worked for him the rest of my time in Italy. I traveled around frequently, became acquainted with a few other big names. None that rivaled his influence, though. That’s actually how I met Alberto. After he died, however, it felt like it was time for me to move on. I had delayed my travels long enough. It took some convincing for Tom to let me leave, but, as you can see,” He sipped from his wine glass as he sat back in his seat. “Here I am.”

Flug froze mid-bite. “His name is... TOM?!”

“Yeah, why?”
Flug felt little chuckles bubble their way up from his throat. Which soon turned into full-blown rambunctious laughter that forced him to put his food down lest he choke on it.

“What exactly is so funny about that?” Black Hat asked with an amused smile.

“I don’t know, it’s just...” Flug searched for the right words, grin still plastered on his face. “It’s just kind of...anticlimactic. It’s not very intimidating, I’ll say that. It’s so...ordinary.”

“He was ordinary.” Black Hat said with a shrug. “On the surface at least. Kind of like you.”

“You?”

“Do you think anyone else would ever imagine you to be capable of murder?” Black Hat asked, grinning widely. Ok, how was it even physically possible for someone to smile that widely? Were those his molars? Why did they look sharp, that was not how teeth worked! The front teeth were sharp to cut food into smaller pieces and the back teeth were flat to mash food into nutrient-rich food-paste. Those weren’t the scientific terms but Flug didn’t much care. Why was that what Flug was focused on right now?

Was it because the mention of what he’d done made him just the teensy-tiniest bit uncomfortable?

“No,” he said after an uneasy pause. “I guess n-n-no one w-would. Can you?”

“I can imagine you doing all sorts of things.” Black Hat said, eyeing him from beyond his wine glass.

Oh God was that meant to sound as sexual as it did?! Was he hitting on him? Was this was being flirted with was like? It had been so long. Flug could feel his face heat up and downed most of his wine without really thinking about it. Ugh, that was dry. He was not a fan. He wouldn’t be asking for a second glass. He wasn’t even sure he’d get to finishing the rest of this one.

“Don’t like it?”

“Oh, no, sorry.” Flug said. “I don’t really like things that are so...bitter.”

“Funny, I can’t stand things that are too sweet.”

“Huh,” That actually was a little funny, how opposite their preferences were. It explained how he could stand to take coffee black, which Flug could never do. He loved his dark bean life-juice, but it freaking needed something to sweeten it. “So, where did you go after Italy?”

“After that, I didn’t have any real direction, so I spent a year in France. I mainly stuck to the south, working my way across the coast. I wasn’t in any big hurry to get wrapped up with other people again, so I laid low. I moved constantly. Then I burned through Spain—” Flug wondered if his time there coincided with the many huge and destructive fires that raged the country a few years back. “—and ended up in Portugal for the better part of two years. I don’t know, I was in a mood I guess.”
"And, how was Portugal?"

"Oh Portugal was wild. I killed so many fucking people in Portugal. It wasn’t the exact same orderly and organized crime vibe you get from Italy, there were times where it was just a free-for-all. Or maybe it was just the people I ended up getting involved with. Maybe they were just loons.” Black Hat stood up with his empty plate and got himself another helping. “A lot of my time there is kind of a blur, I don’t even actually remember leaving.”

“What? How?”

“Me and this little group of no-name criminals had just pulled off this big job. We mainly smuggled drugs in and out for the bigger fish out there who couldn’t risk getting their hands dirty, and this was about the biggest load we’d ever done together. For them, it was a huge deal. I was more or less used to stuff like that already, but it wasn’t as if I wouldn’t celebrate with them. We may have gotten into the stash,” Black Hat looked away. “And when I came to, I was on a boat and one of the guys, Jose, tells me we’re headed to Brasil.”

“Whoa.” Flug said with wide eyes. That did sound wild.

“Yeah, I didn’t take it all that well. I threw him overboard.”

“Jesus!” Flug exclaimed.

“No, Jesus died back in Portugal, the same night I apparently agreed on a one way trip to South America. I have no idea how, I heard it from Jose and Mimi and their memories weren’t the most trustworthy.”

“Before you threw him off the boat?”

“Nah, after. Jose could teleport. So tossing him over the side of the ship didn’t really accomplish much. No matter how many times I did it.”

“Why would you even keep throwing him over if it didn’t kill him?”

“I wasn’t trying to kill him. After the first time.” Black Hat said. “I was just mad he dragged me onto a boat. I get seasick easily. And we kind of stowed away on it so, that wasn’t fun.”

“Why did you even have to sneak on?” Flug asked.

“Because I was with a bunch of idiots.” Black Hat snapped. “Jose did at least get my stuff onboard, so that was nice. He couldn’t teleport people besides himself, only objects, so I was basically stuck there until we reached Brasil. Where I promptly ditched the four of them.”

“Well, that sounds...inconvenient.” Flug said awkwardly. Ugh, he felt like such a fool. Couldn’t he at least try to say something more than Damn, that sucks?

“Yeah, I didn’t spend much time in Brasil anyway. I figured, hey, I might as well put that English I learned to good use, and booked a flight to the United States within the week.”

“Any particular reason? That you picked the United States?”

“Eh, I had always wanted to go. And I was closer than I’d even been before. Seemed like the right
time to just...go for it. I spent the longest time in that country, I think I visited every single state. I tell you, that country has more costume criminals than anywhere else in the world. They don’t have the highest success rate, in fact it’s probably one of the lowest worldwide, but there are just so many nonetheless. It’s inspiring, in a strange sort of way.”

“And that’s when you met Dr. Morte, right?” Flug asked. He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t interested in hearing about the guy who gave Black Hat the means to own his soul.

“Eventually. Which reminds me,” Black Hat finished the last bite of his meal and rose. He picked up his plate, and Flug’s empty plate, and took them back to the kitchen. Uh...ok...it reminded him...to clear the table? Flug got up and was about to follow him when he came back and wordlessly took him by the hand and led him out to an expansive living room, and sat them both down on a comfortable red sofa.

Black Hat got himself comfortable; facing Flug, leaning an arm around the back and crossing his legs. Flug was a bit too timid to do more than just sit back and try to relax. It was a bit easier to do that when he was listening to Black Hat talk, when he had something else to focus on. Like great food. It was far easier to relax with a warm meal and pleasant conversation lulling him into a false sense of security and pulling him out of his mind. Now, when all he had were his own thoughts to occupy his brain, his constant fears of inadequacy crept back up.

Did he really look fine? Had he been too eager to dig into his dinner? Was anything stuck in his teeth? Was he sitting weirdly? He felt stiff. The more he tried to relax the harder he tensed up. Was it showing? Did Black Hat think he was making him uncomfortable? That, that wasn’t the issue! Well, maybe it was a little bit the issue. Black Hat had really went all out; from his wardrobe to his home to his cooking, and maybe it did make Flug feel a bit...lesser in comparison.

“Would you like to meet him?” Black Hat asked.

“M-meet who?” Flug asked nervously.

“Dr. Morte. Would you like to meet him?”

Meet him? Meet another villain? An already established villain with a history of hundreds of years of evil-doing!? A necromancer, who rose the dead to do his bidding and was rumored to have cheated death multiple times? Meet the man who stole the souls of the desperate? The one who ripped the dead from the underworld and forced them to walk the earth as his minions?

“His birthday is coming up in April and he invited me.” Black Hat said. “I wanted to know if you’d be my plus one. I don’t want to go alone.”

...Flug felt like maybe he had a tendency to overthink things sometimes...
“I could introduce you to everyone. Get you better acquainted with our future clientele.” Black Hat said with a devious smile. “Besides, Morte always throws one hell of a party. Especially for his birthday. I was lucky enough to be around for it a few years ago, it was truly incredible.”

“I-Is it true?” Flug asked. “How he’s stayed around all these years?”

“Yes...and no.” Black Hat said cryptically. “I do think he is still alive, in the technical sense at the very least. Whether or not he extends his lifespan by taking the lives of others, I can’t say for certain. It seemed rude to ask about something so personal, especially after he’d already shared so much. I did see him remove a person’s soul from their body once, and that was at the party I attended.”

“Wh-what did it look like? The soul?” Flug felt certain his eyes were wide with wonder. And he may or not be leaning in closer to Black Hat. He wasn’t sure. He wasn’t sure if he was leaning closer or if Black Hat was the one leaning closer to him. Maybe they both were.

“Blinding,” He said, letting the word roll off his tongue and hang heavy in the air, like that one word could weight down everything in the room. “There’s really nothing else that describes it. Come with me. Let me show you what sort of splendor awaits us. I promise you, you won’t regret it.”

They were face to face, so close they could touch but they didn’t. Flug felt he might’ve been panting, what from he couldn’t say. The thought of seeing a soul, ripped from another’s body? What might it look like? A blinding white light, so bright that it can’t even be made out as a distinct shape? Would it resemble a silhouette? What was the man who could remove something so precious like? What sort of person was he? Was that someone he really wanted to meet? He wished Black Hat had continued talking about his travels, Flug would’ve liked to hear from him what Dr. Morte was like.

“Ok,” He breathed it out in a sigh, nodding his head. “I’ll go with you to his birthday party.”

“Great.” Black Hat said proudly. At which point he leaned back against the sofa again. It seemed all the intensity of the past minute evaporated. “Really, he throws fantastic parties. It’s going to be a fabulous time.”

“H-How old is he?” Flug asked, finding his voice. And how old are you for that matter?

“Oh, a thousand years old, or thereabouts? He looks great.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, he looks as if he’s in his forties.”

“Oh, he really looks great if that’s the case.”

“Yeah, he should be on skincare ads.”

Flug broke out into nerdy laughter. God, he was just picturing Dr. Morte’s mugshots on one of those old joke ads online. “Dermatologists hate him. Is a thousand years old, looks 40! Find out how you too can look hundreds of years younger! Click here!”
Although he could only guess at what Dr. Morte's face looked like, and wondered if the skull mask he wore was an actual human skull. Flug wasn't sure if it was even possible to use an actual skull as a mask, unless the skull in question was unusually large it didn't seem feasible. Wouldn't fit comfortably over the head otherwise, it'd be all cramped.

“Well, as much as I love hearing myself talk,” Black Hat said once Flug had calmed down. “I feel as if the evening conversation has been a bit one-sided.” He moved in closer and leaned against Flug provocatively. His arm was still slung around the back of the sofa but it was dangerously close to wrapping around him, Flug felt. He stared down at his hands nervously. “Tell me about yourself.”

“Heh, I, ah, I don’t think anything about my life is really gonna be all that interesting to you.” He said shyly. Yeah, he couldn’t compare to Black Hat. No way. Why would someone who’s travelled so far and seen and done so much want to hear about his boring, ordinary life? He’d never even been outside of Mexico before, the farthest he’d ever been away from home being when he joined the air force. And that was only really for a little over a year, before the incident. That was the only thing that would probably be of any interest to Black Hat, and Flug really didn’t want to talk about it.

It’d probably bore him, to hear about all the nothing Flug had done in his life.

“Tell me about your family then.” He said. “I have none. Tell me about all the mundane crap I missed out on.”

“Oh, well...alright then. Where should I start?”

“How about your parents?”

It was a shaky start, but Flug told him about his parents. How his mother had been a stay at home mom and his father worked in an optometrists office. He told him about his mother’s dinner and how they’d sit down as a family every night. Even when his dad was swamped with work, he’d make the effort to sit and eat with them and stay up into the night catching up on paperwork. His father was actually the reason his special lenses had been as cheap as they were, and how he’d gotten goggles with the same prescription lenses. A custom job from a close friend.

And then he’d let something slip about how at least he hadn’t needed glasses back in high school, given how badly he was picked on they’d have gotten broken every other week.

“What made you a target?” Black Hat asked.

“Maybe it was because I had no friends?” Flug responded with a sad smile. “I’ve always been a kind of solitary person, I guess. I never really liked to go out and play with the other kids, I preferred to just stay in and read or build or just do something on my own rather than be around other people. My parents never forced me to go out, they encouraged me to pursue my interests. They uh, they made it it’s own game for me. If I read ten new books by the end of the week, I’d get ice cream. Whenever I managed to finish a model plane or car on my own they’d take me out to eat wherever I wanted. Sometimes on the weekends, or in the summer, my dad would help me build those little models. They weren’t the simple little wooden ones, they were more complicated and had all these little plastic parts. It felt accurate to what an actual plane was built out of. I guess that’s what really got me
into planes, and inventing, in a way. I loved the feeling of getting all those tiny, tiny pieces into place exactly how they were supposed to fit together. The first time I built something new out of scratch the three of us had our own little party to celebrate the occasion.” Flug smiled at the memory. They’d gotten chocolate cake, his favorite. They’d called all his aunts and uncles and told them about what a special boy they had. It was one of the happiest moments of his life.

“What was it?”

“Huh? What?”

“The first thing you ever made on your own.” Black Hat clarified. “What was it?”

“Oh, heh, it was a little remote controlled plane.” Flug said. He was more relaxed, leaning back into the sofa and looking Black Hat in the eye. “I loved those even more than the models, because I could actually fly them, you know? But, uh, I wasn’t really all that good at it. My mom was, actually. She was good with those little planes and helicopters. She’d fly them with me sometimes, try to help me. No matter how much she tried to teach me the controls, I kept on wrecking them. Sometimes I’d be able to keep them airborne for a while, but then I’d always mess something up and it’d crash on the ground. And I’d crash them spectacularly. She said she’d never seen anyone actually break them into pieces before. I think it took me until I was in middle school to be able to fly them without breaking them. The one I built, I made it from the trashed remains of all the ones I crashed and broke. Took a lot of weeks skimming online articles to figure out how the wiring worked, and a whole month trying to figure out how to make this scrapped together excuse of a machine fly, but it was worth it. Until I crashed that one too.” He laughed lightly. “That’s some crazy fate.”

“What is?”

“My name. Flugslys. It means ‘plane crash’. Even though I love planes, I always seem to crash them.”

Black Hat was silent and, as usual, quite a hard man to read.

“Ironically, ‘Flug’ is German for ‘flight’. The one thing I can’t accomplish. And yet it’s what everyone calls me.” Flug fell silent, getting lost in his own thoughts. He didn’t even notice Black Hat’s arm brushing against his shoulders. He’d wanted to fly so badly. Not commercially, as safe as it was it didn’t hold any appeal for him to just ferry people around like a sky-chauffeur. He wanted to fly as freely as he possibly could. Since he didn’t have the nerve to become any sort of daredevil pilot, the air force it was. Hey, it sounded macho on paper at least. The closest he’d ever come to something resembling stereotypical masculinity.

It did sometimes feel like a slap in the face though, that everyone called him “Flug” when flight was the one thing he always seemed to fail at no matter how often or how hard he tried. He couldn’t get the toys to fly, he couldn’t keep actual planes in the air, it was something he had no talent for no matter how much effort he put in.

“I’d say landing is where you have more trouble.” Black Hat said bluntly.
“Y-Yeah!” He forced out between gasps and laughs. “I g-g-guess you’ve got a point!” He held on to Black Hat’s shirt until he was able to catch his breath again, his head bowed into the dark skinned man’s chest. “Wh-What were we talking about?”

“You were telling me about your school. And how you were bullied.”

“Oh, r-r-right. I, uh, I didn’t have many friends. I was never very s-sociable or outgoing so I didn’t have any close friendships. I also had skipped a grade so I was pretty much known as a huge n-n-nerd, and the youngest person in all my classes. Before, I had at least known the other kids, we’d all pretty much been in the same classes all our li-lives. All of a sudden I don’t know anyone and n-no one wants to talk to m-m-me. Guess it made me an easy target, since there was no one to stop anyone from pi-picking on me. That’s how this stutter started. No one would let me speak. Even when I was just answering questions in class, someone would cut me off. I was told whatever I said was wrong. Even when it was clearly right. They’d come back after class, shove me down, tell me I was an idiot. Every time I tried to stand up for myself I got interrupted. They said that if I was so smart I should think before I spoke. It got to the point where I just started doing it to myself. I’d cut myself off before they even got the chance. It was such a struggle to get the words out, and then I couldn’t get them out at all. Then they’d just make fun of me for stuttering. For how long it’d take me to get even a short sentence out. Made me so nervous about speaking up. I almost stopped talking entirely. I did, actually, after I killed all those people. I didn’t say a single word for the longest time. Made my parents worried. I really haven’t stuttered like this in years. After graduation, just getting away from it all, it really helped. It help put it behind me, maybe because I was literally putting in behind me, ha.” Flug sighed deeply. “Wow, I didn’t think I could say all that in one go.”

“I’m glad you did.” Black Hat said. “Have you ever told anyone else?”

“No.” Flug said softly, resting his head against Black Hat’s chest. Not fully true, he’d told Julio a bit about it. “Who would I ever tell? Why am I even telling you?”

“Maybe because you have no one else to tell?”

“Heh, maybe I did just need to tell someone.”

“It is hard, keeping everything to yourself.” Flug felt a reassuring hand at his back.

“Yeah, I guess you’ve had to keep a whole slew of secrets from everyone, haven’t you? Probably left a whole lot out of what you told me tonight.”

“Well, it’s only the first date.” Black Hat said, the smirk audible. “I don’t have to reveal everything just yet.”

Flug laughed gently. Yeah, he wasn’t expecting to hear his entire life story. It wasn’t as though Flug
was being fully honest about everything either. There were some parts that he wasn’t sure he was comfortable saying out loud just yet. It had little to do with what Black Hat would think of it, hell the man would probably enjoy hearing about all the intrusive fantasies Flug had had about his classmates, even if he’d never gone through with any of them. But, Flug wasn’t fully sure he could trust Black Hat with those details just yet.

He was hoping to learn a bit more about the man himself, though. As much as Black Hat had talked his ear off, he really hadn’t gone into much about his own self. It had been more about where he’d gone and what he’d done. While that told Flug a bit about what kind of person he was and the life he’d lived, it didn’t really tell him much about him.

“Black Hat, can I ask you something?” He asked cautiously.

“Sure.”

“Why don’t you ever take your gloves off?”

He felt Black Hat stiffen up, just a bit. Flug took the second to think back and try to remember what gloves Black Hat had on right now. Had he removed the white ones he’d used when cooking? Was Flug sure those had been different gloves and they just didn’t look different in the lighting or something?

If Flug was remember the past hour or so correctly, he was fairly certain Black Hat was in his usual dark grey gloves at the moment.

“It’s not a problem or anything, it’s just a little odd.” Flug said. “Like, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you take them off. Not even...yesterday...”

“Well, the thing is...” Black Hat said, a bit clumsily. “Remember how I said I had to cook for myself?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I wasn’t always good at it. I...burned, and cut, my hands quite a bit as a child and they, well, they aren’t a very pretty sight. They never healed properly, didn’t have the money for any proper medical treatment at the time, and even now I don’t like to show them. I’ve tried to have surgery, to fix them, but it...never really helped. Not in my eyes at least. They work fine, just not nice to look at.”

Flug was torn between asking him to take the gloves off and show him his hands and respecting his privacy and letting him take them off when he felt comfortable. Flug could handle ugly scars, he could handle burn marks. He could handle...him...

Assuming he actually could.

Ultimately, he decided the most polite thing would be to just drop it. He asked, Black Hat gave him his reason, he could be satisfied with that. As he said, it was only a first date. No one should be
expected to just bare their souls immediately.

Then he felt Black Hat...shift. Flug felt himself pulled closer and Black Hat wrap an arm around him properly. Should he...should he return the action? He wasn’t fully sure where this was going or where he may or may not want it to go, and he really hoped Black Hat didn’t expect him to put out on the first date. Just what kind of man did he think he was?

Flug chuckled lightly.

“What?”

“I was going to say take me to dinner first, but, well, you did.”

Black Hat laughed back. “And how did I do? Did I do a good job of wining and dining you?”

“Ha ha, yeah. I do feel I know you a little better now. Do you...know me a little better too?”

“I’d like to say I do.” Black Hat said as he ran his hands over Flug’s legs, moving them to either side of his own. It was a bit weird, how Black Hat was kind of picking him up and OH SHIT THAT’S A HAND ON HIS ASS OK THAT’S WHERE WE’RE GOING WITH THIS ALRIGHTY THEN.

“I, um, I’m glad I came.” Flug said, beginning to realize the position he was in. In...Black Hat’s lap. With Black Hat holding him. And his head still nuzzling into Black Hat’s chest. It wasn’t that he didn’t like it, it was just, this was kind of...forward. Something he was starting to realize may just be part of Black Hat’s personality. Straight-forward, very forward, really not very straight at all if the past two days were any indication.

And something he would greatly appreciate being dialed down a bit.

“I’m glad to have you.” Black Hat said smoothly, giving his ass a slight squeeze. Oh God it was making his whole body break out in goosebumps. He may have made a little squeaking sound, he wasn’t going to confirm or deny that that may have happened. But it did make Black Hat stop what he was doing for a second.

“Flug?”

“Yes?”

“If you don’t want this, you can tell me to stop. It’s not as though you owe me for dinner or anything.”

Flug let go of a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding. He hadn’t realized how much he needed to hear that again. “No, no, this is...this is ok. Not sure how much farther I can go with it but, just this? This is fine.” Yeah, yeah he could be fine with this. He could be fine...straddling Black Hat’s lap. As long as the farthest they got tonight was just more kissing and everyone’s clothes stayed on, he could handle it.

“Would it be fine...” Black Hat pressed the two of them closer together. “…if I called you my Pet?”
Flug froze, and felt the heat rise in his cheeks again. Oh. Yeah. His Pet. Flug had said that. When Black Hat asked him what he was to him. If he was the Master, like Flug called him (Oh yeah, he’d moaned that out! More than once!), then what was Flug?

*Dios en el cielo dame fortaleza.*

“I realize that you may have said that in the heat of the moment,” Black Hat continued, drumming his fingers along Flug’s spine. “But, well...I like it.” He said in a low voice.

Flug gulped. Goddamn the way his voice got deep like that. It was...kind of a turn on.

“Well, uh, I guess as p-p-pet names go, it’s pretty literal, heh,” He laughed nervously. And wrapped his arms around Black Hat’s neck. “D-Do you want me to c-c-call you M-Ma-Master?”

“As long as you’re alright with it.” The man said as Flug slowly lifted his head up to look at him.

“M-Master,” Flug said quietly, testing out how it felt to say it again. He’d honestly been trying not to think about it all day. How he’d called him his Master. He could feel something in his lower half perk up. He seemed to be more than just alright with it. God, he wondered what his face looked like.

“My Pet,” Black Hat said in a whisper, closing the distance between their lips. It wasn’t a true kiss, more of just a brush of contact. Perhaps he too was testing the waters, so to speak. Seeing where exactly the lines were. Seeing where he was and was not allowed to touch just yet. That’s what Flug assumed from the hands lightly exploring his body. He was reluctant to admit that he wished he was being more...firm with him. Holding him tighter. Like he had before.

Flug took that final leap and made it into a real kiss. A slow one. One which made every small motion of their lips feel like a jolt of electricity through Flug’s veins. It felt so nice. Even when Black Hat moved his lips down to kiss along his jawline, Flug just tipped his head back to grant him better access.

He moved onto his neck from there, a blooming favorite for the both of them. Kissing and sucking gently, occasionally running teeth and tongue along the marks from the day before. Flug might have a few new purple marks on his neck before the night was through. He...he wasn’t sure he really had a problem with that. The way it felt, felt so good to have Black Hat sucking at his skin and reopening his bite marks. The way his mouth felt on his flesh. The way his tongue seemed to sizzle every inch it caressed. Mmmm, this was a brand new shirt that he got just for tonight. He hoped he didn’t get too much blood on it. He didn’t own a lot of nice shirts, he wanted to make this one last.

Black Hat held Flug by the hips, gradually getting tighter with him. The feeling of hands on him, like he’d been holding him yesterday, made Flug sigh softly. They should probably stop soon. Otherwise there’d just be a repeat of yesterday and Flug would feel horrible for ruining things again. He didn’t want to stop yet, though. It still felt...nice. He wanted to enjoy being in his Master’s hands a bit longer.
But when Black Hat tentatively rolled Flug’s hips against his own, making the man in his lap let out a startled gasp, Flug knew he had to pull away. Even if deep down, he didn't completely want to. Even if, in all honesty, he really wanted Black Hat to do that again.

“I think you should take me home now.” Flug said shakily. He knew that if he allowed this to go any further he was going to be losing some article of clothing. And he just wasn’t comfortable with that being the kind of man he was.

“Alright.”

The drive back to his apartment was uneventful. Flug and Black Hat made light small talk, occasionally falling silent to listen to a song playing softly on the car radio. Flug got lost in his thoughts a few times during those stretches of quiet, thinking about how he compared to Black Hat.

Wardrobe, totally outdone. Living space, not even in the same league. Culinary skill, no contest. Confidence, oh is there any question? Black Hat always seemed so put together and self-assured. He knew who and what he was and he embraced it, he stated he was a villain with pride and he spoke casually about murder and breaking the law. He was the exact opposite of Flug; timid, conflicted, kind of a slob, he was just barely taking care of himself on his own. He could think of vile, terrible things with the utmost ease, but the thought of actually putting them into practice was where he choked. When it came to putting pen to paper and taking the steps to really make something that would 100% guarantee bloodshed, he froze. The memory of his last villainous escapade hitting him like a bucket of ice water. He’d killed people, fully intentionally, without hesitation, and yet he couldn’t even bare to so much as think about it for too long without scaring himself. The thought of what he’d done filled him with shame.

Don’t even get him started on how behind he was compared to Black Hat sexually. He’d probably had dozens of partners, probably slept with exotic men and women of various countries who were far more skillful and open then he was. If he had slept with Black Hat, he’d probably be terrible at it compared to some phantom lover from his past. He’d probably only be able to lie back, leaving Black Hat to do all the work because Flug was far too inexperienced to actually participate like a decent partner would.

Flug shook himself out of these thoughts as Black Hat pulled up in front of Flug’s apartment building. God, he was just going to spent the rest of the night wallowing in self-pity wasn’t he? He and Black Hat should remain as employer and employee, the dating thing would just be their cover story. As Black Hat said, they didn’t need to actually date or anything. This dinner was just to make up for the rapid pace of the day before and to get a bit of a better understanding between them. No reason to make it anything more. If Black Hat tried to touch him in a way he didn’t want, he’d just tell him no. Black Hat had said he could handle being told no, and he better have meant it.

“Well, thank you for a great evening,” Flug said. “See you tomorrow?”

“Actually, could I come up for a minute?” Black Hat asked. “There’s something I need to tell you and I’d think it’d be better if we talked inside.”
“That sounds...kind of...serious.” Flug said. “Wh-What’s up?”

“May we go upstairs?” Black Hat asked again.

They went up the elevator (when did they fix that?) and into Flug’s apartment wordlessly. Flug wondered what it was that Black Hat had to say that was so important it needed to be delivered in the privacy of Flug’s home. Was he going to say that he felt they should keep their relationship professional as well? Was he trying to let him down gently or something? Well, someone thought pretty highly of themselves. Oh, how surprised he would be to hear that Flug felt the exact same. Eh, he’d play along and be let down for a few minutes. Maybe a day or two. It was the polite thing to do.

Black Hat sat down on the couch. “Flug, I need to tell you something about Aurelio.”

Wait, what?

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Il Ratto? Sì. = The Rat? Yes. (Italian)
palazzo = palace (Italian)
Dios en el cielo dame fortaleza = God in heaven give me strength (Spanish)

You know, I realized something recently. This December, it's going to be one year that I've been writing this story. I feel like I should celebrate, or do something special for the occasion. I thought of maybe doing a Q and A on my tumblr, or writing a bunch of one-shots suggest by you the readers either from here or again from tumblr, or drawing what I imagine some of the characters from this story (like Flug or some of my OC's) again, at people's requests.

So, follow me on tumblr, get weekly sneak peeks and previews of upcoming chapters, and let me know what you think would be a good way to commomorate the 1 year anniversary of Black Hat Org. (trademark pending)!
A Lot to Think About

Chapter Summary

Flug has a lot to think about. Aurelio, Black Hat, himself, it's just all jumbled together. And he has very little idea of what to do about it.

Chapter Notes

Apologies, I meant to upload this a day or two ago. Whoops. Life happens, ya know?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“And...you’re sure?” Flug asked for about the tenth time. “Because, you were drinking too, weren’t you? A-Are you sure you didn’t-”

“I know what I saw, Flug.” Black Hat said firmly.

Flug racked his brain, trying to remember that night. Drinking and talking with Aurelio. He had turned his back on him, to watch Demetra. It couldn’t have been more than a minute, maybe two, that would’ve been plenty of time. He did remember Aurelio handing him another cup, and that’s really where things started to get fuzzy. According to Black Hat, who claimed to have seen it with his own eye, Aurelio had slipped something into his drink. Which... would explain why everything from that point onward was so fragmented and difficult to recall.

“Do you remember what the contract said?” Black Hat asked.

“I-I’m sorry, what?”

“The contract. You can’t sleep on your own, but you can still pass out if you take drugs. Isn’t that what it said?”

Flug thought back. Yes, he did remember something like that being part of the contract. Sleep wasn’t something he needed anymore, if he wanted rest meditation or hypnosis would work as an alternative, and while he couldn’t sleep or dream he could still lose consciousness from recreational or medicinal substances.

Which he may have just experienced. He... had actually had to wake up Saturday morning. Something that almost felt new after he’d been awake for so long.
Flug ran his fingers through his hair and whispered “What the fuck?” to himself.

“Sorry to end the evening on such a sour note,” Black Hat said. “But I really couldn’t put off telling you any longer. I had hoped to...ease you into it. I’d have told you yesterday but, well, I think things got away from the both of us.”

“I understand.” Flug said rather numbly. God, he wasn’t sure he felt anything at all right now. Not even the couch underneath his rear or Black Hat’s arm brushing against his own. “Thank you for telling me.” Really, it probably was for the best he find out about this now. Even if it kind of dampened the evening. Black Hat was right, it couldn’t be put off any longer. It had already been put off long enough. It wasn’t as if there was ever a “right time” to tell someone something like this. Flug was glad that Black Hat and Demetra had been there to help him. Who knew what might’ve happened to him otherwise. Where he might’ve woken up. What he might’ve woken up to. What would Aurelio have done to him if Black Hat hadn’t intervened?

“Why did you let him come into my home?” Flug asked, not looking at Black Hat.

“I make it a point not to kill the people around me. Doing so would arouse suspicion. I needed to make him leave, so I put on a bit of a show. He seemed very confused and not at all happy to see how familiar I was with your apartment.”

“Because you broke in. Multiple times.”

“A detail he doesn’t need to know.”

Flug scoffed. “Yeah alright. So what now?”

“Do you want to confront him about it?”

“Why didn’t you, if you really saw him drug me?”

“What would I have said to him? Threaten to tell you if he didn’t back off? Would you rather I had done that? Would you rather I had kept this from you?”

Flug shivered lightly. “No.”

“Would you like to continue with our plan of pretending to be romantically involved?”

He thought about it for a second. “Yes.”

“Then, nothing really changes does it?”

“I guess not.” Although he wasn’t sure what exactly he would do the next time he saw Aurelio. What on earth would he say? About anything? About what Aurelio had done, about he and Black Hat, hell what would he say about what he’d almost done to Demetra? What, was he going to just immediately shoot Aurelio down if he tried to talk to him by saying, Um, I have a boyfriend.

Ah shit was he actually going to be calling Black Hat his boyfriend in public? Was he really going to
be able to do that? Was Black Hat going to try and kiss him in public? Or touch him in places? Like, like typical couples would? Oh God the thought made Flug’s body seize up.

“Black Hat,” Flug said in an even voice. “I don’t want to be physical with each other in public.”

“Oh no?”

“No. Even if it wasn’t just our cover story, even if we were actually dating, I don’t like being so open, about myself. So, can we just...” He searched for the right words. “Can we just, act like we normally do?”

Black Hat sighed as he stood up and stretched. “So, business as usual, but we refer to each other as boyfriends?”

A shudder went through Flug’s body at the word boyfriends. “Yeah I guess so.”

“Very well then. I’ll see you tomorrow.” The man in the top hat walked towards the door. “And Flug?”

He raised his head to watch him go.

“Don’t cover your neck.” With that, the man opened the door and swiftly exited the small, unkempt apartment and left his underling (and fake-boyfriend) to stew.

God, how was he going to do this? Even if they actually were dating, he’d still be so very reluctant to do any sort of thing in public that was even a little bit intimate. Hell, if Black Hat walked too close to him it’d made him nervous about what other people were going to say. What was he going to do tomorrow?

Black Hat had agreed that they’d just act like they usually would, but was he really going to do that? Could Flug trust that he wouldn’t start acting kind of... affectionate in front of other people, just to make it clear that they were together, as far as anyone else was concerned?

He better not try to call him his “Pet” in front of other people. Oh Flug swore he would just up and die if he did that!

He wondered why he’d even given his “ok” for Black Hat to call him that in the first place. Or why he’d called him his “Master” again. If he really thought that their “relationship” should stay professional behind closed doors, why was he adding to the multitude of mixed signals between the two of them?

Admittedly, he did... kind of like it when he called him that. And maybe he also kind of liked the thought of having a Master. Although, according to the soul contract, Black Hat actually was his “lord and master”. So it didn’t have to be a sex thing, per se, that he called him that. It could just be a thing. That the both of them went along with.
Oh Lord was he really trying to justify why he wanted to call someone his Master?

With a sigh and a shake of his head, Flug went to his bedroom. He wondered if when he finally moved in with Black Hat, in a giant hat in a town called Hatsville, if he’d even have a bedroom. Well, he didn’t really have any need for a bed anymore. He supposed he could just get, like, a really comfortable couch or something and just furnish himself some small little sitting room to unwind in. In terms of comfort, he didn’t really need much. Just somewhere to relax. Relax, take his pants off, and listen to hypno-tracks.

At least this shirt really hadn’t gotten any more than a few drops of his blood on it. Flug could probably just throw it in the wash real quick and it’d be good as new. One more nice shirt to bolster his collection to about three nice shirts. He’d have worn his new skinny jeans as well, but even he figured that’d be pushing the casual limit. Not that he was any match for Black Hat’s fashion sense anyway. Everything he wore seemed tailor-made for his figure, even the damn apron!

Speaking of his figure...Holy Hell it was hard to think about Black Hat without coming back to the mental image of what he looked like in nothing but his underwear. And socks. And how it’d felt having him hold him down against the bed as his tongue ravished his mouth. Or the feel of the both of them being pressed flush together, grinding against each other. Or the feel of those long thin scars trailing down his back. Flug still wondered what those had been from. He hadn’t gotten to see the man’s back.

Dear God why had he agreed to fake-date this guy? Who was already type-casting him as the bottom. Well, he kind of wanted to be anyway, but hell he could’ve asked at least once. It’s rude to just assume stuff like that, isn’t it? Really, how hard would it be to just go, Hey, you mind if I top? It would take all of two seconds. Maybe the two seconds necessary for Flug to go, At least buy me dinner first, damn. Which actually kind of ended up happening, strangely. Well, he’d made him dinner. Close enough. Wherein Flug actually did manage to reel in the situation before it could get out of hand. He was proud of himself, he didn’t just roll over and let Black Hat do whatever he wanted to him.

Although the thought of doing just that was quite enticing.

Flug ran his fingers through his messy brown curls. Why had he agreed to this? ANY of this? Was he really going to be able to go along with this madness? Perhaps things would be clearer in the morning. He might not be able to sleep on things, but he could always just continue putting off dealing with his troubles til he was forced to confront the issue. Like he’d probably have to end up confronting Aurelio at some point. Maybe. Maybe they’d just never run into each other again and Flug could just pretend nothing ever happened. Maybe he could just do that with Black Hat as well. Just act like nothing happened, business as usual. Yeah. And if, on occasion, Black Hat wanted to suck at his neck again, well fine. The man himself had said that it didn’t have to go any further than Flug’s neck. It would just serve as a reason that they were always together and would sometimes meet up on the weekends. As to why they did nothing publicly, well, Flug valued his privacy. It just wasn’t anyone else’s business and he wasn’t comfortable being so... out. It wasn’t exactly a secret, it was just a private, personal matter. And he hoped that Black Hat, whether as his boyfriend or boss, would respect that.
Flug caught a glimpse of himself in his mirror. God, his neck was going to be a fucking map of bruises and scabs tomorrow, wasn’t it? Fully marked by Black Hat. Even if no one made any specific connection to him, they’d know Flug had been with someone. He took in a deep breath and let it out slow. Perhaps those breathing exercises were good for something after all. So now he’d just spend the rest of the night watching hypno and clearing his head. If nothing else, it’d put him in a better state of mind tomorrow and he could think on things further if need be.

Flug sat on the edge of his bed, his headphones on, and started the audio file up while he got comfortable. From the first few words, though, this one seemed a bit different from the ones he’d listened to before.

“The volume should be turned down, so that you can only just barely hear my voice.” The man said. “For best results, you should be doing some sort of task or chore so that you aren’t focused on my words.”

That was new. Typically, the only prep work these things required was for Flug to get in a position he felt comfortable in. Sitting or laying down, either worked, so long as it was a position he could stay in for 20-60 minutes without being disturbed. It wasn’t even a necessity that he look at the spiral, if it was a video instead of an audio file. Beyond that they all had a pretty similar routine; clear his mind, breath in and out, occasionally there would be one that had him perform some repetitive motion (to give an example, opening and closing his eyes in time with his breathing), but usually all they had him do was stare ahead and lose himself.

Apparently this one was meant to serve more as background noise, probably to really sell the whole “planting triggers in the subconscious” schtick. Flug still didn’t know if he bought into it fully, but they gave him something to do throughout the night and...he kind of enjoyed the idea that someone could send him into a more submissive state of mind just by saying a few particular words. The reassurance that only he, or someone he trusted, would be able to use the triggers giving him more peace of mind. No one knew the words, and even if they did it would have no effect on him unless he wanted it too. If he didn’t want to be in a more complacent state for them, he wouldn’t be made to. He wouldn’t, and they couldn’t make him.

Back to the matter at hand, should he just switch to one he’d already listened too? They did claim the effects would be more potent with repeated sessions. But he liked to browse, see what different people had to offer. See what other videos and audio files were out there. He thought that if he repeated them one to many times, it might take him out of it. That he’d start to get bored with the process of hypnosis and just skip to the end, where the commands were implemented. Which didn’t feel as arousing without all the build up. Or rather, break down of his inhibitions.

It was one thing to be told to be a slave when commanded, it was another to sit there for half an hour getting used to obeying a voice and slipping into trance and then be told to be a slave when commanded.

Not that Flug had ever tested out whether or not the command actually worked on him. So he supposed he had no idea if it actually did ruin the effectiveness of the hypnosis.
And, even for science, he wasn’t very eager to test that little matter out.

Honestly, who even was there that he’d ever feel comfortable enough with that he’d tell them that he so much as watched these kinds of things? Let alone tell them the trigger words to send him into trance and make him an eager-to-please puppet for them.

He really wasn’t sure where this (what to call it, a fascination? A fetish?) interest with things like submission or objectification stemmed from. To Flug it was kind of like...like a way of showing his commitment. The way he could show how invested he was in the relationship, in the other person. The lengths he would go to for another. What he’d let someone do to him. What he was willing to go through when he felt so strongly about someone.

Or just what got him off. As scared as he was of being taken advantage of, it was a kind of...thrilling idea that he could be made to submit so completely to another. That someone could hold such power over him, could utterly own his body and mind. Do whatever they wanted and leave him powerless...use him, even, if it pleased them. In whatever way was satisfactory to them, regardless of what he felt. Make him little more than an object for their pleasure.

But, of course, it wasn’t as if he could do something like that with just anyone. Not as if he could possibly share these dark fantasies he had and be comfortable maybe acting one out with someone at the drop of a hat. He couldn’t just give himself over to someone like it was nothing. It’d be...it’d be everything for him to do that! It’d be him giving his literal all to another person, and something like that required...much. Hell, Flug himself wasn’t completely sure what exactly it would take to make him trust someone enough to let them have him in that dark, subjugating way he imagined. The idea of having such faith in another was such a foreign concept, he’d lived his life with so much hidden he wasn’t sure if he really knew how to give himself like that. As badly as he wanted to.

And even if he did think maybe he could, there was no guarantee that the other person would accept that side of him. There was no telling whether or not they’d enjoy or even so much as tolerate his twisted fantasies. If he misjudged whether or not they’d go as far for him as he would for them, well, that was a bit of a messy situation now wasn’t it? And, when he ended up hurt that he’d made such an error in judgement, when he was rejected, it’d be his own fault for thinking anyone would want him like that.

It kind of made him think of Julio, in a sad sort of way. He wondered how he was these days. He hoped he was well, or as well as he could be being wheelchair bound.

Something else that was all Rocinante’s fault. He should never had involved Julio. Should never have convinced him to commandeer that plane with him. If he had only crashed that plane alone...

He might’ve died. Died without Julio to shield him from most of the damage. If he hadn’t been there, Flug would’ve probably died along with all of his tormentors.

Flug got up and went to his desk. He pulled out some blueprint paper he kept in his desk drawer and
just let his hand glide along it’s surface. He decided that if this was intended to just be some white noise while people went about their day, he might as well see if it worked. He liked having background noise while he sketched out blueprints. It was one of his favorite feelings, to lose himself in his mind and allow his body to operate on reflex. Half the time he wasn’t even fully aware of what it was he was doing, he just let his hands put to paper what his mind slipped out.

Hours later, as the sun peeked in through the blinds, Flug looked down and wondered just what it was he pulled out of his head. He glanced over at the small stack of blueprints he accumulated through the night. He should really show these to Black Hat. Get his input. He made them for him, after all. He should really see what his boss thought of his future armada. He hoped he would like them.

“Well, someone had a good weekend,”

Flug was jarred out of his thoughts by the girl who sat next to him in his Computer Science class. Emily, he was fairly sure was her name. He was sort of friendly with her, they had sat next to each other for the entire semester and occasionally would talk or joke around a bit. And she was giving him an unusual sort of smile.

At first, he didn’t know what she was talking about. Then he remembered how his neck was full of hickeys and scabs. Which everyone could see.

“Oh, uh, y-yeah,” He fumbled his words, grinning a bit as he averted his gaze. Not because he was embarrassed, strictly, more because he was trying to play off how ill-prepared he was to go along with this. He and Black Hat really should’ve come up with a better story than just, We’re dating now. God, imagine if someone starts asking about how they got together. Well, together together. What if they couldn’t keep their stories straight?

“Look at you, getting all bashful and everything.” She teased. “You finally get some action in your life?”

“You could say that,” He said, looking all around the room. She wasn’t wrong, exactly. He was getting a bit more, ahem, action lately. Though not for the reasons she thought. If only those marks on his neck were truly marks of legitimate passion. He wasn’t fully convinced they were. Sure, things got pretty heated, but he didn’t think Black Hat really liked him that way or anything. At least not in any form going beyond the physical realm. It was probably just the innate pleasure of the thing. Flug felt weirdly proud that he’d apparently been doing something right, with as little experience as he had.
He wondered if that was something Black Hat intended to continue doing though. Leaving him with bites and hickeys and things beyond. He said they didn’t need to, but also said that it would help to make it more convincing that they were involved with each other. And if Flug was so hesitant to publicly make their ‘relationship’ known, what else would there be really? It at least fit his personality to be so private with his personal life, he never really did talk about himself all that much. Nothing out of the ordinary there.

But then, maybe he should be hiding his marks? If that was the story they were going with, then shouldn’t Flug be a bit more secretive about it? Should he just act like it slipped his mind that his neck was one giant poster that screamed “SOMEONE WAS SUCKING AND BITING ME!”? That was a bit out of character, he was usually far more careful than that.

Oh God he was just going around and around in circles thinking about this. He had absolutely no idea what on earth he was doing or what Black Hat was doing or anything.

And he could NOT focus on the lecture with all these thoughts swimming around in his head!

“So, what do you think?”

“I think you have horrible handwriting.” Black Hat said. “I mean, what does this even say?”

“LED lights.” Flug said, translating everything Black Hat pointed to. “Hydraulic brakes. Radar scanner. Jet propulsors. I can read this perfectly fine, I don’t see what the problem is.”

“Well I would hope you could, given that you’re the one who wrote it.” Black sipped his coffee as he looked over the blueprints. “I’d hate to be the one who tries to cheat off your paper.”

Flug rolled his eyes. It wasn’t that messy. Admittedly his penmanship here wasn’t the best, maybe he’d been a bit spaced out when it came to labelling and notation, but it was still legible. The design itself hadn’t suffered so it couldn’t have been that indecipherable. It was easier to understand than Black Hat’s chicken scratch of a name, that was for sure.

“Oh, Dem! Dem!” Black Hat flagged her down as she passed by their table and shoved one of the papers in her face. “Can you read this?”

“Whoa, is this like some giant robot thing?!?” She exclaimed. “Cool! Did you draw this?”

“Flug did.”

“Oh dude, this is seriously awesome! I didn’t know you could draw! Can you draw me?”

“Uh, I mean, I guess I could.” Flug said, playing with his hands. He’d taken a drawing class to steady his hand, but no one had ever really complimented any of his sketches before. Maybe it
would’ve helped if he had actually shown other people before now, aside from the people in his club. Who were just as skilled if not better than him.

Artistically at least.

“Dem,” Black Hat prompted. “Can you read any of his notes?”

“Huh? These are supposed to be words?” Demetra flipped the paper around a few ways, squinting her eyes trying to make out the letters.

Flug rolled his eyes again. “C’mon guys, it’s not that bad.”

“Chicken...permission...” Demetra said slowly. “Blind...refugees...bard beer skew brick skid...mack jabroni...bone altitude? Dude, what?”

“Where did you get any of those?!”

“Well, what is supposed to say?”

“It says ‘rotary blades,’” Flug said impatiently, pointing to his scribbles at the edge of the paper. “And ‘piping system.’ And ‘valve gears.’ Honestly, why can’t either of you read this?”

“Cuz you write like a toddler!” Dem said, slapping the blueprint back on the table with the others. “Oh, you have more?”

“Yeah, and they’re all written like that.” Black Hat said. “And don’t slam your hands on the table, you’ll spill something and ruin them.”

“March...infection...” Demetra read aloud from one of the others. “Phone apple...jeans? Car thot? What the heck is a car thot and why it is suspiciously close to your robots’ crotch?”

“That’s not...oh forget it.” Flug said, taking a long swig of his coffee.

“Ready for a refill, Flug?”

“Yeah, thanks.”

“No problem.” Demetra said, taking his cup and strolling off. “Just keep the tips coming so I can move out on my own one day.”

Flug chuckled a bit. More often than not, she was the one who ended up waiting on them whenever they came in. And even if she wasn’t she usually made it a point to stop and greet them. Usually nothing more than the short “Hey guys!” with a casual wave. And, well, since they were kind of friends, sort of, maybe, he especially had been a bit generous with his tips lately.

Perhaps it was just his way of saying thanks. For giving him a place to indulge in his caffeine addiction and share his Hat-Bot blueprints with his future boss/fake boyfriend.

“I’d ask if you were half asleep when you wrote these,” Black Hat said. “But we both know you weren’t. Honestly, how has your handwriting fallen so far in such a short amount of time?”
“Well, look at it this way; anyone ever steals any of my blueprints, they’ll never be able to decipher any of the things that explain how it all fits together.”

“I don’t know, you’re a very talented artist. Your sketches alone may be enough for a good engineer to guess at the inner workings and come up with something functional.”

“Yeah, well, there’s good, and then there’s me.” Flug said, a bit cockily.

“Is that a fact?” Black Hat asked with a grin and a cocked eyebrow.

“According to my teachers, my peers, my parents, my grades, and you since you had me to sign a lifetime commitment soul contract, I’d say so, yes. I wouldn’t think you’d go so far out of your way to get me on your team if I was just ‘good’ at what I do.”

Black Hat chuckled darkly. “Well, you got me there. At least you’ve got the handwriting of a doctor already. Not that anyone can read it.”

“What?”

“You are studying to earn your doctorate, right?” Black Hat asked.

“Yeah, I am. Don’t see what that has to do with my handwriting.”

Black Hat stood up. “I’ll be back in a bit.” Flug picked up all his blueprints and placed them neatly to the side. Black Hat was right about there being a spill hazard. Flug figured Black Hat was going to the bathroom or something. And faintly wondered if he kept his gloves on even then. He had to take his gloves off at least just to wash his hands, right? If not, he wasn’t sure he was comfortable with Black Hat touching his stuff anymore. It wasn’t as though Flug could just ask about something like that, could he? It just sounded so weird.

Demetra came back with his fresh cup of coffee; sweetened enough to give him cavities, just the way he liked it. And started whispering to him. “So Flug, how’d your date go?”

“What?”

“Your date. With Black Hat. How did it go?” She asked with a ginormous smile.

Flug gulped. “Oh-oh, uh, Black Hat told you about that?”

“He may have mentioned it.” She played around with her long ponytail. “Something about dinner at his place?”

“Uh, w-well, yeah.” Flug fiddled around with his glasses to distract himself. “We-We did have dinner...at his place...”

“And?” She leaned in close.

“A-And?”

“How’d it go? What happened? How far did you get? What’s his place like? Give me the deets!”

“P-Penthouse apartment.” Flug blurted out. “I-I-It was re-re-really nice. He made me dinner, we
“And?” Goddamn had no one taught this woman the meaning of personal space???! They were almost nose-to-nose! “What else what else what else?”

Flug felt some sort of whimper sneak its way out of his throat. His voice came out small and high pitched. “N-N-Nothing e-e-e-else. Th-Tha-That’s all.”

“Aw, what? That’s all? Nah, that can’t be all that you did.” She backed off with a smirk. Her eyes glided down to his neck. “It looks like you two did more than just make out.”

Flug squeaked and ducked his neck down. Oh Lord did it really look like more had been done than just making out? Did it look that way to everyone? Did they think that they had-

“Th-That’s all.” Flug choked out.

“Aw man, that’s 200 pesos down the drain. Must’ve been a hell of a make out.” Wait, WHAT?!

“Well, how far did you go with your hands? Anything come off? Who touched who where?”

“Th-That-That’s n-n-n-one of your b-b-bu-business!” Flug silently screamed. His face felt like it was on fire. He kept darting his head around like he was worried someone was listening in and judging him.

“Whoa, Flugsy, calm down. No need to be shy. I’m just having fun with ya.”

“Yeah, well, c-c-c-can you, like, not? Please? Can y-you keep this ju-just between the th-thr-three of us?”

“Why?” She asked. “It’s not like you’re doing anything wrong. Hell, if I was you I’d be bragging to everyone that I was dating the mysterious hot foreign guy. ‘Specially if he’s that intense. He leave anymore of ya all marked up?”

Flug covered his head with his arms. This was not happening, this was not happening. He was not getting grilled on his weekend escapades by his waitress acquaintance. He didn’t want to deal with this. He didn’t know how to deal with this.

This was probably very normal. Friends probably teased each other about their relationships all the time. Nothing wrong about that either. Just light hearted playing around. It wasn’t as if she was trying to make fun of him. Hell, she was probably genuinely happy to see Flug and Black Hat together so often. She was like the founder of their fictitious romance fan club. It was just idle gossip, or it would be until Flug confirmed it and then everyone would know and he just wasn’t ok with that.

Yeah, he knew intellectually there was nothing wrong with dating Black Hat (not that he actually was), but his insecurities told him different. They told him that he couldn’t be so candid about himself. The possibilities, all negative in his mind, terrified him. He had no idea what people would
say about him if they knew. If they would still treat him the same, if they would think of him any
differently. And he didn’t want to take that chance with the world when he couldn’t even bring
himself to take it with his parents yet.


Flug peeked up to see Black Hat, straightening his tie and taking his seat across from him.

“Ah, come on! I’m just asking!” She protested. “If you’re not going to give me any juicy details,
who will?”

“Dem, what we do behind closed doors is our own business.”

“Then you leave me no choice but to leave it up to the imagination.” She said dramatically. “And I’ll
have you know I have a very vivid imagination.”

“So you draw porn on the internet?” Black Hat asked in a monotone voice.

“No, I don’t draw porn. Least not anything more than stick figures.”

“How crude.”

“Um, excuse you, that is art!”

“It’s an abomination.”

“Black coffee is an abomination!”

“That’s how coffee is naturally.” Flug pointed out.

“I will not sit here and be mocked for my sensual stick figures by two men living in sin!”

“Wouldn’t we be living together if that were the case?” Black Hat asked, raising his cup to his lips.

“Aren’t we planning to?” Flug asked.

Flug saw Black Hat’s eye go wide and he sputtered on his coffee. He choked hard on the hot liquid.
“Well, uh, that is, I mean...” Black Hat scrambled to recompose himself. Mainly by shoving napkins
to his mouth and trying to form a coherent sentence.

Flug wondered what had made Black Hat react like that. Were they not planning to live together in
some giant hat of evil and villainy once it was finally built and they got on with putting that whole
‘rule the world’ plan into motion? Did he misunderstand something? Were they not both going to
live there? Them and anyone else who Black Hat managed to get on board with his scheme?

Then it hit him. He was talking about he and Black Hat living together. While they were supposed to
be dating. Or, shifting from being casual hook ups to dating. He still wasn’t fully sure how they were gonna spin this. And they were only like a day into that plan.

And he was already talking about living together.

In front of Demetra.

He felt his face heat up as he registered what a clingy over-eager weirdo he sounded like. Demetra’s eyes went wide, but she was quick to recover.

“Flugsy, my man,” She said with a cocky grin as she backed away towards the tables she’d been neglecting. “Just cuz a guy takes you home doesn’t mean he wants you to move in. Did ya make him breakfast, too?”

Flug covered his flushed complexion and watched her go with a goddamn smile on her face apologizing to the patrons she’d been keeping held up while getting the latest scoop. Dear God what was wrong with him? How could he have said that? Why had he said that? In front of her? He was such an embarrassment!

“I mean, we are,” Black Hat said in a whisper. “But I figured we shouldn’t have that going around when we’re supposed to be dating. And just now getting quote unquote ‘serious.’”

“Y-Yeah I-I’m sor-ry.” He stuttered out. “I-I don’t know where th-tha-that came fr-from. Sorry.”

“Seriously, maybe hold off on talking about that in front of others for a few months. Or whenever it seems a more suitable time to start thinking about moving in together in a relationship. Wouldn’t want to rush things now would we?”

“N-No, you’re right.” Flug said, calming back down. “We should re-really make sure w-w-we have our story straight. So there’s l-less chance of either of u-us slipping up.”

“Yes,” Black Hat stroked his chin. “We should make sure it’s very clearly defined. But let’s not discuss it here. Wouldn’t want her to overhear anything.”

Yeah, good call. She more than anyone needed to buy this little ruse. Not that she was at all hard to fool. Demetra was nice but had no filter, and if they let her she’d probably single-handedly get word around to the entire school that he and Black Hat were now an item (as far as anyone else was concerned). And get them all betting on how far they’d gone. Oh sweet Jesus it would give Flug a heart attack if more people than just the Cafe Triste staff were privy to their relationship. At least Flug knew everyone was cool, and probably only interested because Demetra was making a game out of it. Everyone else could speculate if they wanted but so long as Flug wasn’t getting bombarded by strangers asking about his boyfriend he could handle this. Yeah, yeah he could do this. He could be fine around Black Hat. It seemed like he was willing to go along with Flug’s condition of acting like nothing had really changed. Like Black Hat told Demetra, what they did was their own business. They just needed to stick to that and everything would be fine. They could pull this off. They could
do this. They just needed a script Flug could stick to, and they could definitely totally for sure do this.

So long as both of them stuck to the script...

“So, y-you told her about our date?” Flug asked.

“What?”

“Demetra. Sh-Sh-she said you told her about our d-date.” Flug said.

“Yeah, I told her.” Black Hat said with a bored expression. “Why?”

“C-Can you n-n-not encourage her like that? She r-really can’t keep her mouth shut and I’d like us to be able to control what exactly is going around ab-bout us.”

“That was Saturday, after I left your place. We hadn’t even been on our date yet. And I’ve told her nothing since about anything we did on that date.”

“Y-you could’ve t-t-told her about Saturday.” Flug said. If it was indeed after Black Hat had left his apartment, it would’ve all been fresh in his mind. And it would’ve technically been before Flug asked him to keep their “relationship” private.

“Mmm, I could’ve.” Black Hat picked a blueprint up off the stack. “But I didn’t.”

“Y-You didn’t?”

“Of course not.”

Black Hat looked past the paper over to Flug, fixing him with a smile. “A gentleman never kisses and tells.”

Flug wasn’t sure if Black Hat winked at him right then, or if he was just blinking. The timing was suspicious. As was his thin lipped grin. Flug chose to believe that it was just a blink and sipped his coffee.

“I like these.” Black Hat declared, putting the paper back. “Especially the fifth one you came up with. There’s just one thing, though.”

“What’s that?”

“It needs a camera.”

“A camera?”

“Yes. Both for security purposes, and viewing pleasure.”
“Uh, viewing pleasure, Black Hat?” He understood having a camera on the Hat-Bots for security reasons, since one of their functions would be as sentries, but what did Black Hat mean by-

“Yes. I enjoy the prospect of watching trespassers and heroes ripped apart by these Hat-Bots. The best possible angle I can imagine is from the perspective of what’s actually doing the deed. So, it will need a camera. And a high definition one at that. It will need to capture in the most perfect clarity possible the exact moment of their demise.”

“Oh.” Flug said. “Ok then. Sure. You got it, boss.” So, Black Hat liked to watch? Well, alright. Far be it from Flug to deny him his viewing pleasure.

“Just imagine how we could market that!” Black Hat exclaimed. “For people who lack the strength to rend their enemies with their bare hands, the Hat-Bot! All the strength, none of the compromising ego, and all the best angles to watch the light leave their eyes again and again and again! It will deal with foes swiftly and without hesitation! A perfect machine of malvagità! ”

“You’re getting kind of loud, Black Hat.” Flug said.

“Oh, uh, sorry.” Black Hat dialed down his voice of just above a whisper and fiddled with the brim of his hat. “Sorry about that.” He actually did look a little embarrassed by his little outburst. “Guess I got a bit carried away at the thought of actually having one of these.”

“It’s ok.” Flug said, trying to comfort him. It was odd, to try and be reassuring to someone else for a change. More so because there was the table between them. Had they been closer, next to each other for example, perhaps Flug would feel a bit better about reaching out. Doing something small like...I don’t know, holding his hand or something. “We’ll have a whole military force of Hat-Bots. I’ll make different versions and they’ll have little battalions that specialize in attack formations and weaponry.”

“That sounds great, Flug.” Black Hat said with a small smile. “I’m looking forward to it.”

Flug smiled back. You know, this really wasn’t all that hard. Maybe he really could do this. It wasn’t like Black Hat wasn’t enjoyable company, and Flug was getting nicely settled into their little routine. So, maybe it wouldn’t be so bad, pretending to be dating him.

And that’s what he thought for a day or two until he caught Black Hat stealing glances at his defaced neck when he thought he wasn’t looking. And smiling broadly. Which only served to remind Flug that he was indeed showing off Black Hat’s handiwork. Which made him think of how he’d touched him this past weekend. How his hands had felt on his body. The taste of his tongue in his mouth. The sight of his shirtless form before him and on top of him. In bed.

And how Demetra remarked that it looked as if more had been done than just making out.

There was no way in hell he was going to be able to go through with this.

Chapter End Notes
Translations:
malvagità = evil (Italian)

I think I've decided that I'll be taking requests for one-shots as a way to celebrate one year of this fanfic. Give me prompts peoples!!! Leave them in the comments here, submit to my ask box through tumblr just get them to me and I'll get them up in December or early January. I've still got at least two chapters of this to get through before the years up.
One of Two Tragedies

Chapter Summary

Even MORE Flug introspection! Cuz why not, it's not like we have action or smut to get to or anything...

Don't worry, things will actually happen soon enough. Something great and terrible this way comes.
(Mwhahahahajhahahzahahahahshfdlbdfvshfbvjqagkbdj)

Chapter Notes

There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. - Oscar Wilde

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aurelio texted him.

Flug had almost forgotten he had exchanged numbers with him. And he wasn’t entirely sure how to feel about the man who spiked his drink just randomly texting him at two in the morning. If he really had. He wasn’t fully sure if he really trusted Black Hat’s word. He couldn’t really think of what Black Hat might’ve had to gain from lying about it, but he couldn’t think of anything Aurelio had to gain from doing it either. So he was just all kinds of confused about what to believe. Is a guy who introduced himself as a villain bent on world domination really someone who should be trusted? Flug supposed he was a pretty honest and upfront guy, if he was indeed being honest. He probably could’ve mentioned Aurelio drugging him sooner though. Like, oh I don’t know, maybe before pitching the “let me bite you so he’ll back off” scheme. He should probably lead with that next time.

The time only added to his confusion and agitation. Why was Aurelio awake at a time so late it was early on a weekday and texting Flug of all people? Ok, he was one of the most popular guys on campus, and had a much more lively social life so maybe the fact that he was still up wasn’t all that odd. Maybe it just struck Flug as odd because he was usually home by 8 at the latest (when he didn’t have anything to be working on for his club) and the only people he really talked to were his club members and Black Hat. And given the fact that nearly no one in his club really had his number, it was pretty much just Black Hat.

But even so, why would Aurelio be texting him? Didn’t he have an entire harem’s worth of other people to be talking to? You know, people who were actually socially competent and far more outgoing and could easily respond to a late-night text out of the blue with ease?
Flug was not that person.

No, Flug was the person who heard about this guy in the seventh grade and decided he wanted to know more about him but could never bring himself to do anything like actually approach or talk to him. He was the person who stayed up late in high school essentially cyber-stalking this same guy. He was the person who taught himself to code and hack as a teenager for the sole purpose of stalking this guy more efficiently, and making sure no one would ever find out about it. He was the person who knew even back then that this man wasn’t anyone he should ever get within arms reach of and should be avoiding at all costs.

Not that that ever stopped him from getting *just outside* of arms reach. If anything that was what pulled him in deeper. He was safe from the other side of the computer screen, that was what he told himself. He had nothing to fear from a guy who didn’t even know he existed. He was, even in person, undetectable. So beneath his notice that Aurelio *never did* notice him. Never noticed if he was followed. If the same scrawny guy was just in his peripheral vision many times in and even out of school on the rare occasion Flug had an excuse to be home late. What did it matter? It wasn’t as if *he* mattered. He bet Aurelio didn’t even remember that they had gone to the same middle and high schools. It wasn’t like they’d ever spoken back then. He wasn’t the most memorable kid, he supposed. The kids who had tormented him for so long probably hardly even remembered him either. Typical loser that someone like Aurelio would never bother paying attention to.

Until now, when he was texting him “**Hey**” at two in the morning.

What was that even supposed to mean? Just, *Hey*?? How was Flug supposed to interpret that? Was it a platonic “hey”? A “just checking up on you” hey? A “Hey how are you, you wanna catch a movie later” hey?

Was it an “Are you still awake and down to meet right now” hey?

Flug pondered on how he should respond to that. What on earth was he supposed to say back? Should he even say anything at all? If he did, Aurelio would know he was awake. And would probably ask why. Especially since Flug had nothing to be doing this time of night (technically morning). He supposed he could just wait until daybreak, make it look like he’d been asleep and had missed his message. But even then, what was he supposed to say to that? *Hey, sorry I missed your text. I was asleep. Like any other totally normal shut-in with no life who totally has a soul*. *Yep. What’s up?*

Flug spent so long thinking about what he should say back that he ended up not saying anything. He opted instead to ignore the text and go back to improving his Hat-Bot design. The one Black Hat had said he’d liked the best. In Flug’s mind, there was always room for improvement. And adding a camera so his boss could watch his POV murder live-stream would apparently be an improvement.
Hey, Black Hat was the one who would be paying to build it, the least Flug could do was make it suite his needs. He supposed that having just one circular lens in the head was the most efficient way of going about it. With a wide-angle lens. Hmm, it was going to be very top heavy. Better make sure the legs are reinforced.

When morning rolled around, Flug still didn’t know what to say. So he continued avoiding the issue and chose not to respond at all.

Flug found himself spacing out during the lecture.

He wouldn’t usually do something like that, he took his studies and grades very seriously after all. But in his defense, this lecture, no this entire class really, wasn’t anything he cared about. Nor was it at all related to what he intended to do with his life.

Well, that last part wasn’t fully accurate. The “Preventative Measures for Potential Villainy” portion of the course was related to his future, just not in the way that anyone else in this room would ever imagine.

Classes like this, meant to educate young people on the threat of evil, were required courses at most major universities like this one. UNEHVM in particular boasted an expansive roster of latin American costumed heroes. So of course, under the unspoken assumption that all students were fully intending to add to that roster, they all had to take courses like this. Courses focused on what exactly evil was, recognizing when someone around you might be thinking of turning to the dark side, and naturally what you should if you ever find yourself in such a situation that you need to take action. They’d had assemblies and stuff about this in high school, but nothing quite this drawn out.

Even before meeting Black Hat and signing away his soul, Flug never found these types of things to be all that stimulating. Mainly because they were all so...polarized. They presented the forces of good and evil as being so clear-cut. They acted like heroism and villainy were black-and-white things that were obvious if you knew what to look for. To Flug, that just wasn’t the case. What was good and what was bad wasn’t ever as plain as it was made to seem. It wasn’t that simple. If for no other reason than because humans weren’t that simple.

Granted, now that this was a college-level course, it was a bit more in-depth. But not in any way that Flug found satisfactory. It was clear to him that the purpose behind it was not to educate or seek out any real answers of the root of good or evil, it was just to perpetuate what someone else decided was a correct way of thinking and push it onto the youths of the nation in the interest of maintaining order. Questions were not met with satisfactory answers, and Flug had realized long before that he was better off keeping his questions to himself.
They touched briefly on that whole “Nature v. Nurture” concept. Whether evil, as it were, stemmed from a person’s upbringing or if it was something inherent in a human that made individuals more prone to crime and cruelty. One thing Flug was glad for, they did not generalize in the classroom. They recognized that one couldn’t just put an entire category of people into one box and expect a vague criteria to apply to every single one of them.

Everyone understood the gist of the idea of course, but Flug wished they’d discussed it more. It was one of the few times he’d actually prefer group discussion to solitary study. Though he’d never speak the things really going through his mind.

He was thinking about himself.

He had some dark things in his mind, sure. Maybe it went a bit farther than the average person. Maybe he was at a greater “risk” of acting on those thoughts. Was that something inherent to him or had there been something in his life that made it so? He couldn’t think of anything. When he tried to trace back a thought, tried to follow it back to where it had sprung up in his mind, he usually didn’t come up with much. Had it come from him, or had it been planted subconsciously?

Why had the thought entered his mind to observe Aurelio from afar for so long and so obsessively? What drew his gaze for so many years and continued to even now? What was it that had been compelling him to keep his distance even from the object of his desires? Was it something innate in him that decided that the distance provided security and safety, so that he could continue his deeds undisturbed? Was it his cowardice and shame of his wants that pressured him into secrecy? That too, did it spawn from within him or was it a reaction to outside forces? His environment or his natural self?

What was it that bubbled up devices of murder and mayhem? In the past he often tried pushing such thoughts out of his mind, scaring himself that such thoughts would ever occur to him, but that didn’t change the fact that they did. Regardless of whether or not he acted on the thoughts, he did have them. They were there for him to shove down and pretend he was no different from any other young man around him. It was something he was kind of used to, he often did ignore and put off the things he didn’t want to have to deal with. He shoved down anything that threatened to make him the odd one out. Even his successes, always bittersweet, for they drew people his way. Something he wished he could avoid. He wished he could have anonymity while still being recognized for his work.

He faintly smirked to himself. Maybe he would, one day. After he graduated and took his first steps as a genuine mad scientist, come up with some cheesy alias and horrendous outfit to continue hiding who he was. Just switching the mask he lived in for a mask he could really live in.

If it was anything like the corset he was hiding under his T-shirt, the irony would probably be quite enjoyable. Maybe it would be the same as being constrained by his innumerable fears and the stiff black garment. One suffocating, the other comfortable, making it in turn bearable. Twisting body and mind until he was in a more desirable state. Maybe that was why the concept of hypnosis and submission appealed to him so. Maybe he liked the thought of someone else bending him to their whims because he’d had to bend himself for so long to fit what other people wanted him to be that he was tired. Tired of making himself be something he wasn’t. Let someone else do it. He wanted to
hand his reins over to someone else for a change, let *them* worry about what he was going to be today. It sounded so nice to have that decision be in someone else’s hands.

And that. Was that a result of his many years of hiding in fear of rejection and pretending to fit in the role laid out for him, or was it something deeper that he simply had a congenital longing for? He’d wanted it before, he wanted it now, he’d probably want it until he actually got it. Then, he’d either be content at long last or be disappointed that it wasn’t all he had built it up to be.

Who was it that said that old thing? There are two tragedies in life; not getting what we want, and getting it. Either be perpetually fixated on a perfect ideal, or be let down by the reality of what it was. That was how Flug interpreted it at least.

But back to the matter at hand, which he was probably going to have to ponder on his own time, as class was over.

He had another class right after this one, something that actually applied to his future in the more conventional way, so he was looking forward to it. He had a paper due, not that it was any big thing. Upside of being sleepless, Flug hardly ever stressed about homework anymore. Who cared if it took him all night to write an essay the day before it was due, he was gonna be up all night anyway. It reminded him of his high school days; staying up late into the night, catching up on the assignments he’d put off to watch anime or Aurelio. Two small breaks from the bleakness of his life. Kind of. Now he was preoccupied with designing malignant weaponry and drowning his inner demons in dulcet spirals. But he just had so much more time, he could do it all now. He could wait until it was mere hours before the due date and get it done, and still probably get an “A” for his trouble.

He passed Black Hat in the hall. The two men didn’t really say anything, just a smile and a nod as they went their respective ways. Black Hat still seemed dark and menacing, but since none of the menace was directed at Flug he didn’t really pay it much mind. That was just kind of how Black Hat was.

And if his eyes dipped down a bit, Flug tried not to pay too much mind to that either.

Speaking of, what was it Black Hat had said? Back when they were talking about villainy? About what was *pure* villainy?

*You either have it or you don’t.*

Couldn’t be taught, couldn’t be learned. Naturally evil. Flug supposed that told him where Black Hat stood. And he wasn’t sure that he wasn’t right there with him.

He considered it logically. He’d been picked on and tormented in his high school days. He’d been tormented further for his sexuality. These were not things unique to his life. He wasn’t the only one who’d been bullied in high school. He wasn’t the only one who’d ever been discriminated against
for being homosexual. He was nothing special because of it. Thousands of people worldwide were singled out for things like their smarts, skin color, sexual orientation, gender orientation, prejudice against hybrids or people with more abstract Gifts, things about themselves they couldn’t help. They weren’t all driven to misdeeds because of it. So, was it a result of all his misfortune piled up and finally breaking him, or was it some inherent part of him that made him more susceptible to such acts if given enough of a push? If given enough of an excuse to justify it to himself.

They had it coming. They were no better. They were the ones who wouldn’t leave him alone. They deserved it. He had to do it. No one else would. No one else ever did. All they ever did was talk and talk and it never did a thing. So, he had to take action for once in his life.

That was how it had been. He’d had to do it. That was what he told himself, at least. Usually he chose to believe it.

How had it been for Black Hat, he wondered.

From what Black Hat had divulged it seemed he had come from very meager beginnings. Flug wondered if Black Hat had always wanted to be a villain, or if he’d had some other aspirations that he’d had to put aside or give up on. Had he turned to a life of crime out of ambition, or necessity? Had it been his choice to kill? Or was he driven to it the way Flug had been? What made him decide that he wanted to rule the world? Had he really continued and pursued his goal of world domination for so many years on nothing but faith in himself and the drive to see his dreams come to fruition?

There was still so much Flug didn’t know about him.

The water of the shower stung his body a bit. It gave Flug another chance to practice turning off his senses. The trick seemed to be just kind of ignoring it until it went away. Blocking it out until he was numb to the world. He didn’t feel the prick of the water on his tender skin, he hardly even felt the water of the showerhead pelting his form at all. He was just vaguely aware of something coming into contact with him, but if he didn’t think about it even that sensation became distant and dull. Even his hands, scrubbing 2-in-1 shampoo and conditioner out of his hair, might as well have belonged to someone else.

Sometimes, he swore he just got so wrapped up in the rest of his life he forgot to shower for days on end. Being preoccupied with work, school, his club activities, the small matter of his budding career path as a villain, it was easy to overlook little things like the fact that he probably stank. Only thinking of it at the most inopportune of times. Like when Aurelio was near.
Flug’s mouth went a dry all of a sudden. He was surprised he even noticed.

His feelings towards Aurelio were...complicated at the moment. He was pretty much stuck with endlessly analyzing what little information he had trying to figure out what was true without actually having to confront either Aurelio or Black Hat. The drinks at the party were strong, but were they really strong enough to knock him out after only a few drinks? Even if he wasn’t fully sure what his limit was, it felt to Flug like he’d only really had three or four cups of whatever exactly he’d been drinking. Enough to get him drunk, sure. Enough to knock him out so soon? He wasn’t convinced.

He tried to think about whether or not Aurelio would actually drug him. Was that something that Aurelio seemed likely to do? Well, he had no problem using people as human shields or forcing people to fight his battles for him. He was a pretty underhanded guy. Flug knew for a fact he had no problem taking advantage of people. It was kind of what he did. So, perhaps slipping something in someone’s drink wasn’t anything unthinkable. But then, why? Why would he do something like that? To Rocinante Flugslys of all people? What would the purpose be? Was he actually interested in him in that way? The way Black Hat seemed to think he was? Flug still really couldn’t fathom something like that. Ignoring all the nothing he had to offer personality-wise, it wasn’t as though he was all that attractive. Especially for Aurelio, who could undoubtedly have his pick of the entire human population.

Flug was thin. Scratch that, he was downright scrawny. He had nothing so much as resembling a social life. He spent most of his time indoors with his nose in blueprints or his hands in machinery. His fingers were abnormally long and speckled with small superficial cuts and scrapes. He had nerdy horn-rimmed glasses with thick lenses. He had boring brown eyes that saw the world in a blurry Sin City filter without those thick lenses. His hair was a curly nightmare immune to the influence of the comb. Half of his face was covered in scars, and the other half wasn’t much to look at either.

Flug stepped out of the shower and began toweling himself off. Operating more on muscle memory than conscious thought. As he glanced down at his body, he noted that he was also currently covered in bruises. Which would probably only be maybe pleasing to the eye of the one who’d left them there.

Black Hat. A man he was equally conflicted about.

Flug stepped out of the bathroom and into his bedroom, he slipped his glasses on and inspected himself more thoroughly in the mirror.

His neck was a mess, as he expected it to be. Full of bruises and scabs from teeth breaking the skin. They trailed along his neck down to his collarbone and nearly reached the scattering of scars on his right shoulder. Black Hat hadn’t spared more than a few centimeters of skin from his attention. His chest was more bare, the flat surface of his torso only having a few small scattered marks where Black Hat had trailed his mouth down. Although his sides has a few small bruises that were in the faint shape of fingers. They were far more pronounced on his hips. One look and anyone would know someone had been holding him there. Tight.

The same could be said for his behind, he timidly noticed.
He felt a pang of arousal shoot down into his abdomen. A quick glance confirmed that his little plane had indeed perked up a bit, preparing for takeoff. Something that made him incredibly self-conscious. Even when he was all by his lonesome.

Flug fished around in his underwear drawer, seeing what he hadn’t worn this week yet. His hand brushed against a soft satin pair, he pulled it out to get a better look at its colors. It was a red pair with a white lace trim. Almost festive.

Almost...Black Hat’s colors...

Flug wondered if Black Hat would like him in something like this. Did Flug have any with a black trim? Or black ones with red trim? Would that be something his Master would like to see? His Pet, decorated in his colors? Wearing them like a coat of arms?

Why was he thinking these things? Did he intend to show Black Hat his undergarments again? Did he intend to show him how looked in the garter belt he was clipping to a black pair of fishnet stockings? Would Black Hat have liked it better if he had worn something like this the morning they ended up in bed? Or if after dinner Flug had allowed things to escalate, and his new slacks were slipped off his long legs to reveal something like what he was wearing now?

Rocinante Flugslys looked at himself in the mirror again. Oh God just stick a collar and a cat ear headband on him and he’d probably faint, he wouldn’t be able to recognize himself. The thought of including a tail plug made him feel dizzy and he fell back onto the bed. Better than falling to the floor, at least.

He wasn’t going to be able to go through with this, was he?

He still wasn’t fully sure what he was supposed to do now that he was in a faux-relationship. He and Black Hat had worked out their story, but Flug still wasn’t completely settled on how they were going to go about this. Well, he should probably start getting used to referring to Black Hat as his boyfriend. While being kind of private about having a boyfriend. Since he wasn’t comfortable with physical public acts, maybe he should think of something else? Some endearing way of referring to Black Hat to make it clear that they were in fact together? Should he start calling Black Hat “babe”? No, no, that was laughably ill-fitting. Baby? No, somehow that was actually worse. Honey? Too sweet. Darling? If anything, he imagined Black Hat calling him darling.

It wasn’t as if he could possibly call him Master in public!

Did he change his relationship status? Should he change his relationship status? He was feeling a lot more like “It’s complicated” in all honesty. Complicated because Black Hat had said it was just to sell their story, yet asked to kiss him again. And asked him to dinner. Then pulled him onto his lap and proceeded to kiss him again. And asked if he could still call him his pet. And had reiterated multiple times that Flug could say no to him. So, was this all just for show? It seemed that Black Hat might actually want, at the very least, a physical relationship with him. Flug wasn’t sure at all what it was he himself wanted out of it.
Maybe...maybe he could treat this as a kind of trial run? See if he was comfortable with the idea, and continue getting a bit closer to Black Hat and see if he was even the type of person he’d be in a romantic relationship with if it weren’t for a sold soul and an apparently shared bite kink? Black Hat seemed to enjoy biting him as much as Flug enjoyed being bitten. And if not, then perhaps some sort of...friends with benefits type situation? Something more on the casual side of things? They worked together, they hung out, and every so often did a bit...more? On occasion, be physical with each other? Well, that wasn’t such a bad idea. They were both men. They had... needs ...that really should be met somehow and it wasn’t as though there was anyone else. So, no real reason to feel odd about it. Like Demetra had said, it wasn’t as though there was anything wrong with that. And...Black Hat did say that he would take care of him....that he’d give him what he needed ...

Flug picked himself up, with all the thoughts swimming around in his head he didn’t dare touch himself. He didn’t want to know the sort of thing he’d fantasize about in this state. Going to his desk and opening his laptop, he noticed he hadn’t checked his email in a while. Not that he really had much. It was mostly spam, or notifications from his rarely used social media sites. Which were pretty much just more spam. It didn’t really matter to him that they updated their privacy policy when he didn’t put any sensitive information out there. He had an email from Manuel that his Engineering Club was going to meet in the science building at the end of the week. It was probably going to be pretty boring, but he’d go. Not like he had anything better to do. There wasn’t anything else of note, so Flug just kind of sat there for a bit, contemplating what he would do tonight.

Nothing was due tomorrow, so homework was not of the highest urgency. He could always just do it now and get it out of the way. Just because he could procrastinate didn’t mean he should. Better not get too much into the habit.

He could draw up some more blueprints for future inventions. Fiendish devices to mutilate and maim. They always came easily, if he dared to give it some thought. He’d gotten the Hat-Bots out of his head with little difficulty, so perhaps if he allowed his mind to unleash more of his inner villain he’d be able to slip a few more mechanical menaces out past his filter of normalcy.

He could watch more hypno videos. Or documentaries. Or anime. You know, it had been a while now since he’d watched Digimon. He wondered if it still held up. It had kind of been his first introduction to anime as a child, it could be worth revisiting. He could probably find all the episodes online. How did the opening song go again?

Oh, before all that, he sent Black Hat a quick text: Club meeting Friday. Don’t wait up for me.

Seeing as how they got together pretty regularly, he figured it was just common courtesy to tell the man he had something else to do so he didn’t waste his time.

Ok. Want to go with me to Dem’s Saturday? See that snake she was talking about?
Oh wow, two social outings in as many weeks! He was well on his way to becoming a bonafide social butterfly!

**Sure. Are you picking me up again?**

*I mean unless you or Dem gets a car by the end of the week and I can stop being your taxi service, yeah.*

Ooh, someone was feeling snarky. Flug felt a smile tugging at his lips.

**Ok, point taken. When are we leaving?**

God it felt like everyone was staring at him!

Since their latest project had finished up, the Engineering Club met in room 106 of the science building. Just them. No Gifted volunteers or anything. All fifteen members showed up, so that was nice. Usually only about a handful of them could be bothered to be present at one time.

Manuel was going over how everyone had done on the project, what could be improved, suggestions for what they’d be doing during the spring semester, lots of things that Flug couldn’t force himself to focus on right then. Because he just felt eyes all over him. More specifically, his neck. Which he was trying very hard not to hide like a turtle. A very self-conscious turtle who really wished he’d said *Fuck you, I’m uncomfortable*, to Black Hat and wore a scarf today.

The meeting ended fairly quickly, as it usually did when all they had to do was talk, and Flug kind of nervously picked all his stuff up and rushed out before anyone could question him. It sounded like maybe someone had tried, but he just blew them off immediately. He needed to get out of there. He left out of one the side exits to make sure he got out quicker. He just needed to get out of there, get away from anyone who might try to talk to him, and get home. He’d be safe there. It’d all be okay.

Until he ran into the one person highest on his list of people he didn’t want to see right now.
“Oh, Rocinante.” He said. “I’m glad I caught you.”

“Au-Aurelio,” Flug said in a small, breathless voice. Not unusual for him, but he was left speechless out of fear and suspicion rather than fear and arousal.

Why was he here now, of all times? Why would he be here? What reason was there for Aurelio to be hanging around the science building?

“I tried texting you.” He said. “Did you not get it?”

“Oh, uh, n-n-no, I-I got it,” Dumbass, why did you say that!? You could’ve just pretended his message never got through and that was why you didn’t respond! “S-S-Sorry, I’ve just b-been b-b-busy this week.”

“Rocinante, I wanted to talk to you real quick, if you’ve got some time now.”

“Wh-What is it?” Flug stuttered, more unsure than ever of what it was he wanted to say to him. Please just make it quick please just make it quick.

“I was wondering if you might...help me with something.”

“H-H-Help you?”

“Yes, I was hoping you might be interested in help me test out a few things. With my Gift.”

Flug felt his entire world come to a screeching halt for a second. “With you Gift?” He asked.

“Yes, ah...” Aurelio played with his thick, dark, mesmerizing hair. “You see, I’ve had this ability all my life, and yet lately I feel I’ve never really explored just what my actual limits are. I feel I’ve kept everything I use it for very, well, basic. Never really trying out anything new. Recently, I’ve been thinking about some other aspects of the body I could potentially control, and I’d like you to help me.”

Oh, so maybe this was all he wanted him for. Testing out the limits of his Gift. Not quite as mind-blowing as wanting to go out with him or something. Ah well, there was a load of off Flug’s mind. One less thing to worry about.

There was still the matter of why he drugged him last Friday, but if this was all there was to it Flug could handle it. He could for sure handle being used for his mind. That, that was fine. Something he could deal with. Hell, that was all Black Hat was really doing, and that guy was confirmed evil. So dealing with Aurelio couldn’t be any worse than dealing with an actual villain, right?

It was still a terrifying thought as to what Aurelio could accomplish now that he was thinking about testing the limits of his powers, but it was a thought that Flug could think with relative ease. It was absolutely no trouble at all to think about all the horrifying things he could do with his Gift.
Horrifying...and for maybe the first time, not very exciting.

“Oh, uh, well, that d-d-does sound pr-pretty fas-fascinating, ahhh...” Flug said, mumbling his words. God this was so uncomfortable. He could barely bring himself to look Aurelio in the eyes right now.

How does one talk to someone who (allegedly) drugged them at a party?

No, no, he better operate on the assumption that Black Hat was indeed telling the truth. Just in case. It’d be much safer for Flug to be on guard.

“Can I, can I think about this?” He asked, more just looking for a way out of this conversation. He really didn’t want to be involved with this, everything about it screamed DANGER! DANGER! GET OUT OF THERE! Sure, it’d be interesting to witness first-hand just what Aurelio was capable of when he was really thinking outside the box, but it just did not bode well for Flug’s health.

And neither did telling the man “no” outright. Not in person at least.

“Well, I was sort of hoping we could get started soon. Maybe...right now? Find some secluded spot and test out a few theories of mine?” Aurelio fixed him with a wide grin and lidded eyes. Any other time, Flug would’ve up and fainted from AURELIO CRUZ giving him such an alluring look while suggesting they go somewhere secluded. To test out a few theories. It sounded like something straight out of his daydreams.

“Aw, gee, Aurel-l-lio” He cringed at his mangling of the man’s lyrical name. “I don’t know. I, uh, I have this th-thing, and it’s taking up a l-l-lot of my time so I don’t r-really know if I’ll be able to h-h-help you with anything.” His eyes were nervously flitting to and fro, looking at everything except the man before him. The few seconds his eyes did land on his face just man him want to run for cover. He was wringing his hands like everything else in the world would fade away as long as he kept up the nervous motions.

“Rocinante, does this have something to do with Black Hat?” Aurelio asked, suddenly looking a lot more serious. Flug’s heart shot up into his throat. God, was it that obvious? They didn’t even need to do anything in public, everyone already thought they were dating!

Honestly, Flug felt a bit offended that people would just blatantly assume something like that. It wasn’t as if Flug was prancing around in heels all fabulously, talking about fashion and the latest pop diva. He wore his mask well, he thought. No one would ever think of him as a particularly masculine specimen, but he didn’t outwardly present as all that feminine, did he?

“Uh, yeah...yeah kind of.” Flug said. He still was looking anywhere but Aurelio’s face.

“I thought you said that the two of you weren’t anything serious?” Oh sweet Jesus the way that one eyebrow of his perked up. Not many people could move only one of their eyebrows like that. Was it
something that had to be practiced? Or could only certain people do it, like folding their tongues? Was that really the best thing to be thinking of right now!?!?

“We-We weren’t.” Flug was just completely ad-libbing by this point, forgetting what the story he and Black Hat worked out was. “B-But, I guess, after your, uh, your party, s-s-something changed.”

“What changed?” Aurelio asked, his voice sounded a bit...off.

“Well, uh, Black Hat told me h-how y-y-you and he, and Demetra, took me home. Th-Thanks for that by the way. S-S-Sorry to make you g-g-go out of y-your wa-way like that. And, um, the ne-next morning we uh, we got to ta-talking. About, about me and him. How, like, w-we have a lot of f-f-fun t-t-t-together, but we ki-kind skipped over the whole ‘talking’ st-stage, hehe. S-So we de-decided we’d slow it d-d-down a little and actually, y-you know, go out. W-With each other.” God he was taking a lot of liberties with this story. And it felt so super weird to be thanking the guy who knocked him out at his party. “And, well, now we’re pretty much of-f-f-official, heh.”

“And, what, he saw you drinking with me? That made him rethink things?”

Flug chuckled nervously. It was like Aurelio was helping him along with his lie. And it fit the narrative so well. Convenient. He did get really sarcastic when talking about Aurelio Saturday. Almost like he actually was bothered by Flug drinking with Aurelio. “Y-Yeah, I guess he d-d-didn’t really like that.” He was grinning madly, trying not to burst out in hysterical laughter just to get some of this tension out of his system.

“So he’s a jealous type? Is that it?” Aurelio said with a smirk. “Are you worried he’ll get mad if you start spending some time with me?”

Yes. Just say that. My evil boyfriend will get mad and I just don’t want to deal with that.

...My evil boyfriend...oh Dios, por favor ayúdame en estos tiempos difíciles.

“Uhh, y-yeah. Something like that.” Flug said with a forced smile. He really hoped Black Hat would be okay with this little addition to their story.

Aurelio laughed. “I assure you and your boyfriend I have nothing but the purest of intentions.” He reached out a hand to touch him and...Flug backed away. Physically. Physically stepped back to avoid the contact.

Aurelio noticed. Oh God he noticed. Well, of course he noticed, it’s not like Flug was at all subtle about it! Oh God why had he done that!? Why’d he do that!? Why on earth had he backed away so obviously!??

Aside from the fact that he didn’t really believe a word of that last sentence.
“I, um,” Flug cleared his throat fearfully. Quick, say something! Make something up! “I think...I think there are some things I need to cl-clear up.”

“Like what?”

“At-At your party. I think I may ha-have said some things that I probably shouldn’t have.”

“You mean, like when you told me you were...” Aurelio trailed off, still hesitant to say it out loud.

“Yeah.” Flug said. He also had fuzzy memories of calling Aurelio...certain things. Like hot. Or sexy. But there was no time to think about that right now. If he did, he’d never get out of this conversation with his sanity intact. “I-I, I don’t...I’m not u-usually so...” He struggled to get the words out. “N-Not a lot of people know. And, I’d appreciate it if it s-st-stayed that way.”

“About...you and Black Hat or...?”

“B-Both.” Flug looked Aurelio cautiously in the eyes. “Um, c-c-can w-w-w--we just k-keep this bet-between us?”

“Oh sure, sure,” Aurelio said. “If-”

“Oh Flug, there you are!” A woman’s voice called out.

Flug and Aurelio turned, and there was Tesoro, lightly jogging around the corner of the science building, auburn curls bouncing and swaying as she approached the two men and pulling Flug by the arm once she was close enough.

“C’mon, we’re gonna be late to meet the others for pupusas! ”

“What?”

“Pupusas! Everyone else is probably halfway there, let’s go!” She said, taking him away with a slightly forced perky grin. “The way you rushed out I thought you’d be the one waiting for us!”

“Oh, uh, right. Right.” Flug said, catching on quick. “I’ll, uh, I’ll talk to you later, Aurelio.” He said as he was lead away quickly.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll call you.” Aurelio said. Oh no please don’t.

After his escape, and he made sure Aurelio was well out of earshot, he whispered to Tesoro. “Thank you for that.” He wasn’t sure why he still felt the need to whisper, especially after triple-checking that they weren’t being followed, but it just felt safer that way.

“Don’t mention it,” She whispered back. “I owed you one anyway.”

“What?”

“You got me out of his hands before, it’s the least I can do. One good turn deserves another, you know?” She smiled at him, and suddenly he was immensely grateful that he’d stepped in back then when he did. Tesoro let go of his arm, and he held himself in a small sort of hug as he continued
walking with her. He wondered where they were going, it wasn’t the direction of the parking lot and his bus stop was the other way.

“I know you’ll probably say no anyway,” She said “But a bunch of us actually are going out for pupusas. You can totally come if you want.”

“Sure,” Flug said. “Count me in.”

“Wait, really?” Tesoro said, staring at him with wide eyes.

“Yes, sure. I’ve been thinking I could stand to go out more.” And I really don’t want to be alone right now.

“Oh, well, cool!” She perked up, genuinely this time. Blonde highlights catching the sunlight and heightening her bright smile against her dark skin. “It’s probably just gonna be the six of us; me, you, Hector, Angeles, Miguel and Cynthia. I tried invited Natalia and Bianca and even Rodrigo but I’m not sure if any of them will actually show up. Maybe we could all get together after finals and hang out one last time for the semester. You think you’d be up for that?”

“Sure, sounds good.” Flug said, having no real intentions of actually going.

“Great!” She beamed. And kept talking, although Flug mostly tuned her out. Just agreeing and nodding at the correct times to make it at least seem like he was trying to contribute to the conversation. He really hoped he wasn’t agreeing to any more future outings. His inner introvert was already shriveling up in horror thinking about having more social obligations.

His outer introvert (a.k.a. his physical self) spent the late afternoon in the company of friendly people talking about things that didn’t feel very important. It really wasn’t too bad. It served its purpose as a distraction from his worries. His neck was not mentioned. He was talked into carpooling with Hector and Miguel and made it home easily enough. He repeated the statement that they should all hang out together again soon and locked himself in his apartment to wait for Black Hat to pick him up in the morning to go check out some deadly snake at Demetra’s house.

Look at him, having a life and junk.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

oh Dios, por favor ayúdame en estos tiempos difíciles = oh God, please help me in these difficult times (Spanish)

So...anyone willing to take a guess at what happens next? Go on, give it your best shot! Write it here! Write it here! I will see it and respond pretty much regardless of how you
get it to me, so long as you do. I'm always up to talk to you glorious bastards who follow this fic so closely. And I use the term "bastards" in it's most endearing way. As always, follow my tumblr, leave me a nice comment to brighten up my day, and do whatever it is you've been doing that makes you look so beautiful. Did you change your hair? It looks nice.

Oh God imagine if someone actually DID change their hair recently...
A Snake's Favorite Dance

Chapter Summary

Dem: now that’s a black mamba. One of the deadliest snakes on the planet, it can grow up to 14 ft and moves 12 miles an hour. They’re very skittish and are known to bite multiple times. Just two drops of venom and I’m dead.

*I’m gonna pick it up.*

Flug: OMFG WHAT?!

Black Hat: wait hold on let me get my phone.

Chapter Notes

What’s a snake’s favorite dance? The mamba!!!

....I’ll shut up now...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Demetra lived kind of far. And very out of the way. If you didn’t already know about this place, it would be hard to find. There wasn’t much in terms of neighbors, or even really any sort of neighborhood to speak of. It was kind of isolated, like it was a place of business first and a residence second. The actual abode seemed just an afterthought, as Black Hat had to drive around to park in front.

Flug wondered why exactly Demetra worked at a cafe nearly an hour away when she didn’t seem to have her own mode of transportation. He also wondered why they needed to leave by 8 in the morning, the only answer Black Hat had to give being “What does it even matter, it’s not as if you need beauty sleep!”

Flug’s lack of a need of sleep was not the point, Hat-Man, not the point.

Demetra’s house wasn’t anything spectacular. It was an average sized two story abode painted a truly horrid shade of yellow to the side of a slightly smaller building which looked a bit better maintained. Judging by the sign, it was the actual reptile ranch thing. There was also a large van out front, decked out to look as if it had scales and sporting what Flug assumed to be their shop’s logo on the side. Along with a pretty decent decal of a snake. Wonder who did that.

The door swung open and Demetra herself ran out soon after the two of them approached the porch. What, was she just waiting by the windows to see when they showed up?
“Oh good, you guys are here!” She exclaimed. “She’s only going to be basking for a few more hours so c’mon, let’s go see her right now!”

She pulled them both along to the main shop of their little reptile farm/pet shop thing they had going on. She dragged them past the various cages of snakes, lizards, other things Flug didn’t know the precise name of (is there any difference between a salamander and a newt?) to a room in the back partially hidden by a thick curtain. Demetra pulled it back a bit and led them into a dark room, whose only illumination seemed to be the heat lamp positioned above the cage.

“Well, here she is!” Demetra announced proudly.

It was a huge glass thing, nearly spanning the whole wall. Although the room itself was on the small side, so maybe it wasn’t that big a cage after all. It seemed bigger than most of the other cages they’d passed. This snake apparently needed its own little enclosure separate from the rest of the reptiles on display and on sale.

It looked very humid in there. Dry, sparsly leaved branches extended like a tree from the large amount of dirt and bark packed into the bottom of the cage. They took up most of the top right corner, directly under the heat, along with a few of the large rocks that were scattered and piled up in seemingly random piles. There was a large stone bowl front and center, it’s water bowl, Flug guessed. Which was about the only thing that broke the image of actually being the wilderness. Expect for one thing that just left Flug confused.

The box. There was some odd plastic box off in the corner, which stuck out like a McDonalds in the middle of the savannah. It was so jarring that Flug felt almost physically confused by it. It really took him out of what was otherwise a pretty decent illusion of a scene straight from nature.

And there it was, lounging (do snakes lounge?) along the branches and soaking up the heat. It’s light grey color not quite blending in, it’s fleshy white underside giving a clear view of it’s position. It was, to be frank, a big ass snake. Lengthwise, at least. Flug estimated it to be about 1.5 meters, but he could be slightly off with the way it had strewn itself about. It didn’t seem to have much girth, although Flug didn’t know much about snakes so he supposed he had no idea if it looked particularly thin or not. What did this thing even eat?

The three of them just silently took it in for a few moments, admiring the sheen of the light on it’s scales. It was a little creepy, how it seemed to be watching them as they watched it. Out of the corner of it’s eye like their walking in was a bit of an inconvenience, but it was too cool to acknowledge them further. Flug saw it’s small round eye looking back, as if it actually was looking back. Observing them like, Who disturbs my basking? Or, I bet I can eat the scrawny one.

That was surprising, too. It had round pupils. Flug though snakes had slit pupils, like cats. But these were circular and pitch black, only a small ring of reflected light differentiated iris from pupil.

Wait...do snakes even have irises?
“She’s grey.” Black Hat said, breaking the silence. Flug and Demetra just kind of stared at him.

“Uh, yeah, Captain Obvious, she is.” Demetra said with a roll of her eyes.

“You said she was black.”

“Black, grey, close enough.” She said with a shrug. “When they grow up, they’re usually dark grey, dark brown, sometimes green. Her underside will stay light like this, I think she’s gonna stay grey though. She’ll get darker as she grows up, maybe get to almost black, but that doesn’t happen all too often.”

“I thought she was a black mamba.”

Demetra snickered a bit. “That’s not why they call them that, silly.”

“Why do they call them that then, if not for their color?”

“Well, not their scale color,” Demetra said. Then she smiled. Flug didn’t like that smile. God she looked like she was gonna do something insane. “Actually, I think I can show you.” She turned her head to Flug. “Can you keep watch?”

“Can I do what now?”

“Keep a lookout in case my dad or one of my brothers comes in.”

“Wh-What am I supposed to do then?”

“I don’t know, scream?” Her eyes flitted to the cage and the snake inside. “Wait, no, better not. She’s a flighty one. Might spook her. Then we’ll all be in trouble.”

“Wait, wait wait wait,” Flug held up his hands, like that would stop the lunacy unfolding before him. “You’re not, you’re not going to take that thing out of its cage are you!?”

“Keep your voice down!” She said in a low voice. Her head whipped back to the cage, Flug and Black Hat’s eyes followed. The snake had picked itself up, it’s raised head facing them directly. Almost accusingly. Oh shit things just got real. “She’s a shy girl as is. And for your information, I have been handling snakes since I was a little kid. I know what I’m doing.”

“Then shouldn’t you know that everything about this is a terrible idea?”

“I thought you said this was one of the deadliest snakes worldwide.” Black Hat spoke up.

“Uh huh! One of the fastest too!”

“Oh? How fast?”

“Top speed for the grown ones is about 20 kilometers per hour!”

“Oh Jesus!” Flug exclaimed, still in a hushed voice.
“And you are going to pick her up?”

“That’s the plan!”

“With your bare hands?”

“I’m not gonna die just from touching her.” She said with a flip of her massive hair.

“Ok hold on.” Black Hat pulled out his phone. “Ugh, the lighting in here is just terrible.” And proceeded to tap away at the screen for a few seconds. “Alright that’s as good as it’s getting. Flug, keep watch.”

Flug just stared at him. And yelled in a whisper. So as not to scare the snake that was almost as long as he was tall and faster than an olympic athlete! “You’re going to record this?!”

“Hey, if I’d have known she was going to take her out I’d have brought my actual camera. The quality on this is gonna be shit in comparison. I’ll show you later, go keep watch now.”

Flug shook his head. “Fine, fine. I’ll keep watch. But when one of you is bitten by a black fucking mamba and dies, don’t come crying to me.”

“How much venom does it take to kill a person?” Black Hat asked.

“Two drops is enough to do it.” She said cheerily. “We scare her though, and she’s gonna be giving us waaaay more than that. So keep your voices down, no sudden moves, and don’t get too too close just in case.”

Oh don’t worry, Flug would be staying two car lengths away from this thing at all times. He turned his attention to the outside world, just peeking out from behind the curtain. It seemed to him that the less obvious he was about this, the better chance nothing horrible would happen. Well, nothing more horrible than was already happening. Just further confirmation that his life was slowly spiraling into madness the more he ventured past his apartment door.

Why couldn’t they just calmly crowd around the chameleons? Those were perfectly safe, no danger of dying from one of those bites, right? And they were tiny. Could fit in one hand. And had neat bulging eyes. Eyes that could move independently and look at two things at once. Man, that would be so cool to be able to do.

He heard something and assumed Demetra had just opened the cage. He heard her go “Shh, shh, it’s okay Lil’ Jack, it’s okay. I’m not gonna hurt you. You remember me, don’t you? Nice and warm, just relax, there you go.”

“Lil’ Jack?”

“Heh, yeah, that’s what I decided to call her.” Demetra’s voice was soft. “My dad doesn’t like it when I do that, cuz we’re not supposed to be keeping them, but, whatever. Never stopped me before, ain’t stopping me now. And it just fits her so well, you know?”

“She not very little.” Black Hat said bluntly. Although Flug had to agree with him. How could
anyone call something this huge “Lil’ Jack”?  

He heard Demetra chuckle. “She ain’t even a year old yet. She’ll probably be about twice this big when she’s all grown up. Maybe more.”  

Oh goddamn this wasn’t even it’s final form!? It was going to grow to 3 meters in length??! At least!??! Jesus!  

“How long will she live?” Black Hat asked.  

“11 years, maybe?” Flug could hear her voice hitch as she (he assumed) actually brought the thing out. He wondered how much a snake this big had to weigh. “That’s how long they live out in the wild. Some of ‘em live into their 20s in captivity, but we dunno for sure how she’s gonna develop. Or how the person who takes her home is gonna treat her. Hey, hey hey hey,” Flug heard a raspy sort of hiss. Oh shit it was going wrong immediately. She spoke to it in a soft voice, “No no no, just relax Lil’ Jack. Just relax. It’s all good. These are my friends. Shh, shh, I know, new people are scary, but it’s cool. I’ll introduce you. I think you’ll really like these guys.” The hissing died down, so Flug assumed Demetra had been able to calm the thing. He didn’t know it was possible to talk down a snake. Maybe it was like with dogs, maybe it was more the tone that mattered, not the actual words.  

“Where did you get her?”  

“Dad didn’t say. And with something as special as her, guess it’s better not to tell. All I know is he got her from a different guy than we usually get the imports from. Kinda shady.”  

“Ever figure out what she’s crossed with?”  

“No, but I think if I can match her bands with something, it’ll give me a pretty good idea.”  

“Bands?”  

“Yeah, I told you she’s got a lil’ red on her, right?” Yeah. Flug vaguely remembered her saying something about that back when they were driving to Aurelio’s. “They’re back here, kinda hard to see but she’s got these red bands on her.”  

Flug tried to rack his brain and figure out what she was talking about. When he thought of red bands on a snake the first thing to come to mind was something like a coral snake, something bright red and very noticeable. But he hadn’t seen anything like that on this snake when he saw it. It seemed to all be a silvery-light gray color. Aside from the white of its underside.  

“I don’t think my phone is getting them.” Black Hat said.  

“But you see ‘em, yeah?”  

“Barely.”  

“Good. I’m hoping they’ll get darker along with the rest of her. Bet she’ll be even more of a beauty
when she’s all grown up.”

“So, why do they call them black mambas?”

“I’ll show you,” Demetra said. “It’s their mouths.”

Flug couldn’t see what was going on but he heard Demetra shh-ing the snake a bit more and Black Hat go “Ooooooh, ok. I see.”

“Pretty neat, huh?”

“Yeah that’s cool.”

“So, it’s mouth is black?” Flug asked, turning a bit.

“Yeah yeah, check it out.”

Flug let the curtain drop and he turned fully to see Demetra with all 1.5 meters of the snake in her arms, one hand gripping the head tightly and exposing the inky interior of its mouth. While Black Hat stood there with his phone like a Japanese tourist.

Flug resisted the urge to lean in closer to its mouth for a better look. He had to admit though, it actually was pretty cool. It’s mouth was like the aftermath of an oil spill, a deep murky black that bubbled suspiciously at the back of it’s throat. In the dim lighting it almost looked like a black hole, sucking in all illumination and leaving itself pitch. It also looked really weird with it’s mouth held open like that. If looked at from the side it almost looked like it was smiling. A very unnatural smile. Unhinged. Like this thing could probably do with its lower jaw. Could all snakes do that, or just some?

Flug couldn’t see it’s tongue, maybe it was the same jet color, but he did see some odd tubish thing going down its maw. Barely distinguishable, just a hint of black-on-black shadows.

“What is that?” Flug said, pointing to it from a (hopefully) safe distance. “Is that it’s throat?” He knew it probably wasn’t the throat, it seemed far too narrow, but he didn’t really know what else it would be.

“Nope, that’s her windpipe.” Demetra said cockily.

“Is it supposed to be like that?”

“Yeah, it’s like that so she can breath while she’s chowing down.”

Huh. That...actually made a lot of sense. Snakes didn’t chew their food, Flug knew that much. They extended their mouths and slowly moved prey down their throats into their stomachs, where it was digested in its entirety. If the trachea was farther down in their throat like a human’s, that would be a pretty huge choking hazard. Having the windpipe separate from the esophagus like that allowed air to flow even during the feeding process, where the entire mouth would be stuffed up.
“Where are her fangs?” Black Hat asked. “I don’t see them.”

Flug squinted his eyes. Yeah, he couldn’t see fangs either. Just black gums and little lumps around where he figured the fangs should be. Were they just really tiny? Like...baby teeth? He didn’t actually have any real clue as to how big snake fangs actually were.

“Oh, they’re flat right now.” Demetra said. “She’ll move them down when she needs to eat.”

“She can do that?” Black Hat and Flug asked in near perfect unison.

“Yep. They’re a lil’ longer than usual, I think, but very flexible.” Demetra nodded as if that explained everything. She moved her hand down so that she wasn’t holding the reptiles mouth forcibly open anymore, but rather held it by the neck. The thing turned its head around a bit, as much as it could while still held steady, maybe sizing the two newcomers up again now that it was closer. How was this things’ eyesight? Did it hunt by sight, or smell? Flug could now make out a thin black line flicking against the milky white of its underside. That was how snakes smell, right? Through their tongues? Was it sniffing them? Trying to see which of them might be tastier? Well, it certainly wouldn’t be Flug. He’d probably taste like sweat and day old microwaveable food.

Flug doubted it had the capacity for such higher thinking, but he found himself imaging what must be going on it it’s head. *Who are these weirdos? Why am I not soaking up the sun? Put me down you cretin. I’m hungry.*

What did this thing eat again?

“Can I hold her?” Black Hat asked when all had been silent for too long.

Flug just stared at him like, *What the fuck did this man just say?*

“Oh, well.” Demetra stammered. “She, ah, she can be a lil’ defensive, I think she’s only letting me hold her like this cuz I sneak in here to hang with her pretty often and I’ve picked her up once or twice before.” Oh Lord was that really all!? She’d only done this once, *maybe* twice before!?! “So, she knows me, ya know? I dunno if she’s gonna let you so much as touch her.”

“Can I try?” He asked again. Like they were talking about a particularly nervous puppy or kitten and not ONE OF THE MOST VENOMOUS SNAKES ON THE PLANET!

“Well-” Demetra started before Flug cut her off.

“No. No, no, no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no. NO.” He faced Black Hat and pointed at him seriously. “ No. ”
“Oh come on, just hold my phone.” He pushed the cell phone into Flug’s hands. “Make sure you get my good side.”

“No.” He pushed the phone back. “This thing could literally kill you.”

“Yes, and she’s beautiful.”

“What?” Flug’s face scrunch up trying to comprehend the mania that had clearly befallen his two compatriots.

“We’re looking at the same thing, right?” He asked, placing the phone back into his pocket. “I don’t see what exactly I need to clarify here. She’s beautiful and I want to hold her.”

“Ok, so,” Demetra chimed in. “How’s about I keep holding her, and you just touch her? See if she’ll let you do that first.”

“Works for me.” Black Hat shrugged. “Flug?”

He considered it. And studied Demetra’s grip on it’s head. It... seemed secure. It moved about, swaying like it was trying to move, but not as if it was really struggling. Not like it was actively trying to break free from her grasp. It’s head was held high, making Flug feel like it was trying to intimidate them, but it didn’t seem particularly interested in striking out. She did say she had been handling these animals for years, and despite her rowdy nature she did seem to know what she was doing. Hell, this was probably the quietest and calmest he’d ever seen her. This certainly wasn’t safe, all notions of safety were thrown out the window the second she took this thing out of its cage, but he supposed this was (marginally) better than just handing it off like a lethal game of hot potato.

Flug shook his head. “Do what you want. Buy the damn thing.” He mumbled, going back over to the curtain where things made a bit more sense. “Get yourself killed.”

Almost immediately he heard the same raspy hiss from before, a clear sign that things were going marvelously. And Flug faintly wondered what would happen if Black Hat actually were to die. Would the contract just be voided immediately when one of them died? Would Flug get his soul back? Would he just remain soulless for the rest of his life, in service to a deceased master? Would Black Hat instruct him on running the evil empire through a ouija board or something? Would he need someone to formally annul the contract? And he mentally asked himself again; who would he need to talk to about this, a lawyer or a priest?

Maybe he could ask Dr. Morte himself when he met him at his birthday party in a few months. He’d probably have some answers for him, right?

“Stop that!” Demetra snapped, shaking Flug out of his thoughts. “You gotta be gentle with her. Like I did; gentle, soft, easy. You can’t lunge out and expect her to just go for it. That ain’t how she is. If you’re too eager all it’s gonna do is scare her off. Just like I told you for him.” She added in a not-at-all-subtle whisper.

Flug turned back around. “You know I heard that, right?”
“You know your boyfriend refuses to listen to sound advice, right?” Oh God. She said it. Flug could feel his cheeks bloom rose red and hoped it wasn’t all that noticeable in the dim lighting. She called him his-

“Can everyone just shut up?” Black Hat said in a very agitated voice. “And get back to the matter at hand?”

“Kay, since you need everything spelled out for ya, here it is: Cool your jets! You come on way too strong!” The snake hissed again, as if to agree with her.

“Tell me about it,” Flug said under his breath. Apparently loud enough that he was still heard, if Demetra’s restrained giggling was anything to go by.

“I fucking told you so,” She choked out.

“Ok, first of all, I didn’t hear you complaining at dinner.” Oh come on he didn’t have to bring that up. “Second, it is not my fault that she refuses to cooperate.”

“Oh yes it is.”

“What? How?”

“I been telling you how! You’re scaring her off! Keep it up and she’s gonna bite ya.”

It was then that Flug remembered he was supposed to be on guard duty. He peeked out from behind the curtain and was almost immediately greeted by a large man almost a full head taller than him and, as the kids would say, swole as fuck. He had short brown hair about the same shade as dark chocolate sticking out in odd places like he just rolled out of bed and threw on a muscle shirt real quick. He had a wide jawline with a bit of stubble, maybe he hadn’t shaved this morning. He just kind of stared at Flug with a surprised look on his face, like Who the hell is this and why is he here?

“O-Oh my-” Flug stumbled back, knocking into Black Hat, who hopefully miraculously stopped himself from crashing face-first into a deadly serpent.

“Yes,” Demetra said, apparently unaware of anything going on beyond the area right in front of her. “Like that. Be gentle. Much better.”

“Uh, Demetra?” Flug whispered. “What do your brothers look like?”

“Tall, dark hair, kind of douchey, why?”

“...Hello, my name is Rocinante,” He gave a small wave. “I’m a friend of your sisters.”

He felt Black Hat turn a bit. “Hey.”

“Well shit.” Demetra said. “Flug, you are a terrible lookout.”

“Demetra, put the fucking snake back.” The guy said. He didn’t even seem all that mad, he just seemed like he was tired of having to tell her not to pick up venomous snakes. His face was kind of blank. Like he hadn’t fully woken up and was currently only at half-capacity to deal with the
situation.

“It’s fine, really, we were just—”


“Ivan, if you would just—

“Put. The. FUCKING. SNAKE. BACK!” He shouted. Making Flug flinch and bolt as if the words were directed at him.

“Don’t do that!” She hissed, fighting to keep Lil’ Jack under control. It seemed the snake got startled and was now going crazy. That was Flug’s best interpretation of things, at least. If Demetra wasn’t holding it it’d probably be in the process of biting all four of them to death. “I’m putting her back, I’m putting her back!”

“Please tell me no one got bit.” The guy said, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

“I had everything under control.” She dumped the snake back into its cage, where it rapidly retreated into that strange little plastic box. Huh. Guess it really was a shy girl after all.

Demetra’s brother, Ivan, barked out laughter. “Yeah no, I don’t think so. Everybody out.” The three of them filed out, Flug in the lead. “And stop going in there, I’m not telling you again.”

“That’s what you said last time.” She said with a mad smile.

“And if I need to say it again it really will be the last time you little fuck up.” Ivan said with hollow eyes above his own tight lipped grin. “Now get out.”

He called after them as they awkwardly exited the place. “And wash your damn hands!”

Demetra huffed. “I don’t need to wash my hands. Hardly do, and I ain’t never caught a thing.” Flug wasn’t sure he was comfortable with Demetra handling his food and drink anymore.

Demetra led them back around to the front of her house, “C’mon in, I’ll show you Locojos. ”

Flug shot Black Hat a really confused look as they followed her lead. “I think it was a lizard.” He shrugged.

“A horned lizard.” She specified.

“Ah, right. Like your hood.”

“Awww, you remembered.” She shot a flirty grin back at him. “He doesn’t look like this though. Too bad. It’d be wicked.”

As they entered, Demetra started telling them a bit about horned lizards, which Flug mostly tuned out as he took the place in. From the yellowing white interior paint to the wooden furniture with its many nicks and duct taped table legs, it was kind of a mess. He could hear some more male voices coming from somewhere off to his right, where the kitchen might be. How many brothers did she have
again? Maybe one of those voices belonged to her father?

The banister and stairs, which Demetra walked up two at a time, were covered in scratches and marker graffiti and carvings. Like, literal carvings. Like someone in this family got a knife and just went to town on the stairs. Highlights included things like Demetra eZtuvo aquí (carved), porque ella fue suspendida de nuevo (purple marker), pinche metiche (red marker), ¡Rey de la casa! (carved), and callate alex (blue pen).

Demetra’s room was at the far end of the hall and had a big messy sign that said ¡ENTRE Y MUERE! in rainbow glitter on black construction paper. Along with a few crude crayon doodles of skulls, crossbones, and puking emojis. As well as a fair amount of stickers and printed out band logos taped to the door.

Demetra herself kicked the door open, not entirely sure why, and spun around with a “TA-DA! Welcome to my home inside another home cuz everywhere else in this house sucks and is full of morons! C’mon in, make yourselves at home, sorry about the mess. Friends don’t come over too often.”

Apparently not, if the multitude of chip bags and soda bottles littering the carpeted floor was any indication. Flug assumed that there were tons of stains on the carpet, but he honestly couldn’t tell from just how messy it was in here. There was an empty metal trash can in the corner, that looked like Demetra had forgotten she had. Or she had terrible aim, because the space around the trash can was full. In another corner was a guitar, which seemed to be held together entirely with duct tape. Along with an old amplifier, which Flug doubted still worked. Her room looked like the stage of a garage band had been through a tornado, that for some reason dumped a girls bedroom on top of it. Her bed was full sized, with a mountain of pillows at one end and a tangled mess of red and black blankets at the other. It might’ve had a canopy at one point, but now it just had four large metal posts holding up nothing and threatening to stab the ceiling. There was a lump near the bed, which was possibly a bean bag chair, but otherwise no where else to sit. Flug almost couldn’t tell if the walls were the same peeling off-white color as the rest of the house; they were hidden behind posters of bands and people he’d never heard of, cork boards of various sizes with pinned up photographs of Demetra with people Flug assumed to be her other friends, a large mirror with a corner piece of glass broken off, a large closet with sliding doors that were decorated in stickers and sloppy crayon doodles, and a small glass cage on top of a scratched up wood dresser. Like the snake, it had special heat bulbs.

Unlike the snake, this one looked to be more arid and dry. It had a bit of cacti and a small desert bush, but was otherwise bare save for the water dish and the animal itself.

Oh, wait, no it wasn’t. There were also a ton of ants in there. Which were being slowly picked off by a small thing covered in horns and spikes that kind of looked like a partially deflated balloon. With the spikey head of Jabba the Hutt.

“Is that him?”

“Yep! That’s my lil’ Locojos!” Demetra said in her usual upbeat tone. Flug took the opportunity to
inspect the thing closer. It was in its cage and as far as he knew it wouldn’t kill him in two seconds. It was on the small side, it would probably fit rather nicely in his hand. It’s body was wide and flat, like it had gotten stepped on or run over and became a pancake. It’s little head darted back and forth while it ate, it’s eyes small and beady, tracking their prey with an odd sense of determination for something that looked like a toad with horns.

Apparently Demetra had been talking. “-and when they get threatened, they puff up to make predators go ‘Man, I can’t fit that in my mouth. It’s like the land version of a pufferfish.’ And I mean, it kind of is. He’s just this spiky ball thing with legs and a tail, pretty much a land-pufferfish. Minus the toxic part. That’s pufferfish, right?” That was probably a pretty accurate description of it’s natural defenses, but it was phrased rather stupidly.

“Although the blood is supposed to taste bad. ‘Nother way to scare off predators, they shoot out their blood. Like, first it’s ‘Whoa what the fuck, how’d you do that I haven’t even bitten you yet!’ then it’s ‘Ew, if that’s what you taste like nevermind.’ Which, I mean, so long as it works. It would sure freak me out if something I was trying to eat did that. Imagine if people could do that.”

Flug whipped his head around. “Uh, what?”

“Oh, you didn’t know?” She said with a smug grin. “Horned lizards can shoot out their blood.”

“Whaaaat?”

“Where? From their mouths or something?” Black Hat asked, approaching the cage and tapping on the glass.

“Nope!” She announced, pulling her eyelids down dramatically. “From their eyes!”

“Neat.”

“Whoa!” How did that work? Did they have special veins and arteries near their eyes which had evolved in order to be able to expel their blood when threatened? Were the blood vessels in their eyes themselves just extremely sensitive and prone to burst when startled?

“He he! Yeah it is! He can shoot it out pretty far too! A whole meter away!”

“Impressive,” Flug admitted. That had sparked his interest. It surely did scare off predators, and if it did indeed taste foul it probably served as a deterrent for both the individual lizard and the species as a whole.

Cool.

“So, he just eats ants?”

“Ants, grasshoppers, even spiders. Little bugs like that.” She said. “But enough about him, put your feet up! Grab a snack! I think I still got some Takis somewhere...” She trailed off as she hunted around the floor. “You guys like Monster?” She tossed a crumpled can off in the general direction of
Not seeing anywhere else that was even remotely sanitary, Flug opted to sit on the edge of Demetra’s bed. Where he found a bunch of crumbs. God he hoped they were crumbs. Black Hat remained posted by the cage, leaning over to peer at Demetra. Who was still sifting through empty bags and crinkled cellophane looking for something edible.


“Birds.” Demetra said, not looking up. “Mice. Rats. Small things like those. That’s all we have to give her, really. But she’ll eat pretty much anything if you give her the chance, ya know? Even other snakes.”

Flug shuddered. Snake cannibalism. Was it still considered cannibalism if it was a different type of snake? It was deadly to its own kind as well as him. Although he would admit Demetra had been right about one thing; it was a thing of beauty. It was mesmerizing, and scary, and it got his paranoia juices flowing. Just his type.

“And that’s the kind of stuff she’d eat if she were in the wild?”

“Uhhhh, in the wild she’d be eating birds, yeah. Small chickens and stuff. And bats. Rodents. Just, you know, small animals.”

“Ahh, ok. Where is that, anyway? Her natural habitat or whatever?”

“South and East Africa.” Demetra replied quickly. “Not like Locojos here. He’s a local.” The thing stuck it’s tongue out. “Black mambas can live in a couple of places; woods, savannas, trees, grass. Lil’ Jack seems to like it hot and humid best, with tons of places to hide in.”

“And about how often does she eat? Once a day or so?”

“Pssh, nah. Snakes don’t eat every day. And since they’re cold-blooded, they don’t need to eat a whole lot either. Black mambas gotta eat pretty often for snakes, though. I give her a bird or a rat or something about every three days, she gets it when she wants it.”

“Where do you get them?”

“I find ‘em!” She declared, pulling a half-empty tube of Pringles out from under the bean bag. She began munching immediately. “Want any? They aren’t that stale.”

“Pass.”

“No thanks, I’m good. Um,” Flug fiddled with the blankets a bit. “When you said you ‘find them’, like, where? Please tell me you don’t find them in your room.”

“No, I don’t find them in my room!” Demetra said with the most offended expression Flug had ever seen from someone sitting on torn plastic bags and eating stale chips. “Well, except for that one time.”

Oh Lord.
Things continued in this manner for some time. Maybe a few hours, Flug wasn’t really paying attention. Demetra pulled out a small little green laptop that almost looked like a toy, Black Hat sat down next to Flug behind her while she got comfortable on the lumpy bean bag, and the three of them watched miscellaneous YouTube videos while keeping the conversation going through a myriad of topics. Science, nature, how January lasted four years yet October lasted a week, random things as they went from video to video.

They were only really interrupted once, by a man who looked kind of like Demetra’s brother Ivan; he had the same square jaw and dark messy hair, but it was longer and tied back in a short ponytail. He also seemed slimmer, not as buff but about as tall. His long sleeve T-Shirt was splotched and messy, though Flug couldn’t tell if that was just the design or if the guy had spilled something on himself. He leaned in against the doorframe, arms crossed and a sly smile on his face.

“Damn girl, two guys at once? You’ve moving up in the world.”

“Oh hi Mark.” She replied, the sarcasm heavy in her overly-sweet and innocent voice. “You jealous that you don’t have any friends of your own to invite over?”

“Nah, this place is shit. Wouldn’t invite anyone here if Dad paid me.”

“You’re missing out.”

“I can live without getting tipped by my dad, thank you very much.”

Flug whispered to Black Hat. “Are they just gonna act like we’re not here, or...?”

“Oh, yeah.” Demetra piped up, not turning around or even looking up from the screen. “Mark, Black Hat and Flug. Black Hat and Flug, Mark.”

“My name is Rocinante.” He mumbled under his breath.

“You sure know how to pick ‘em, Demi.”

“So, did you want something, or did you just show up to be annoying?”

“I pretty much just showed up to be annoying.” He shrugged.

“Ok cool, just checking.”

Mark laughed freely as he strolled off. “Well, just leave the door open. Remember what happened last time.”

“What happened last time?”

“My friends were politely asked to leave, and it was awkward for everyone.”

“Your brothers are kind of assholes.” Black Hat said.
“Yeah, but they’re different kinds of assholes. Makes it a bit more interesting. Mark’s not too bad, he’s like the catty sister I always wanted.”

They resumed their aimless binging. They somehow kept finding themselves watching How-To videos from this one guy that were just...insane. They started out normal, but always devolved into the madman throwing eggs and jugs of milks and even setting things on fire. One, titled “How to get rid of bed bugs” ended with some random naked guy, screaming and holding a french bulldog! They just made no sense! And where did that cow come from?!

So naturally, they couldn’t stop watching them. They just carried on with whatever they were talking about while the “tutorial” played. One of them occasionally daring to ask, “What the fuck are we watching?”

Black Hat however, seemed to always try and direct the flow of things back to snakes. More specifically, the black mamba. What exactly it needed in terms of temperature, diet, growth; how often it would shed, how the cage was cleaned, Demetra mentioned that the current terrarium was going to need an upgrade soon, which only seemed to spark Black Hat’s curiosity further. It was kind of amazing how she had an answer for virtually every one of his questions. Although it was equally concerning just how many questions Black Hat had and why they all seemed to relate to the care, feeding, and just general upkeep of the animal. Flug had a sneaking suspicion that he had some ulterior motive for asking all these questions, beyond innocent interest.

And when they had wasted half the day away, having finally ending up in the Top 15 Deaths Caught on Camera part of YouTube, he was proven right.

“Well, that settles it, I’m buying her.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Demetra eZtuvo aquí = Demetra wuz here (Spanish)
porque ella fue suspendida de nuevo = because she was suspended again (Spanish)
pinche metiche = [to my understanding this comes out to meaning something along the lines of "nosy fuck". If I'm wrong, please correct me. I will never get better if you don't]
¡Rey de la casa! = King of the house! (Spanish)
callate alex = shut up alex (Spanish)
¡ENTRE Y MUERE! = ENTER AND DIE! (Spanish)
Poisoned Rationality

Chapter Summary

Another chapter based on a Panic! At the Disco lyric. Although this time it's a misheard one.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

While Demetra went to go tell her dad, Flug tried to talk Black Hat out of his insane impulse buy.

“Have you ever had a snake before? Do you know anything about how to take care of it?”

Black Hat counted on his fingers. “Keep her in a 100-gallon tank, get a bigger one when she’s full grown, 125 at least, with a tight lock and good ventilation. The temperature should be stable with a bit of a gradient to it, the coolest end shouldn’t be any less than 23 degrees Celsius whereas the warm end should be closer to 28 or 30 degrees. Not counting a hotspot for her to bask in, which should be in the mid to high 30s. Wood chips, bark, and fir are good to line the cage with, as well as keep in the trap box for transportation. When she’s in there, I’m good to clean out the cage safely with a long shovel. Her water dish must be kept clean, and preferably should be big enough for her to soak in. Which I want her to do since Dem said that helps sheddings and I can’t imagine how else I’m really supposed to bathe her. She needs to be fed twice a week, small mammals, which should increase in size as she grows. If there’s anything else, I’m sure Dem knows and will be happy to tell me.”

Oh crap. Motherfucker had been paying attention. Were those all things Demetra had said over the past couple hours? They sounded so detailed. How was it Black Hat seemed to have all this memorized already? Had he been taking notes?!

“Well...” Flug searched for another logical argument. “What do you know about the actual snake? Because, if memory serves, it didn’t seem to like you.”

“Skittish, aggressive, not very confrontational unless forced. She’d have probably run from me if Dem wasn’t holding her. Or bitten me, given how close I was.” Black Hat said plainly. “As fast as she is, they apparently use their speed and agility more to escape threats than to give chase to prey. Not what I was hoping for, but I suppose I understand. She’d rather be left in peace, though has the means to attack if necessary. I can work with that.”

Flug was afraid to ask what Black Hat meant by that.
“But,” Black Hat continued. “Black mambas typically don’t tolerate any human contact at all, whereas Lil’ Jack here seems to be able to...get used to us, I think. According to Dem, snakes don’t really enjoy physical contact like, say, a dog would. They might allow it for our body heat, but don’t particularly want or like it. I believe she said something about snakes being able to recognize specific humans, either by smell or sight, which I think is why she was able to hold her. As she said, she knew her. It might be a result of whatever other snake species she’s crossed with, but whatever it is, it makes her a bit more compliant than a pure black mamba would be.”

“It still hissed at you. It clearly didn’t want you touching it.”

“Yes, because she didn’t know me.” Black Hat insisted. “So, perhaps all I have to do is get her used to me. What better way to do that than to become her caregiver?”

“Have you considered the fact that no matter if you own it and take care of it, it’s still a venomous snake and could kill you with a single bite? How much venom was it to kill a person, again?”

“Two drops could feasibly do it if I remember right. Her bite can inject 100 milligrams, at least. Then there’s the fact that black mambas bite multiple times.” Black Hat got a mad look in his eye. “I want to own her. Dem said it takes less than five minutes for her venom to kill mice, how fast do you think it could kill a human? How fast could she, if she had the drive to? I haven’t shown you the video yet, have I?”

“No, but I really don’t think—”

Black Hat already had his phone out and was pulling Flug to his side. “Look at her, Flug. Look at this lethal creature.”

He reluctantly obliged, focusing more on the snake itself than what was being said about it. The recorded voices of the three of them fading to white noise as he kept his focus trained on the thing called Lil’ Jack. He saw how it allowed Demetra to stoke it’s small head, but took a more aggressive stance as she gingerly lifted it. How it raised its head and hissed, mouth wide and threatening. How it gradually relaxed as she spoke to it, moving her fingers in massaging motions all down it’s underside until she was cradling it. How it’s mouth was forced open, Demetra snaking (no pun intended) her hand gently up to the head until it was holding the snake properly and squeezed it’s jaws. Those small, powerful jaws opening wide like a poison-tipped mousetrap.

Flug couldn’t make out the red Black Hat and Demetra claimed to have seen. A shame, but even without them the snake was a marvel. Most likely because it was such a lethal thing. It made one exercise caution, like you needed to be on your toes every second you were around it. And, well, you did. The thing could and would kill you if you got too close. Perhaps not out of malice or bloodlust, but out of primal instinct that told it to defend itself and holding back was not an option. It was a thing built for a world that showed no mercy, and hence would not show any in kind. It’s silvery-like scales looked almost a cloudy gray in the shadows, like a tombstone. The width around it’s jaws giving its head a sort of coffin shape. Appropriate, considering it’s bite was a near guarantee of death.

Fascinating? Yes. Beautiful, even? Sure. Would Flug ever want it around him? Not particularly, no. Not without Demetra present. Loon though she was, she at least knew about the animal and was capable of handling it. She was like a manic Steve Irwin, and Flug honestly wouldn’t be surprised if she died in a similar fashion.
When the video was over, Flug turned to Black Hat. “There’s no talking you out of this, is there?”

Black Hat gave him a devious smirk. “You must admit, it’s a very fitting pet for a villain. It’s deadly, and fearsome. What’s a more common and downright justified fear than that of a snake?”

“Can’t you just get, like, a tarantula or something? Maybe a scorpion? Those can be deadly and inspire fear, can’t they? People are afraid of those. *I’m* afraid of those.” Flug backed off so that they weren’t so close together anymore. “And they won’t grow to 3 meters in length.”

“No, my mind is made up. It’s either her, or something that would kill her.”

“So, a mongoose?”

Black Hat gave him a very disgusted look. “Just going by the name alone, I don’t want one of those.”

“It’s a little ferret-looking thing. It eats snakes. That’s kind of impressive, isn’t it?”

Black Hat grimaced even further at his words. “Not nearly enough.”

“Well, the only other thing I can think of is an eagle, I think those eat snakes. Or maybe falcons, some kind of large bird of prey.”

“Better, but where am I going to find an eagle on such short notice?”

“I don’t know, but I’m sure you can manage if you spend more than just an afternoon thinking about it. Or, what, have you really been considering this since Demetra told us about it a week ago?”

He shrugged. “Not exactly, no. She caught my interest, the black mamba’s lethality being so infamous. I wanted to see it for myself. I didn’t come here intending to take her home, but, what can I say? I want her. I will have her.”

Flug looked him dead in the eye. “You shouldn’t be allowed to have a pet.”

“Well, I have you.” Black Hat said, cupping Flug’s chin. He chuckled at Flug’s flustered pout.

“Be serious,” He mumbled, brushing Black Hat’s hand away.

“I’m very serious.”

“I doubt that.”

“I am completely serious about wanting this snake as my own.”

“Black Hat, that is nowhere near enough thought to justify actually buying this snake.”

“Do I really need to explain it further? She is one of the fastest snakes on the planet, she’s packing venom with a near 100% mortality rate, she’s about 5 feet- sorry, uh, I believe it’s a bit over one meter?”

“Roughly 1.5”

“Yes, she’s 1.5 meters long, and she’s only going to get bigger. She’s skittish and unpredictable by nature, and she’s also apparently a mutt, mixed with who knows what. I can only imagine any
changes to her natural development as a result will make her all the more lethal for it.”

“All of those are reasons not to get her.”

“No,” Black Hat placed his hands on Flug’s shoulders. “They are reasons why I absolutely must have her. Also, she color-matches perfectly with my aesthetic.”

Flug just stared at him. “You’re the kind of person to intentionally get an aggressive dog just so that it would attack people, aren’t you?”

“I probably would do that,” Black Hat admitted. “But I can’t say that I ever have. I don’t really like dogs.”

“More of a a cat person?”

“Mmm, no. I don’t really like cats either.”

“But you like venomous snakes?”

“You don’t need to agree with my decisions, Flug.” Black Hat said, letting him go. “Or even understand them. I’m going to have this snake, whether you like it or not.”

“Have you considered the possibility that maybe you can’t have her?”

“And why would I not?”

Demetra came back at that moment, with timing so impeccable it was almost like she’d been waiting outside the door for her cue. “Ok, so, my dad says you can’t have her.”

Flug raised his eyebrows at him, making his best Well, what now boss? expression.

Black Hat pointed at him seriously. “Not a word.” Then turned to Demetra. “And why not, exactly?”

“Uh, he said that we can’t sell her to just anyone.” She dug the toe of her shoe into the carpet. “I tried vouching for ya, but I think I just made it worse. Sorry.”

Black Hat straightened his tie with a sigh. “Dem, would you mind introducing me to your father?”

“I don’t think you got any better chance of changing his mind.”

“Well, we’ll just see about that.”

The two of them walked out into the hall swiftly, without so much as a glance back at Flug. He trailed after them awkwardly, unsure of what exactly he was supposed to feel. Annoyed? He was kind of annoyed. What, was he third wheeling? How, when Black Hat was supposed to be his boyfriend? His boyfriend that he was super conflicted about and didn’t even really want anyone to know about, and Demetra only knew about it because she had no sense of privacy.

But still, what the fuck, guys? Why was this the second time in a row that they’d been in a place other than the cafe and those two left him behind?
They made their way down the stairs, to the right, through the living room and around to the back of the house to a wooden door left ajar. It seemed dark, but a very faint light shone out. Demetra pushed it open with little to no regard for anyone’s privacy and called out “¡Papá! We got a man who wants him a black mamba!”

The room was dim, the only illumination seemed to be a bare light bulb hanging from the ceiling. It only barely lit up the room, which seemed to have two chairs, a desk, and nothing else in sight. Maybe there was more furniture hidden in the shadows, Flug couldn’t say for sure. If there were any windows, they weren’t open. Rather than feeling hot and stuffy, it seemed to be a bit cool inside. Must have the air conditioning on. Though Flug didn’t hear the usual steady rumbling that typically came with A/C. The room gave off bad vibes and so did the man inside it. Demetra’s father was a heavy set man, who kind of smelled like onion rings and cigars. He was currently smoking one, in fact. Making one small spot of burning red in the otherwise dreary space. He was slouched over a plain fold-out table, though Flug couldn’t see what it was he was doing in this suspiciously dark and foreboding room. What he could guess at was that it was probably something a bit unsavory, and probably not even worth poking his nose into. The only other thing he could tell about that man was that he was perhaps an inch or two taller than his daughter, but shorter than his sons had been for sure. He seemed to share their lighter skin and the boys dark hair, but not much else of his appearance was discernable from where Flug stood behind his...

...Were they friends?

Black Hat entered and shut the door behind him. Right in Demetra’s and Flug’s faces. Jeez, what was his problem? Even Demetra seemed put out by that, if her childish pout and annoyed mumbling was anything to go by.

“Yeah, no ‘Thanks Dem, I got this,’ or ‘Hello, my name is Black Hat, your daughter was nice enough to invite me and my boyfriend over to check out this cool snake you got and I want to buy her, can we talk?’. Don’t even ask me for advice on talking to my dad or nothing, no. Just go in dry, sure, see how that works out for you.”

“Uh, Demetra?”

“What?”

“Do you think Black Hat is actually capable of taking care of a snake?”

“Yeah sure, why not? They aren’t all that hard once you get used to ‘em. Just a ton of little things ya gotta remember. Like changing the water and keepin’ the terrarium clean. I used to have a whole set of alarms on my phone to keep track of what I had to do for everyone, till I got a job and they had to stop putting it all on me. Couldn’t say everyone else was too busy with work, not when we ALL got work.”

“Ok, but, is he really ready to just take one home with him after one day? Especially this one, that has so many...special needs?”
“Ehhh, you’re right.” she said. “He’s probably gonna forget all the stuff I told him.” Oh girl, that guy was listening to you like he expected a test. “Maybe I should make a little instruction booklet thingy so he won’t forget anything important!”

**AM I THE ONLY ONE HERE WHO THINKS THIS IS A BAD IDEA!?** Flug violently screamed in his head to no particular entity.

She grabbed him roughly by the arm and dragged him back upstairs. “C’mon, you’re supposedly smart, you can help!”

Um, excuse you, *supposedly*!?

Just because he didn’t know a lot about snakes and reptiles didn’t mean he knew nothing! She had been raised with the animals, it wasn’t fair to compare! Did she know anything about the laws of aviation? About calculating terminal velocity? About physics? *You didn’t even graduate high school!* Do you so much as know the scientific method!? Or is your science knowledge limited to “mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell”? Can you even spell “mitochondria”!?

Flug worked his ass off to get where he was, he didn’t like it being taken lightly. Just because book smarts came easily to him didn’t mean he didn’t put in effort and energy for his A’s. It wasn’t as if his scholarship just fell into his lap while he was jerking off.

Flug found himself hurled to the floor, his upper half landing on the bean bag chair. His lower half left to make do with crinkling cellophane and crushed Slushee bottles. At least he felt nothing on impact, just a dull ache as it set in. And even that he was able to will away with little effort. Hey, he might be getting the hang of this soulless thing.

Demetra sat down cross-legged across from him, and pulled out a flat wood board. Where from? He honestly had no idea. Had it been hidden underneath all the trash and debris? Did she pull it out of her hair?? Where had it come from?!

She managed to scrounge up a handful of broken crayons and loose leaf paper, and got to doodling.

“So, I guess I should start with the basic stuff like keeping her space clean, yeah?”

“I guess so,” Flug muttered, figuring it was best to just go along with things. He halfheartedly talked with Demetra, giving what little input he could. He basically just agreed with everything and said he trusted her “artistic vision”. He tried looking on the bright side. If Demetra gave Black Hat a handy little instruction booklet on the do’s and don’ts of having a pet snake, there was less chance of him fucking up in his hubris and dying, right? Although, her childish doodles were pretty distracting. Along with her penmanship. Maybe a pencil would be better than the crayons. Along with a
sharpener, so she wasn’t making such broad strokes. Maybe she should let him do this. The illustrations at least. Sure, the Doodle-Demetra was kind of cute, but it wasn’t really something that screamed, “IF YOU DON’T REMEMBER THIS YOU COULD LITERALLY DIE!”

Not even the helpful little note on the side that said “IF YOU DON’T REMEMBER THIS YOU COULD LITERALLY DIE!”

When she had finished her work, she passed the finished piece to Flug. He had to say, while it was crude and sloppy, it was actually kind of neat. She’d stapled everything together and it really was like a little how-to guide for proper snake ownership. And then there was the fact that, well, she made this. With her own two hands. She got the paper and the crayons and put together this little book so Black Hat would remember how to take care of Lil’ Jack. Was it perfect? No, it looked like something made by a grade schooler. But even Flug could appreciate something from the heart.

“So?” She asked eagerly. “What do you think?”

“I will make sure he has it.” Flug said. And he fully intended to do that, too. He couldn’t have his future boss dying on him before they went and became world-ruling supervillains. He was taking Demetra’s instructions with him if he wanted that snake.

“You think it’ll help him remember everything he needs to to take good care of Lil’ Jack?”

“Yeah, it seems like you were thorough.”

“Ok, think fast, bookworm!” She threw a crayon at him.

It got the side of his head. “Ah! What the hell was that for?!”

“Pop quiz! Quick, what do you line the cage with?!”

“Uh, wood or-”

“Wrong!” She wadded up a piece of paper and hit him in the face. “The answer was bark!”

“What exactly do you think bark is made of?”

“Since you got that one wrong, you gotta answer one of my questions now! Got it?” She held up half of a red crayon threateningly.

“Uh, ok? Sure?” Were they playing a game? Was this some weird way of seeing if going through the book actually helped? Quizzing him out of the blue and penalizing him with a question in turn? Oh God, it was like Who Wants to be a Millionaire met Truth or Dare. What was she going to ask him?

Demetra grinned fiendishly. “What do Black Hat’s scars look like?”

Flug blinked in surprise. “You, you know about those?”

“Eh, I tried to get him in the pool back at that jerk-wad’s party.” Aurelio’s? “He wouldn’t go, and
eventually told me it was cuz he didn’t like showing off his scars. Wouldn’t let me see anything, though. Wouldn’t even tell me what they were from. So, what do they look like?

“Oh, uh,” He was trying to comprehend this new information. So, he’d told Demetra about his scars? Before he’d told him... Actually, he never told him about his scars. He’d shown him. When things got heated and words were reduced to...bedroom talk... Even at dinner, he hadn’t gotten into his scars or what caused them. He’d told him a bit about his hands, though Flug hadn’t seen those. “Well, he has a lot, and they’re kind of all over so-”

“But you’ve seen them?”

“Yeah-”

“Ah ha! So you did get his shirt off! I knew it!” She threw the wood board off her knees and pinned Flug against her bed frame. Curses! She knew! He couldn’t very well deny it now! Why was he so bad at this!? “Oh, now you gotta tell me what he looks like with his shirt off! You didn’t happen to snap a photo or three did ya?”

“N-No!” He screamed in protest. “Get off me!”

“But until you tell me! C’mom, on a scale of 1-10, how sexy are they?”

Well, if he had to say- HE WOULDN’T SAY ANYTHING BECAUSE HE REALLY ISN’T COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT HIS PERSONAL LIFE!

“Demetra, seriously! Please get off me!”

“Aw c’mon, just tell me a little about his scars?”

“He...” Flug panted, trying to shove her off. “He hasn’t really told me much about them either.”

“But he let you see them.”

“It wasn’t like he was showing me just to show me. He was...uh...” Oh wow, was he really going to say that Black Hat had pretty much been giving him a strip tease? In bed? Was he capable of saying something like that OUT LOUD? To another human being!?

“Crazy intense make-out session?” She asked with a mischievous grin.

“Uhhhhhhhhhhhh, yeah. Yeah, that’s it. Crazy, crazy intense make-out session.”

“Uh huh,” She looked like she though that was code for... something else they may have been doing. “Give me the deets, brainiac. Your boyfriends scars. Go.”

He sighed. “Look, he...he’s got scars all around his body. Front and back. Up and down his arms too. You really want me to go over every single one of them? I can’t do that. I’ve only seen them clearly maybe once or twice. I think Black Hat’s kind of self-conscious about them, so we probably shouldn’t be talking behind his back like this.”

“Well, aren’t you sweet and understanding boyfriend material? You’re a regular old cinnamon roll.”

“Thanks, I guess.”
She finally got off of him. “So, you saw them, but he didn’t tell you what they were from?”

“No.”

“Did you even ask?”

“I figure he’ll tell me when he wants to. I’m not gonna push it.” Flug said. “If you wanna know so bad, ask him yourself.”

“Like he’s gonna tell me before he tells his boyfriend?” Well, he apparently told you he so much as had scars before he told his boyfriend, so it’s not too unthinkable. Although they hadn’t cooked up this whole dating scheme yet, so technically Flug supposed he had nothing to feel bad about.

Not that that stopped him at all.

“Demetra?”

“Yeah?”

“Now that me and Black Hat are, you know, officially t-together, can you kind of lay off us?

“What do you mean?”

“Can you not, like, tell anyone else about us being together?”

“Aw what? Why not?”

“It makes me really uncomfortable when you do that.”

“Man, you know I’m not making fun of ya. I just like seeing the two of you. And I like spreading the word.” She twirled the ends of her massive ponytail around. “Marietta and Esme agree with me too, y’all are the cutest couple we’ve had all year.”

“Demetra, I...” Flug hid his face behind his hands. “I really haven’t told a lot of people, so-”

“Oh wait so, like, you’re technically not out out, is that it?”

“Yeah, no, I guess I’m really not, ha ha ha.”

“OOOOoh I see. But that’s no good. What, are you just never gonna hug or kiss your boyfriend in public? That’s not right.”

“Please, can you just keep it, you know, low-key? At least until I’m...ready?” Not that he felt he’d ever really be ready. “I mean, I should be the one who decides when everyone else knows, right? Black Hat agreed to be private about it, so will you too?”

Demetra sighed dramatically. “Ok fine. I’ll try and lay off. But once you finally come out to the world, we’re throwing a party.”

“A party?”

“Hell yeah man! We gotta throw you your very own coming out party!” She flopped over and wrapped him in something that was almost a hug. “We’ll celebrate you and your boyfriend! Hey, hey, give me a date and I will get the entire cafe decked out. You can have as many coffees and
sweets as you want. Put it on Black Hat’s tab.” She winked.

As supportive as she was being, even thinking that him coming out was something that should be celebrated, it didn’t really get rid of any of his feelings of discomfort. She probably meant to make him feel at ease, let him know he had someone besides Black Hat who accepted him, but he just wasn’t feeling it. She was trying, he knew she was trying, but it just didn’t quite make him feel any better. At least she agreed she’d tone it down a little.

Another man walked into the doorway of Demetra’s room. This one was a large man, even more muscle than Ivan. And the white tank top only further showed off his toned arms. He had a buzz cut and his left arm was covered in tattoos like a sleeve from the shoulder all the way down to the wrist.

He whistled at them. “Get a room, you two.”

“We’re in a room.” She said snarkily.

“Then lose some weight.”

“You’re just ripping off Futurama!” She yelled, jumping up to throw an empty soda can at his head. He dodged it. “So, this is the guy you’re texting every night? Gotta say, I though even you could do better.”

Ouch.

“This is Flug,”

“Would it kill you to use my actual name every once in a while?”

“Wait, that’s not your name?”

“You have known me for how long now?”

“Damn sis, at least find out a guy’s name before you bring him home to dad.”

“Ok Alex, first off this guy is gay and spoken for.” **Demetra I JUST ASKED YOU NOT TO TELL ANY MORE PEOPLE.** “Second, you couldn’t even remember the names of your past three girlfriends.”

“Those bitches weren’t my girlfriends.” Alex scoffed.

“Oh wow, I wonder why. With you being such a huge asshole I can’t imagine women everywhere aren’t just ripping off their panties when you catcall them.”
The siblings got into it, making Rocinante glad he was an only child. He snuck out when Demetra hit Alex with “At least I’m not 30 and still living with my dad!”

Well, he couldn’t say she didn’t have a point there.

Having no real direction now, Flug headed downstairs to where Black Hat was. Assuming he and Demetra’s father were still talking, he’d wait for him outside the door. He had to wonder though, was Black Hat actually going to be able to get this snake? It wasn’t really a matter of price, the man seemed to have enough money to do whatever the fuck he wanted (at least he acted like he did), and Flug supposed he understood his rationale at some level. It was scary and dangerous and something he probably wasn’t going to just stumble across again. But for the love of God don’t let him immediately get this just because he wants it. Please let Demetra’s dad be an even bigger stubborn bastard and flat out refuse him.

Wait, hasn’t Black Hat murdered people before? And presumably gotten away with it, unless he left out the part where he traveled around so much because he had to constantly run from the cops?

Please don’t murder Demetra’s father for this snake, Black Hat. Then we’ll have to kill everyone else here so that there are no witnesses, and frame the snake, and that is far too “Series of Unfortunate Events” for my taste. Besides, where the hell would we hide the snake in that scenario, given your intent to keep it? Can’t just stick it in your apartment, no matter how well it matches the color scheme.

Hey now, there’s a question no one thought to ask; Does Black Hat’s apartment building even allow pets? Much less venomous snakes?

Reaching the door, it was again open a crack. The lock must be broken or something. Flug could faintly hear Black Hat and Demetra’s dad talking. He squeezed in close to the door and was able to make out the conversation.

“That’s all very interesting,” Said a scratchy voice, which paused briefly. Flug faintly heard something being lit, so he assumed it was Demetra’s father lighting up another cigar. Damn this guy had some bad smokers lung. “But I’m still not hearing anything that sets you apart from anyone else who wants to say they’ve got a pet black mamba. You can afford it and still pay your rent, big whoop. What else ya got?”

“What if...” Black Hat said, leaving Flug feeling like this pause was purely for dramatic effect. “I pay double?”

Demetra’s father laughed. “For that much, you can take my daughter.”

The sounds of the man’s laughter was extremely grating. Flug really didn’t like overhearing this man talk about his daughter like that, like he could just sell her to some guy if he had enough money. Black Hat didn’t reply for a moment, and his voice sounded a bit off when the laughter died down and he finally spoke up. “I’m just interested in the snake.”

“Yeah, I don’t blame you. At least the snake will stay in her cage.” Flug heard some grunts and
assumed the man had gotten to his feet. “You know what you’re buying here, right?”

“A *splice*, that someone gave you for safekeeping while the heat died down.”

...What’s a *splice*?

“She is a *splice*, isn’t she?” Black Hat asked. Flug wondered what he looked like right now. He couldn’t help but imagine he looked rather threatening. He was picturing the man sat back in a dingy little fold out chair like Demetra’s father; his head tipped to the side, only revealing his one good eye with it’s almost trademark glean of malignant motives. Just going by tone alone it seemed these two were talking about something illegal.

Flug heard another inhale and exhale of smoke. “So, you know about those, huh?”

“More than you’d think. Where’d you get her? *Deus*?”

“No, I don’t particularly like those types.” The cigar probably bobbed and shook while he talked, like in the movies. It sure didn’t sound like he’d taken it out to speak. “Gettin’ too old to deal with ‘em, anyway. She’s a little something cooked up by some kid with more brains than he knew what to do with. Long story short, things went to shit and he needed to get rid of all the evidence, so to speak. Rather than let years of work go down the drain and kill her, he cut a deal with some old acquaintances of mine who passed her off to me, and here we are.”

“Are you holding her for anyone in particular?”

“Not really,” Flug heard more nondescript noises. He kind of wished it wasn’t so damn bright out. It would’ve been easy to sneak a peek inside if there wasn’t such a contrast between this one room and the entire rest of the house. “They didn’t have anyone set up to take her, just wanted her far away. Never said I had to keep her, so I see no problem selling her off for my trouble. Had a few prospective buyers, but none as batshit insane as you to want to take her home after, what, a couple hours?”

“I know what I like when I see it.”

“Heh, sure. Whatever you say. My girl fill you in?”

“She gave me the basics.”

“You understand that if this snake kills you, or anyone else for that matter, it’s all on you.”

“Naturally.”

“Once you take her, she’s yours. I won’t be taking her back if she gets you into trouble.”

“ Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“And, of course, we’re gonna need you to be discreet. Can’t have you telling anyone else what me and my boys are doing out here.”

“If anything, you need to tell your daughter that, not me.”
Demetra’s father laughed darkly. Which Flug took as his cue to move. It seemed as if things were wrapping up between them and Black Hat was getting his deadly pet after all. Flug hastily got out of the way and walked backwards into the living room. Why?

So that when Demetra’s father lumbered out, it seemed like he had only just gotten here. Flug got a bit of a better look at him now that he was really in the light. He was an overweight man, his dark hair steadily receding and going gray. His stubble made him look dirty, as did the various types of grime stained into his clothes. He had on well-worn boots, the kind made for hiking or harder outdoor activities. The kinds of things this man couldn’t be pictured doing without collapsing from a heart attack. His arms were almost unnaturally hairy, to the point that Flug himself felt itchy just looking at them. He had faded blue eyes, possibly cataracts. Couldn’t imagine being in that dark room helped his eyesight at all. He also seemed to have a permanent scowl on his face, which he quickly turned in Flug’s direction.

“Oh, uh, h-hello sir.” He squeaked in his usual nervous manner. “I’m Rocinante, a friend of your daughters, pleased to meet you.”

The man obviously completely wrote him off. “Yeah, yeah, whatever. You seen my boy Mark?”

“I, um, I think he’s upstairs.”

The man muttered something Flug couldn’t make out. The sleaze ball got a better look at his face. He pointed with his cigar. “What happened to you, kid? Looks like you lost a fight with a hamster”

“Plane crash,” He looked away sheepishly. “I was right by the windows.”

“And that’s the worst you got? Lucky you.” He walked off in the direction of the stairs with heavy footsteps.

Flug watched him go, his mind briefly flashing though that night. Julio’s weight on top of him as he took the brunt of the damage. The things he couldn’t protect him from. The glass shattering and hitting his face. His broken leg. His ruined eyesight. What came after he woke up.

He got much worse. But no one really saw that. Wasn’t as evident. A thought he often had came to him again; if it wasn’t for the scars on his face, no one would know anything had happened to him at all.

He cautiously approached the door, and knocked twice before pushing it open. Because he had been taught manners. Black Hat was sat in the dark leisurely, he grinned at Flug when he saw him.

“So, you’re really getting Lil’ Jack?”

“I am.”

Flug sighed. “Well, Demetra made you a little booklet thing with everything you need to take care of her.”
“I won’t be needing that.”

“Could you take it anyway? Just in case?”

“Aw, are you worried about me?” His teeth stood out against the darkness like the shadows themselves were smiling.

“As a matter of fact, yes. I’d really appreciate my lord and master not dying like an idiot before so much as getting started on that whole ‘world domination’ thing we got going. Especially not in such a dumb and easily avoidable way. So will you please take the book she made you?”

“If it’ll really make you feel better, fine.” Black Hat shrugged. “I’ll take it, but don’t expect me to actually use it.”

Well, Flug supposed that was something. Just so long as he had it. “Does your apartment even allow pets?”

“It’ll be fine, I’m getting a permit.” Why was Flug imagining a blank piece of paper with the words *I can do what I want, signed Black Hat* in black marker?

“This isn’t legal, is it?”

Black Hat chuckled evilly. “No.”

“Then I guess this is your area of expertise, huh?”

“Trust me Flug, I know what I’m doing.”

“I hope you do,” Flug said softly as he walked away. He meant it, too. Black Hat better know what he was doing. Flug really didn’t want to have to spend the rest of his life under a moron with questionable spending habits.

As he went back around he saw Demetra’s father and two of her brothers approaching. Ivan and Mark, if he remembered right. They didn’t pay him any attention as he passed by, didn’t even so much as stop talking. Allowing him to eavesdrop a bit more. He didn’t catch anything concrete, but from the snippets he got and what he’d heard earlier, he could piece together a bit of what was really going on here.

Lil’ Jack was an artificially created hybrid snake. Made under shady circumstances and shipped off to Mexico because Demetra’s father had some old friends who were still in the business of smuggling animals to other countries. The man himself seemed to be out of it, for the most part, but still did business from time to time. His sons were in on it, if the two heading off with him and talking about the deal was anything to go by. Hard to say if Demetra was fully aware of the illegality of the situation. She seemed to think this was all completely normal. Maybe to her, it was.

Flug’s best guess, they were about to forge some legal documents to make it seem like Black Hat legitimately purchased the snake, as well as some bullshit permits allowing him to keep it. If it wasn’t enough, Black Hat would probably just pay off anyone who questioned the fact that he was bringing a venomous snake into an apartment complex. And a very high end one at that. Perhaps one used to having residents with “exotic” pets, and used to being well compensated for accommodating them. Even if it was under the table.
The next few hours went by in a blur. Flug couldn’t really contribute much, he mainly stood off to the side with Black Hat as Demetra and her family (her and her brothers) got to work. From getting the snake out of its cage and into its “trapbox” (the strange box-thing Flug had noticed earlier), to disassembling the cage and getting it in the van, to packing all the necessities for Black Hat to be able to care for it, to everyone piling up in their respective vehicles and driving to Black Hat’s. In the family van; Ivan, Alex, Mark, Demetra, and Lil’ Jack. In Black Hat’s car; Black Hat and Flug. The man himself was in good spirits, smiling broadly and reaching out to hold Flug by the shoulder for the majority of the drive. Flug wondered why exactly he did that sometimes. Not that he was complaining exactly but it struck him as a bit odd that Black Hat would just randomly touch him like this.

Well, he probably didn’t mean anything by it. Maybe he was just an overly-touchy kind of guy.

He got a call about halfway through the ride. The sudden sound of *Airplanes* jarring him out of the peaceful quiet. Who would be calling him? Maybe his parents-

Aurelio.

It was Aurelio.

Oh shit what should he do?

He said he’d call him but Flug never thought he’d actually do it! Although he’d never thought he’d ever get his number either or that Aurelio would ever text him and both of those had happened so he should really stop being surprised by these things! Should he, should he answer it? And talk to Aurelio in front of Black Hat? Who would probably be a bit curious about who that was and what they were talking about and why Flug was so sweaty all of a sudden.

Yeah, no. No no no no no. He wasn’t doing this now. He rejected the call.

“Who was that?”

“Oh, uh, n-no one.” Flug said. Black Hat didn’t press the matter further, going back to gentle squeezing Flug’s shoulder. Should he tell Black Hat about his chat with Aurelio yesterday? Maybe. Especially with Flug being an indecisive doormat who’d probably cave if Aurelio just pushed him a little more.

They were quite the spectacle out in front of the pristine building; a man in a top hat, a man with half his face scarred over, three shady looking white guys and a punk rocker with a snake in a box. It sounded like the set up for a really bizarre joke. It was a bitch getting everyone and everything to Black Hat’s apartment (penthouse, remember?), and it wasn’t until well into the night that everything was finally set up and settled and Black Hat’s living room layout was in satisfactory condition. Which was a relief because if Flug had to “help” Ivan and Alex move that goddamn bookcase one more time his arms were going to snap like literal twigs.

Arrangements were made to get a bigger cage installed in a few weeks, depending on Lil’ Jack’s growth. Demetra gave Black Hat her little instruction booklet, and while he did roll his eye a bit he
took it. The four siblings left, Demetra dragging their departure out to an almost annoying degree (though if Flug were being honest, there was no *almost* about it). Leaving Flug and Black Hat alone. In his apartment. At night.

Not that there was any chance of anything happening because the two of them were alone together at night in Black Hat’s apartment. No sir. Mainly because Black Hat seemed to have forgotten Flug was even still there and was too busy checking out his new snake. He’d been standing in front of the cage, stroking the glass between him and it, for at least ten minutes by this point. In total silence.

Flug decided to speak up. “Please tell me you aren’t going to try and touch it again.”

He chuckled. “Not alone, no. And not right now, of course. It’s much too soon to for something like that.”

While Flug would rather he just never try ever, it didn’t seem like that was going to happen. Fucking madman.

Fucking madman who was the only one Flug could talk to. Goddamnit.

“So, I um, I talked to Aurelio.” Flug said, hesitantly.

He saw Black Hat freeze for a second, before he resumed tracing the form of his new deadly pet through the glass. “Did you now?” He asked. “And how did that go?”

“H-He said he wanted me to help him test out some things with his Gi-Gift.”

“Like what?”

“Well, uh, I don’t know if you know this but, he has the ability to control other p-p-peoples b-body’s through skin contact.” Flug explained. “He said he felt he’d never really tested out his actual limits and w-wa-wanted me to help him.”

Black Hat huffed, and Flug just barely heard him mutter “I’d never do something like that.”

“Wh-What was that?”

“I said I’d never do something like that.” Black Hat said a bit louder. “If I had a...Gift, like him, I’d never ask anyone else to help me test my limits. I’d find them out for myself, and leave everyone else guessing at just what it was I was truly capable of.”

Flug considered his words while Black Hat folded his hands behind his back, not moving from his spot in front of the cage. “What I *might* do,” he continued. “Is find someone to test my limits out on. Someone who’d keep quiet. Or could be made to keep quiet.”

“A-And...how would you keep them quiet?”
Black Hat let loose a little sigh. “Oh, I don’t know, kill them?”

Flug gulped. Black Hat went on with a shrug. “It’d be the simplest solution. As the saying goes, two can keep a secret if one of them is dead. No risk of anything getting out. No chance of being betrayed. Kill them, find a replacement if the need arises, and repeat.”

Wow. That was cold. Calculating. But effective, he had to say.

“But, of course, it’s not as though Aurelio would ever do something like that,” Black Hat turned to face him. “Would he?”

“No. No, I d-don’t think that he’d ever kill anyone.” Yeah, Aurelio wouldn’t ever go that far, would he? Use people, sure. Abuse them, yeah he was fully capable of that. Kill them? Flug wasn’t convinced Aurelio would ever actually kill someone. Not to say he couldn’t, it’d probably be fairly easy with a Gift like his, but it seemed unlikely that he would ever truly do it.

“But use someone else as his guinea pig?” One of Black Hat’s thin eyebrows arched. “You think he’d ever do something like that?”

“Uhh, y-yeah,” Flug admitted. “He’s no stranger to u-using people for his own g-g-g-gain.”

“Is that right?”

“Ha, you saw what he did d-during my demonstration of the Stun Gun, didn’t you? How he used Byron? An-And then there was Friday...” Flug trailed off, hands slightly shaking. “Y...You said yourself you saw him d-drug m-m-me.”

“Are these regular things he does?”

“Ki-Ki-Kind of, yeah.” He chuckled nervously “B-B-Been doing stuff like what he d-did to Byron since middle school. I can tell you that much.”

Black Hat got an odd look on his face. “I thought you said you only met him this past year.”

“Oh...” Oh shit now what? “W-Well, y-y-y-y-yeah, I did. W-W-We went to the same middle and high sc-schools, but we d--d-didn’t a-aually meet until this y-year.”

“Oh.” Black Hat said simply. That other eyebrow raising slowly to meet it’s perked twin. Black Hat’s mouth was small, only open just enough to enunciate his words. Leaving his face rather...blank. Flug couldn’t pick up anything, from his tone or his face, that hinted at what was going through Black Hat’s head.


“Hmm.” Was all Black Hat had to say in response. His eyebrows lowered, making him look all the more... suspicious. It was the kind of look that made Flug imagine he was thinking something like, You think you’re real fucking cute, don’t you?
And then his sudden smirk made Flug imagine he followed that up with, *You know what? You are.*

“So,” Black Hat broke eye contact. “What did you tell him?”

“Huh? What?”

“Aurelio. What did you tell him?”

“Oh, uh, well,” Flug struggled to catch his breath, trying to work past all the strain of the last minute. “I guess, I guess I didn’t really tell him anything.”

“What?”

“Well, I kinda...got pulled away before I could really give a definitive answer.” Yes, that is still the technical truth! Roll with that shit! “I told him I’d think about it.”

“You’ve thought about it. What are you going to tell him?”

“I’m going to...tell him no?” Flug asked with wide eyes.

Black Hat strode over towards him. Menacingly. “Are you asking me, or telling me?”

“I’m...telling you? That I’m t-telling him? No?” Was that even a coherent string of words? Black Hat looked like he wanted a more direct answer. “I’m t-t-telling him n-no.”

“You’re going to tell him no, that you won’t help him?”

“Y-Yes.”

Black Hat looked him up and down. “Tell him now.”

“Huh?”

“I’ve noticed you have a real problem saying ‘no’ to people. You give in very easily. So I want to see you tell him ‘no’, right now.”

Flug didn’t know whether to appreciate the brutal honesty or take offense to it. Or be extremely worried with how he worded that. Why was every interaction between them either completely normal or nerve-wrackingly intense? What the damn hell did this man want from him!?

“Oh, ok, I’ll do that. Right now.” Flug pulled out his phone and pulled up Aurelio’s number. He decided a text would be the best way to do this, especially with an audience, so he typed a quick, *Hey so I’ve thought about what you said and I’m sorry but I’m just not going to be able to help you out.* “There. How’s that?”

“Good. Now see, was that really so hard?” Black Hat smiled at him. They both chuckled a bit. You know what? It wasn’t. It really wasn’t all that hard to just say no to Aurelio. Flug guessed that all he really needed was a little push.
Until Aurelio texted back. **Too busy with your boyfriend?**

Flug was frozen for a few seconds. Black Hat wasn’t.

“So, you told him after all?”

“That w-was kind of the f-f-first way I tried ge-getting out of it.” Flug admitted. “I said I was t-too busy, he asked about you, and I...may have said y-y-you’d be je-jealous.”

“Me? Jealous of him?” He scoffed. “Please.”

“I-I know you’re not, I was just trying to make him go away.”

“Fine, fine. Gives me an excuse not to be nice.” Oh Lord if Black Hat was going to actively play up the jealous boyfriend angle Flug may not survive.

“S-S-So, what should I say n-now?”

“Well, if you think about it,” Black Hat slung an arm around Flug’s shoulders. “He’s not wrong.”

“I g-g-guess...you’re right...” Flug nervously typed out, **Yes.**

**He doesn’t need to know.**

Ok, this was getting concerning. Very, *very* concerning. Both because that made it sound if they’d be doing something he’d need to keep from Black Hat, and because Black Hat was reading this over his shoulder. And Flug could *feel* the change in his demeanor without even looking at him. The way that arm tightened around him was a clear sign that Flug needed to shoot Aurelio down now.

He wondered how Aurelio would respond to, *He’s actually reading this over my shoulder right now. And wants me to remind you that he knows where you live.*

His fingers shook, but he texted, **Look, just find someone else to help you test out your Gift. I’m not going to tell you again.**

After what felt like an eternity of waiting, one final text, **Ok, I understand.**

Flug let loose the breath he’d been holding. “Ok. Ok, so, th-that’s it then? R-Right?”

Black Hat still looked mad, but not at Flug. He was staring daggers at his phone like he wanted to pulverize it. He sounded threatening, even though the words were calm. “Right. You see? Not hard at all.”
“Yeah, yeah. So, uh, c-could you drive me home, please?”

“Yes, of course.” Black Hat didn’t take his arm off him the entire walk down to his car. Flug was a bit worried about someone seeing them, but it wasn’t anything obviously romantic. Not like Black Hat was holding onto his waist or hip or any other suggestive part of him. Ultimately he enjoyed the contact, too. Even on just a platonic level, he liked having someone’s arm around him.

How long had it been since he’d had this much contact with people? Just today alone; Demetra had dragged him around, had pounced on him, had hugged him, and now Black Hat was holding him like this. When was the last time he’d let people be so physical with him?

And why did he feel so embarrassed by his desire to lean in to his touch? Why did he keep thinking it was something he should feel bad about wanting? He shouldn’t. Should he? It wasn’t as though Black Hat was actually his boyfriend, and this probably wasn’t meant as anything more than just simple casual contact. So, nothing to feel odd about.

And even if he was his boyfriend, he still had no reason to feel ashamed. He shouldn’t. He really shouldn’t. Flug knew who and what he was and he was comfortable with himself. The only reason he kept so much of that self secret from everyone was that it was the rest of the world he wasn’t comfortable with. He didn’t know who could and couldn’t be trusted with what he really was and until he did he’d keep it all in.

Except with Black Hat, who’d invaded his privacy multiple times, butted his nonexistent nose into his personal affairs and who knew what else he’d neglected to mention? He’d also never really seemed to care in the slightest about any of it besides the death Flug had caused. He’d never cared about him being gay, hadn’t said a word about his preferred undergarments, and it could just be that he’d known all along but even after Flug had revealed both of those things on his own, Black Hat never treated him all that different. He was occasionally a bit... suggestive, but the way he spoke and acted towards him had remained the same for the most part.

Flug thought he might keep in contact in the car. Like he might put a hand on his shoulder (or thigh, but that was a thought and nothing more) like he had in the past. But he didn’t. Both men were silent throughout the drive and Flug made it home safely.

Two words: Finals Week.

Easily the most anxiety-inducing period in any students life that really only gets worse with every passing year because the stakes just get higher and higher and one loses the little bit of clarity that tells them “It’s okay if not everything you do is perfect”. Because when it’s your future doctorate on the line, it is most certainly not okay. To hell with rational thought.

Not that Rocinante Flugslys had any real reason to be especially anxious or stressed out. As a matter of fact, he wasn’t. He was confident for a change. He knew himself, and he knew finals were a challenge he could take on full force. He had handled meeting a supervillain, selling his soul to the
said supervillain, making out with said villain (multiple times but let’s not talk about that), and getting wrapped up in a fake-dating fiasco to mask his new life of evil. Standardized tests had nothing on the lunacy that was his life. After all, he’d be a straight “A” student if the writing sections didn’t trip him up every now and again. Damn those B’s. Damn his lack of communication skills. Damn the fact that everything he wrote came out sounding like stereo instructions!

And now, thanks to his new soullessness, he had an extra 8 hours of study time (3 of which he actually used to study). So the entire week should’ve been an absolute breeze.

It had seemed like it would be Monday morning.

Things started out perfectly fine; he went in, he took his exam, finished early, didn’t even bother double-checking anything, left, and texted Black Hat to see if he was free. He got no response, so he figured he was still taking an exam of his own. He had some free time before his next final and presumed that Black Hat would be out soon enough, so he went to Cafe Triste early to wait for him. He got coffee he didn’t need, it was pretty much just a force of habit by this point, and took the time to get some last minute review in. Also something he didn’t particularly feel a need for, but it was what any other normal university student would be doing with his time. He was the absolute picture of a normal college student; caffeine addicted, cramming every second, a nervous wreck, just ignore the scars and he’s literally anyone else in the room.

But, as he wasn’t really going over his notes seriously, more doing it just for show and something to do, he noticed the three women as they came in. He recognized one or two of them as volunteers from this past semesters club activity. Bianca, the girl who had let him (and Aurelio) use her flute once, and the other may have been Ruby, he wasn’t totally sure. She had the same style of short hair and hoop earrings that he remembered belonging to Ruby. The third one he didn’t know, but she her hair in a high ponytail that cascaded down to her thighs. They scanned the place a bit, not just getting in line like the usual patrons. And they zeroed in on...him. Yeah, they saw him and just rushed over to his table. Bianca quickly sat in the seat across from him, Possibly-Ruby and the one Flug was just going to refer to as Rapunzel hunting for empty seats.

Uh...he was kind of saving that seat for someone...

“Hey...Flug.” Bianca awkwardly said. Probably she couldn’t remember what his actual name was, just that everyone called him “Flug”. Hey, if it bothered him that much maybe he should stop responding to it. Her soft purple lips were stretched tight into an eager smile. “How’s it going?”

“It’s going ok.” He shifted his eyes across the three of them. Why exactly were they here, talking to him? The Gifted students usually kept to their own little clique. Not to say they never hung around with mere normal people like him, it was just what ended up happening when education was split like it was. They had been in the Gifted program their whole lives, growing up with each other for the most part and continuing on in higher education, so their friend groups tended to consist mainly of other Gifted people. “How are you?”

“Oh fine, fine. My last test was just murder, though. I hate finals, I always break out from the stress.” Yeah, Flug could see a few pimples hiding under her makeup. “I only got, like, three hours of sleep last night I was studying so much. How about you?”
“I...was up all night, heh.”

“Same,” said Rapunzel, finding a free chair to pull over to the small table. She fought back a yawn.
“I am so fucking tired.”

“So, uh, what’s up?” He asked. This was very unusual and kind of weirding him out that three people, maybe two of which he sort of knew, were just randomly chatting him up. They didn’t have any classes together as far as he knew, so it wasn’t as though they wanted to study together real quick or borrow a textbook or something.

“I am so glad you asked.” Bianca said. “Word around campus is that you’ve been holding out on us.”

“What do you mean?”

“We heard you’ve got a new boyfriend!” Possibly-Ruby said, poking at his shoulders a bit. She still hadn’t found a seat. “And we want to hear all the details!”

“Uh, Flug? You okay?”

There was a loud noise. A scream, maybe? He felt himself slipping. The room spun. Dizzy. Darkness.

Apparently, he could still faint.

He came to a bit later. He had no concept of how long it had been. From the feel of it, he was on a cot. His eyes opened slowly, and were assaulted with stark white. An infirmary, then. Wonder what happened.

He turned his head slowly, and through the blurry haze of the world without his lenses, he was pretty sure that black silhouette with a vague top hat shape next to him was Black Hat.

“Why do you have this weird habit of showing up whenever I pass out?” He mumbled.

“Well, when I get a call that my boyfriend screamed and collapsed in the middle of the cafe, I feel the need to show up.” He held out something. His glasses. Ah, that was a bit better. Now Flug could actually see his solemn expression from the chair to the side of the cot. And then everything came
“Three women. They knew. About...” He almost said us. “Me.”

“Yeah, I heard.”

“H-How?” He felt himself tearing up.

“They heard it from someone, who heard it from someone, who heard it from someone.” Black Hat crossed his arms. “Apparently, it’s very interesting to a lot of people. Seems everyone’s talking about it.”

“Wh-Wh-Who?” He could feel the tears welling up, threatening to break into full-blown waterworks. His voice was high and strained. “W-W-Wh-W-Who did this?”

“Why? What are you going to do?”

“I-I-I, I, I...” He trailed off. The tears hit him full force. “I don’t know.” He broke. He broke out into sobs, desperately fighting back his cries of anguish. Why did this happen? How could this have happened? How many people knew? How long had it being going around for? How long had people been talking behind his back before someone finally decided to confront him about it? What was he going to do? What could he do? It wasn’t as though he could deny it, not now. Wouldn’t do any good to. No matter what he said people would think whatever they wanted. Like with Demetra, whatever they’d said before, she’d completely ignored and had superimposed her own version of what was going on. Even now, she insisted on knowing every little detail about their “relationship”. When they refused to give her anything, she just made up her own. No matter what either of them seemed to do or say she never let up and just said whatever she wanted to whoever she wanted. The rest of the world was no different.

There was nothing he could do.

“Well, I know what I’m going to do once I find out.”

“Wh-What?” Flug tried in vain to blink back the tears and get a hold of himself. He couldn’t. This was just too much.

Black Hat stood up and leaned over his weeping subordinate. He brushed the hair out of his face and kissed him on the forehead. He whispered, “I’m going to rip them apart.”

Flug’s breathing evened out a little, as his words registered. They calmed him down, which they probably shouldn’t be doing but he couldn’t bother to particularly care about that. Black Hat rose back up and held his hands behind his back.

“How long was I out?” Flug asked in a hoarse voice.

“About an hour.”

“I-I still have one m-more exam today. I c-c-can still make it.”

“You really feel up to it?”

“I can d-d-d-do it.” His voice shook. “Af-After all t-t-this, an exam is n-n-noth-n-nothing.”
“That’s the spirit,” Black Hat said in a bland monotone. He helped him to his feet and walked him out. Very obviously close to him. And very obviously glaring at everyone they passed. Which was only earning them even more stares.

Flug tried to pull away but Black Hat wouldn’t let him. “C-Can you please n-not do this?” He asked faintly. “You said-”

“There’s very little point in being private about it now.” Black Hat said, turning his icy gaze to him. It softened a bit, but not by much. “People know. Now we have to deal with it.”

Well, when he said it like that, he made it sound so simple. Like it was just one more thing on their To-Do List. Go grocery shopping, do laundry, pick up some last minute gifts, find the one who outed him and tear them limb from limb, get the holiday decorations up. Did Black Hat celebrate Navidad?

But it just wasn’t that easy. Flug didn’t know how to deal with this. He spent nearly his entire life purposely avoiding dealing with this! Everywhere he looked, all he saw were people stealing glances, talking quietly amongst each other, about him. Averting their eyes and backing away because Black Hat looked like he was going to start his search of who to murder by beating it out of bystanders.

When they reached the classroom, Black Hat finally gave him some space. Sort of.

“I’ll be outside when you’ve finished.” Flug gave a small nod and walked silently in, taking his usual seat in the first row of desks. Not right in front, somewhere in the middle. A generic type of seat. Which he’d specifically picked out because no one was drawn to this area of the class. Not front enough to be among the other study-minded nerds with poor eyesight, not back enough to be among the lackadaisical goof-offs who take pictures of the lecture slides, just in the middle with the average people who winded up there cuz the other seats were taken.

He bet no one else ever put this much thought into where they sat in the classroom.

Flug sat, faced forward, spoke and looked at no one, and waited for the exam to begin. He swore he heard whispers. He swore he heard his name. He swore someone was tapping him on the shoulder. He slowly turned, exposing his red splotchy face. Still a bit shiny from the tears. His eyes were probably bloodshot. He still sniffled every now and again.

The guy who sat next to him gave a quick, “You know what, nevermind.”

The exam paper was passed down the row, he pulled out his scantron sheet and pencil, the professor gave the word to begin, he looked at the first question.

His mind went blank.
There were words there. He knew that. He knew there were words and they went together to make sentences and those sentences were questions and he had to answer the question by filling in the little bubble on his sheet with the right letter. He knew he probably knew what the right answer was. He just had to pick it out of the choices. But it wasn’t getting through. He was looking at the paper and looking at the words but they weren’t making sense. He read it again but he still didn’t know what it meant. He understood what it was asking but didn’t know what it said. There were words there. Letters. Letters went together to make words. He had to pick out the right letter to bubble in on his paper. If he could just comprehend what the words meant he’d be able to do that. If he was capable of reading and understanding the question he could find the answer.

He struggled to read the question. Word by word. Going over it again and again, until it began to make a bit of sense. He could hear other people filling in their answers. He could hear the sound of paper being flipped over as they finished the first page and moved on. Usually he was first to do that. He noticed a few wet spots on the exam paper. He hoped they were allowed to mark it, if not this exam might be invalid. He didn’t want that. He took a deep breath, ignored the silent stream of tears running down his cheeks, and tried to read the question again. His lenses were all blurry, so it was hard.

It went like that for a long time. He struggled to make sense of what was on his paper and get it through to an answer. Was it the right answer? He wasn’t sure anymore. He wasn’t sure of anything. He finally finished the first page and he saw someone turn in their paper and leave. It happened again and again and again as he worked his way down the second page. He tried not to think about that. He just had to focus on his own work. The professor says that he’s allowing the few remaining students an extra thirty minutes to finish. At least he’d managed to get through the multiple choice section. Short answer was all that was left. He could do it. Couldn’t he? He only had thirty minutes. Twenty nine. Twenty eight. Twenty seven. He read each section again and again. He knew he knew the answers here. He did. It was just a matter of putting down the words. Twenty minutes. It was simple. It was easy. For him it was easy. It had always been easy. He was always finished first. Fifteen minutes. Ten. Now he needed extra time. He was the last one in the room. He still wasn’t done. He still had more questions to answer. The professor is apologizing, he says he can’t give him any more time. He watches as he collects his paper. Incomplete. Unfinished. It feels wrong. The answers are wrong. Some aren’t even there. If he could he’d go over them again, maybe be able to understand what it all meant and be able to make it right. He couldn’t, though. He could only watch. As everything fell apart.

Had he ever actually failed a test before?

Flug got out of his seat, his backpack probably open still. He takes his pencil and just sticks it in his pocket. He walks out, he feels nothing. Nothing but hurt. Not even as articulate as pain. Black Hat is still there. He zips the pack shut. He takes him by the arm, he doesn’t fight it. Like he said, no point in being private now. He could start kissing him right now and he wouldn’t stop him. He doesn’t know if he’d reciprocate but he doesn’t think he’d fight it.

People are still watching them. Black Hat’s grip tightens. It doesn’t hurt, but it probably should. He gets into his car with him. People are still looking. Probably whispering about what the two of them are going to do, driving off together. Are they going home? Whose home? What will they do there? Where are they going? What will they do? He doesn’t know either, but can’t bring himself to ask.
Black Hat has a hand on him again. He doesn’t know if he wants it right now or not.

There’s music. Sounds a bit familiar. Sounds like english. He might know this song. Or just the band. Black Hat apparently knows it.

“It’s funny,” he says. All Flug does in response is turn his head a bit. He clarifies. “This song. The first time I heard it, I thought it was saying ‘a sense of poisoned rationality’, instead of ‘poise and rationality’.”

Flug says nothing.

“Either way, it still fits the song. Maybe a little better even.” They go to Flug’s home. Black Hat walks him up. He uses his own key to open the door. But he doesn’t let himself in. He holds it open for Flug. Flug slowly walks inside, and turns to see if Black Hat comes in. He doesn’t know whether or not he wants him to.

“You have more exams tomorrow, yes?” Flug nods bleakly. “Would you like me to be here in the morning?” After a moment, he nods again. “See you tomorrow then.” Black Hat leaves, no lingering touch, no goodbye kiss, nothing else for Rocinante Flugslys to question whether he wants or not. He has no idea what he wants right now. He isn’t sure he’s capable of wanting at the moment.

He legs shake, but he follows his usual routine. With all the grace of a snake in an oil spill. His backpack falls to the floor off his shoulders with a dull thud. He drags his feet across the floor, slipping out of his shoes and leaving them wherever they happen to land. He pulls his pants off with some difficulty, and they end up in the doorway to his bedroom. Leaving him in short socks with little pink bows and plain white panties. Hey, not every pair of panties is a sexy lace or satin pair. Sometimes a guy gets behind on his laundry and has to wear the boring stuff. Thank God this place has a washer and dryer inside the apartment.

He collapses onto his bed, face first. He lays there for a minute. He’s shaking. Is he laughing? Is he crying? Is he just lying there trying like hell not to completely lose control? Burying his face in his pillow and trying to convince himself that it really isn’t as bad as he thinks and there are worse things that could happen and other lies to try and avoid the inevitable but it doesn’t work. He curls into the fetal position and screams into his pillow. Harsh, feral, sobbing screams that are only muffled by his desperation to do what he’s always done and hide from reality. Keep it on the low, keep it secret, keep it so absolutely no one knows. If it doesn’t exist to anyone else then it might as well not exist at all and it’s just his and only for him to know and only for him to revel or suffer in.

He spends the night in silence, after that. After he’s screamed his throat raw. Numb, cold silence. It’s dark, he neglected to turn on any lights. It feels familiar. This has happened, once before. It lasted a long time. He had come home, he took to locking himself in his room. Never speaking, not a word. Hardly a feeling. Just the emptiness of memories and occasional hunger pains. He doesn’t even feel those now. He feels absolutely nothing. He might as well be a gaseous being, with no form to touch this world and no ability to feel it. At least not in any way a human could comprehend. He remembers this numbness, though. He remembers it first settled on him three, maybe four years ago. And it stuck with him. Following him out of the wreckage, through the infirmary, through the halls
and rooms, being with him in his childhood home.

It takes hours, it takes until he notices the faint traces of daylight coming in through the windows, for him to remember what he felt before absolutely nothing.

He remembers that he felt violent.

He remembers that another time someone found out about him and his boyfriend. He remembers what happened after that, how he’d put up with the abuse and mistreatment just thinking that if he could put up with it for long enough it would pass. Like in high school, just get through it and he’d never have to deal with it again. But he did. He did have to deal with it again because it was still happening. Different people for different reasons but he was still being bullied and teased and harassed and now it wasn’t just him. It wasn’t just happening to him this time. This time it someone else was suffering right along with him. *Because* of him.

And he remembers that he had to make a decision.

And it takes Black Hat knocking on the door (some part of Flug wondering why he even bothered) for Flug to make a decision again. It doesn’t come from feeling, exactly. If there’s any feeling at all, it’s the feeling that this is more of a need than a want. Or a want that Flug has finally chosen to indulge in. However one wishes to look at it, Flug made his mind up and had one thought.

He needed to do it himself.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Navidad = Christmas (Spanish)

Follow me on tumblr [@fallinforaguyfelldownfromthesky](https://tumblr.com), where I post weekly sneak peeks and snippets of upcoming chapters. Ask box is open and I’m always happy to talk. I’m going to try, TRY mind you, to get the next chapter finished and posted by the end of the month. It, like this one, will probably be long as FUCK and really damn intense. I’ve also decided that if I can't manage to get it up by then, I'm not going to be mad or disappointed in myself. All it means is that I aimed high and that's something to be proud of.

See ya'll soon for one last hurrah before I need to take a break from the madness that is my writing process.
Flug got pants on and changed his shirt before he opened the door. Black Hat was pretty early, actually. It was still morning. Flugs exam wasn’t until the early afternoon. Did he have one soon?

“Morning,” Jeez, his voice was almost as raspy as Black Hat’s. All that screaming and crying probably wasn’t good for him. It didn’t exactly hurt, but he should probably take it easy on his throat.


“No.” Had he even had lunch yesterday? What was the last thing he ate? He wasn’t sure.

Black Hat sighed. “Come on, let’s get you some breakfast.” He held out his hand, which Flug took easily enough. He had more important things to think about at the moment. Which Black Hat was probably thinking about as well.

Who did this and how do I get them?

At least back in the Air Force, he’d known his target. And had the chance to follow him around and learn where he’d be at any given time. It was more a matter of waiting for an opportunity, just seeing if something presented itself so he could potentially claim innocence. And when one did, he was quick to act. Didn’t turn out...exactly as he planned, but hey, beggars can’t be choosers.

Where were they going, anyway? Black Hat was driving in the direction of campus.


“Cafe?” He croaked, keeping his voice low and his words short.

“Yes. Would you rather somewhere different?”

“It’s fine,” Yeah, fine. Fine. Perfectly fine. Didn’t matter. He’d get a sandwich or whatever to eat. And coffee. He wasn’t really hungry, but he’d eat. He needed to eat. Was kind of a necessity.

Black Hat parked across the street and they walked in silently. It was a bit busy for the morning, probably due to it being finals week. The change in atmosphere was extremely noticeable. The entire place seemed...off. What had once been a pleasant sort of place, despite the name, was now an uneasy cheerless hole with christmas decorations that did not fit the mood of the patrons or staff. The usual barista and waitstaff all averted their eyes as soon as they noticed them. With the exception of one.

Demetra rushed over before they could take more than a few steps in. “Oh jeez, are you okay?” She grabbed Flug harshly by the face and twisted him around, examining him. “You look terrible. Did you sleep at all last night?”

He stared at her for a second before remembering that she wasn’t aware he had no soul. “No.”

She winced. “Wow, you sound like shit. You want double espresso? No wait, would tea be better? We got herbal tea. Might help a little. You had breakfast yet? Want a muffin? Or maybe some cake? We got carrot cake, cheesecake, even red velvet. You know, cuz it looks pretty festive and it’s really super sweet. You want me to get ya a slice of red-”

Black Hat rather rudely shoved her. “You need to back off.”

“Ugh! What’s with you?! I’m just-”

Their potential altercation was broken up by Flug shambling in between them and mumbling “’Spresso. Cake.” as he found an empty booth and sat down. It was almost impressive how quick they were to put whatever that had been about aside.

“Ok, espresso and cake. Black coffee?”

“Yes,” Black Hat joined Flug in the booth. “Thank you.”

Neither of them spoke for a minute or two. They both just sat there silently. Flug had his eyes trained on the table, slumped low in his seat and hanging his head like he was awaiting his execution. He guessed that Black Hat didn’t really know what to say either. He certainly had nothing to say. What even was there to say? Were they going to plan their little revenge scheme right now? They were missing a pretty crucial part of a revenge plan; the target. The only thing Flug could think of to talk about was what they’d do once they had whoever it had been. Not that he could bring himself to get that conversation started. Black Hat said he’d rip them apart, and as appealing as that sounded, Flug wanted to do something of his own. Maybe he’d be able to get a few minutes in and Black Hat could
finished them off. If he didn’t kill them himself.

“When was the last time you ate?” Black Hat asked out of nowhere. Flug just shrugged. He heard Black Hat sigh. “Hungry at all?” Flug shook his head quietly. “Will you eat anyway?” He nodded a bit. “Good. Though I can’t imagine cake is going to fill you up. Really, cake for breakfast? What is she thinking?”

Flug imagined that she was thinking something sweet like cake would cheer him up a bit. He didn’t have the energy to say that much, so he shrugged again and muttered, “Sweet.”

Another heavy silence overcame them until Demetra came with their drinks and his cake. She brought the red velvet, which Flug might’ve appreciated if he had it in him to care at all. Or if he had something resembling an appetite. Black Hat said thanks, so Flug didn’t feel any particular need to vocalize. He sipped his coffee, his tongue registering the heat and the taste of it, but not really feeling the burn or any of the usual familiar feelings of comfort he got from coffee. Not even licking the whipped cream off his lips got him to perk up at all.

He picked at his slice of cake, only taking small bites of it like a bird. He could taste the sweetness, but it did nothing for him. He liked sweet things, didn’t he? Didn’t he? That was why he took his coffee with cream and sugar and caramel and whipped cream and anything else he could have on it to give him that sugar rush that got him through his days. Cinnamon. Nutmeg. Vanilla. Chocolate. He heard somewhere that red velvet cake was just chocolate cake with red food coloring. And cream cheese.

What was that other thing they called it? Devil’s Food cake? Laughable.

“So, I guess Dem was right to bring cake? I’ll have to remember that one.”

“Huh?” Flug peeked up from his spot hunched over the table.

“You smiled.”

Flug blinked. And felt around his cheeks like his smile might still be there. He’d been smiling? Why had he been smiling? He wasn’t happy. He’d just been lost in thought. Thinking. About cake. He resumed half-heartedly picking at his breakfast dessert. No, no this did not make him happy. He couldn’t be happy right now. He’d been living in fear of this situation for years, terrified of someone finding out the truth about him. And now they had. He was miserable. Not even cake was getting a smile out of him.

Black Hat spoke up. “Ok, I know you’re upset, as you should be, but this really isn’t as bad as you’re making it out to be.”

Flug picked his head up. “What did you just say?”

“It’s not that big a deal. Things could be worse.”

Hat-Man I know you did not just say that.
“Ar-Are you serious right now?” Flug asked. “No really, are you? Are you fucking kidding me? After all this time of me telling you how I didn’t want anyone else to know, you’re giving me ‘it could be worse’? Seriously?! I thought, with all the stalking you’ve done of me, which I haven’t forgotten about by the way, you might’ve been able to figure it out, but if really have to spell it out for you, fine. When I said I didn’t want anyone to know, I meant that I didn’t want anyone to know. I have literally never been able to feel comfortable about myself. I’m never just okay being who I am. I tell myself I am, I’m not. Not without a guarantee that no one else knows. I have never had the security of being able to be who I am without being terrified of what someone else will think about it. I don’t even have that with my own family. I have had to hide nearly everything about who I really am to my parents. The people absolutely closest to me are people I can’t trust. Because it’s unthinkable to me that they would still be the same kind, loving, supportive people they have always been if they knew this one little thing. And if that’s how I feel about the people who raised me, don’t even get me started on all the horrible things I can think of now that everyone at school knows. Matter of fact, everyone in this cafe probably knows.” Flug glanced at the table next to them and saw three people sitting quietly, unusually fixated on their cups. “Don’t even bother hiding it motherfuckers we all know damn well what you’re doing.” They all got embarrassed and turned away. Flug turned back to Black Hat and lowered his voice. His strained, scratchy voice. “So, why don’t you tell me exactly how this could be worse, because I’m living out one of my recurring nightmares here papi chulo. I’d love to hear how this isn’t so bad.”

“...It’s illegal in my country.” Black Hat said, a bit softly.

“What is?” Black Hat calmly sipped his coffee, his visible eye downcast. Huh, this was the first time today Flug had really gotten a good look at Black Hat. It was hard to tell against his already dark skin, but he seemed to have bags under his eyes. Had he slept at all? He wasn’t sitting with the usual poise and posture Flug associated with the top-hatted man. He looked tired. What was he talking about being illegal in his country?

Oh wait, oh did he mean...?

Oh...oh damn...

“The penalty can be...severe...” Black Hat continued in a voice just above a whisper. He slowly raised his gaze back up at him. “And very public.”

Flug almost didn’t want him to elaborate. “Um, wow. I...” He was rendered almost speechless. He was starting to feel the pain in his vocal chords. “I don’t know what to say to that.” Was an apology in order? He felt like maybe he should apologize for being such a baby about this.

“You don’t need to say anything. And I’m not saying that because it could be worse doesn’t mean it’s not still bad. It is. I’m only saying that you should count yourself lucky that the opinions of others are the only thing you have to worry about.”

Well, ok. Flug got it. Things could be worse. They could be a lot worse. That thought had never helped him in the past. It had always felt like he was tempting fate. Like in the movies, like as soon as he said “It could be worse”, it would get worse. Completely illogical, but terrifying nonetheless.
How could things get worse in this situation? Well...he supposed his parents could find out. The thought making his throat seize up like he was being strangled. Although he couldn’t think of any way they possibly could. The only one who could tell them was him, and he had no plans to. He couldn’t imagine it in a million years. There was little chance of it happening, but there was still that haunting thought that it could happen. That was it. That was his worst-case scenario. That was the only thing that could really end up happening. It might be the worst thing for him, but it wasn’t the worst thing in the world. And neither was this, if he could still think of more horrible things.

This was still a terrible situation. And it could be worse. But, realistically, it could only get so bad. Past a point there wasn’t any feasibly danger. And absolutely no chance that it could get to the near-nightmarish level of what Black Hat’s words entailed. That didn’t exactly make things any better, but he supposed it was some comfort to know that even his biggest fears weren’t the worst possible thing that could happen.

And now he felt like kind of a whiny brat.

He took a slightly bigger bite of his cake. And gulped down more of his coffee. After only maybe another minute, he’d cleaned his plate entirely and nearly emptied his cup. He actually felt hungry for the first time today.

“I think I should probably eat something more filling than cake.”

“Oh really? You think?” Black Hat asked sarcastically.

“Have you had anything for breakfast?”

“We aren’t talking about me right now.”

“You should probably eat something too.”

“You’re sounding better.”

“Thanks.” He was, actually. His voice wasn’t coming out as hoarse. That was a pretty lame attempt at changing the subject though. “Now, what should we get to eat?”

Black Hat was about to respond, when an alarm sounded from his phone. It sounded like one of those old sirens in the movies when there’s a bomb threat or something. He pulled his phone out and hurried to his feet, throwing a few bucks on the table. “This should cover things, get yourself some actual food please, you’ll be fine for a few hours right? Bye.” He rushed out of the cafe. Maybe his next exam was soon.

Flug sighed. Ah, well, it would only be two hours at most. Maybe two and a half. Then it would be time for his own exam. Just one today. Tomorrow was free. Thursday would bring along two more exams and then he’d be done with the semester. He often took one or two classes during winter and summer, but he thought he might take a break like most other people this year. Save some money. Not be the closeted overachiever he was.

He laughed to himself. Well, he’d been ripped out of one closet already. Where was the harm in coming out on his own terms?
“Hey, where did Black Hat go?”

Flug glanced upwards at Demetra. “He had an exam, left some money for his coffee though.”

“Ah, ok. You sound better. We’re actually getting complete sentences outta ya! Did the cake help?”

“Maybe a little.” He smiled a bit at her. “Think I should have something more than just cake for breakfast though.”

She counted the bills Black Hat had left. “Should be enough here to cover what you got and then some. You want me to bring ya a sandwich or somethin’?”

“How about one of those muffins you were telling me about earlier?”

“You got it! And, um, hey,” She placed a hand on his shoulder thoughtfully. “I’m sorry, ok?”

“Sorry? What for?”

Demetra got a bit of a pained look on her face. “Just, just in case.”

“Just in case of what?”

She leaned down over the table. “Listen, I swear I haven’t told anyone else this week. I even told Marietta and Esme to shut up about it in case they were telling people. But, but just in case I let it slip before now, and someone told someone who told everyone else and that’s how this all happened...”

She bit her lip. “You know I didn’t mean to, right? I never meant for anything like this to happen. And I really didn’t think you’d start screaming and up and pass out like that. You scared a whole lotta people the other day, you know. So, just in case, I’m sorry...Rocinante.”

The gears in Flug’s head were turning. She’d known ever since this had all started. She’d framed them as a couple from the first time she saw them. And had been gossiping about it with everyone possible for just as long. She could have caused this. Slowly, spreading it around over time. Unknowingly. Unwittingly. Accidentally.

Flug’s improved mood was gone. Even the usage of his first name wasn’t enough to ward off the cold calculations that enveloped his mind.

“Get me my muffin, please.” He said, as threateningly as one can when demanding a fluffy bread product. He wasn’t sure what sort of expression he wore, but it made Demetra cringe and leave to get him his food without further words. Not that he was hungry anymore. His soured mood had stolen his appetite yet again. He would eat, he would need sustenance to keep himself going. And he had no plans to return to the cafe after this. Not in the foreseeable future. He was going to have to find somewhere else to get his caffeine fix. Cafeteria? Unappealing. Sub par food and drink, too many people, loud. Maybe he could use his time to look for another coffee shop in the area. There had to be one reasonably close by, right?

Demetra came back quickly with a blueberry muffin. Not his favorite but it would do. She had
another coffee for him, “On the house,” she uttered. He paid her no attention as she trudged away. She really seemed to feel genuine remorse for what she’d done. If she’d done it. It was a possibility, but it would be difficult to confirm. Flug wanted confirmation before he actually did anything. He didn’t want to go and take all his spite out only to discover he’d went and killed the wrong person. To think, all that time and effort he’d put in just to have the little bit of closure ripped away when it was revealed he’d killed someone who didn’t have anything to do with his pain. How wasteful.

He sipped his coffee slowly, staring off into space and mulling it over. If this was indeed Demetra’s doing, maybe he wouldn’t kill her. She hadn’t been intending this, and felt guilt at just the chance that it might’ve been her. But then, if he wasn’t going to kill her, what would he do? He wouldn’t be able to say anything to her, he’d need to maintain anonymity, so from her perspective it would be a random unwarranted maiming. Which would be pretty pointless. What was the point in punishing her if she didn’t know what she was being punished for? How would she ever learn, which she would need to do if she was going to live. And how would he hide his identity, anyway? A cheap halloween mask? Face paint? What, was he just going to stick a paper bag on his head and call it a day? Yeah right. He supposed he could blindfold her, but he didn’t really like that idea either.

He hoped it wasn’t her. Honestly. He couldn’t hate her too much for what was an honest mistake. One she apologized for. It complicated things, too. People knew they were somewhat close. And it was still entirely possible that she’d had nothing to do with it. It was only a theory. He needed more information.

Well, he had some time to himself. Time to go hunting, in a manner of speaking.

I’m done. Are you still at the cafe?

No, I went and headed off to my exam. Only have about a half hour until it starts.

Ok. Text me once you’re done.

Shouldn’t he also have to ask what class and where, since the implication would be that Black Hat would come get him? Now that he was thinking about it, Black Hat hadn’t needed directions to escort Flug to his last exam yesterday. He didn’t even ask, he just went. Kind of like the first time driving him home.

Exactly how often had this man stalked him?

Although once that was taken in with how he’d already know Flug’s address and underwear choices and the details of his last relationship (Flug was very obviously NOT thinking about the murder), his class schedule was really the most innocuous thing Black Hat knew about him. And, since Flug had
actively stalked a guy himself (for years, but let’s not dwell on the past), he supposed he wasn’t one to talk. Especially since he’d had to really restrain himself not to fall into old habits when he first saw his former stalkee again. Who still never really took notice of him, until recently. Even with his new scars. Well, he’d been even more self-conscious and squirrly back then. Back when they were only a year or so old. Nearly fresh. He’d hung his head down and hunched his shoulders up to hide them from passersby, always so scared of what other people would think. But this was different from high school. People didn’t care enough to pick on the loner with their head down scurrying to their next class. It still took time for him to be able to just walk around normally, but that was more from his end than the world’s. What was this, his second year? Time sure flies when you make it a point to ignore the guy you spent years following. Until you can’t.

But it better not have been fucking years that Black Hat had been following him. Months, fine. This guy was a self-proclaimed evil villain with a body count and connections. He could accept it being months that he’d watched Flug before approaching him in person. Years? No. No no no no no. That’s some “going to tie you to a chair in the basement and hand feed you mystery meat” shit right there and Flug was not having it. Even though Black Hat didn’t actually have a basement. At the moment. Oh God he didn’t want to think about this anymore.

But since his search had come up empty, he didn’t really have much else to think about. Every person that he’d worked up the nerve to confront had heard it from a friend who’d heard it from a classmate who heard it from some other people who’d been eavesdropping on other people who heard about it on messenger and this was like a giant game of telephone where the message was miraculously kept pretty well intact. Very little of it was done online, except maybe through private messages which were only more dead ends, so there wasn’t much of a trail to follow back. Damn word-of-mouth spreading of information, get with the times! The easily tracked and monitored times!

It didn’t help that he was (they were) some of the few LGBT+ people at this University who were actually quote unquote “out” and “publicly” in a relationship. Making this all the more fascinating to everyone. Flug had kind of gone straight to the depression stage of grieving the loss of his privacy and security, but he was about read to circle back and hit rage. He knew people were eyeing him in the classroom, he just refused to acknowledge it and stayed on his phone ignoring the world until the exam started and everyone was required to keep their gaze on their paper or risk it being taken and ripped in two. Thank God for hardass physics professors and thank Him again for exams composed of nothing but math. Numbers were so much easier than words. There was always a clear solution with mathematics and calculations. You were either wrong or right, no inbetween. Nothing getting lost in his piss poor wording. It still took him some time to really get into his zone, but he was at least not the last one to finish this time around. He wasn’t his usual first, but he could live with it. He caught a few miscalculations going over his work, and that made it worth it.

What was not worth it was people taking this as their opportunity to try and talk to him. No matter how much he just blew them off. This was exactly why he never told anyone, he hated getting attention like this. It had nothing to do with him, just what he was, and what it meant in people’s minds. And in most people’s minds, it apparently meant it was okay to demand information about his personal business.

Take, for example, what this man (Roberto? Rigoberto? Bob?) and what he had to say once the exam was over and Flug was innocently texting Black Hat on his way out.
“Hey, you’re that gay guy, right? The one dating the dude in the top hat?”

“Nope,” He hoped that’d be enough to get this guy off his back, but, as he just said, nope.

“Nah, that’s you. Definitely.” What, was someone giving out his description? Snapping pictures without him noticing? He was already dating his stalker (and boss), he didn’t need this bullshit. “Didn’t peg you as a marica, honestly. You don’t look like one.”

And what does one look like, for future reference? Was he expecting platform heels and star shades? And why was this guy following him around? Was it really so hard to take the hint that he could stick his unwanted comments-

“Whoa now, hold on there.” He said as he blocked the hallway. “You’re not getting off that easily.” No, he never did, did he? It was always something. He wasn’t allowed to just live his life in peace.

“What exactly do you want?”

“No need to get all defensive, hombre. I just want to talk a little.”

“Well I don’t, so move.”

“Nah, nah, c’mon, get real. I just want to talk, no biggie. Matter of fact, you should be happy that you’re getting so much attention! Everyone’s practically fawning over you two, dying to hear every little thing! No one’s saying anything bad about you, if that’s what you’re worried about.” You just called me a homophobic slur. You literally just contradicted yourself. “Except maybe you’re boyfriend, he’s kind of a dick. How’d you two even hook up, like, how did that happen?”

This isn’t how you show your support for samesex couples, guys. This only further fetishizes them, adding to the problem. No one wants to be spoken about like they’re the latest celebrity gossip. Know why? Because almost none of it is actually positive. It’s all opinionated trash, like the rag it comes from. Full of everyone’s views, as if they have a right to tell other people what their relationship should or shouldn’t be. It’s not “helping” if you act like there’s something unique about it because it’s two men. You want to help destigmatize gay relationships? You want to let us know you’re cool? Be cool. Don’t make a big deal out of it, don’t go spreading the word to strangers, and most of all, mind your damn business.

And if it wasn’t for the dark figure approaching the guy from behind, Flug might’ve told him just that. Along with a pretty colorful string of insults.

Instead, he kept his face blank and answered simply, “I guess you could say he kind of snuck up on me.”

The look on that man’s face, confusion turning to alarm as Black Hat grabbed his head and rammed it against the wall, was absolutely priceless. Black Hat just kept doing it, too. Over and over until it started leaving a red mark on the wall. Then he let him drop. Not dead, probably concussed, maybe unconscious. Maybe not. Flug didn’t really care. He wasn’t smiling, or frowning. He didn’t really feel anything about the display of violence. He was rather glad to have that nuisance out of the way, he could say that much. His face felt as expressionless as a doll’s and he faced Black Hat, who was giving off that same dangerous explosive vibe he first noticed back in the cafe at one of their first
meetings. It felt only barely subdued, like Black Hat had wanted to do so much more but was keeping himself in check because of how many witnesses there were. Flug supposed he should probably be scared, like the crowd of observers, and maybe on some level he was. But it seemed unlikely that Black Hat would turn any of that anger onto him. So then, why be afraid?

Black Hat stepped over the guy and offered his arm. His voice was steady, as if that hadn’t even taken any great effort on his part. “Shall we?”

“Let’s.” Flug took it. Like he said, little point in being private now.

The two of them made their way calmly out the building and off campus. They got a few stares, far more people were outright looking away and intentionally avoiding eye contact. Black Hat didn’t even have to glare at people, they were learning to give them their space on sight. It was as if they were afraid of him. Of them. It was a new feeling, an interesting one. One Flug might like to explore further.

If his incessant fears would stop creeping on and ruining it for him. Whispers of how everything was changing now. He wouldn’t be able to just go about his day like he usually would. People would know about him, know of him, which he never wanted. It was so hard to get away with things when everyone knows who you are and associates you with bad things.

...Why was that the thought that came to him?

He shrank in on himself, as if being smaller than Black Hat would somehow make him invisible. Fat chance, a slender nerd and a fancy man together having a gay old time was not exactly what came to mind when he thought of being inconspicuous. He was starting to feel a little uncomfortable about that, the two of them walking arm-in-arm so nonchalantly. Out in full view of the world.

...at least he wasn’t alone...

Black Hat tried pulling them in the direction of cafe. Flug pulled him back. “No, let’s not.”

“Not even just to get a quick coffee?” Oh he was really trying to tempt him here wasn’t he?

“No, I’d rather just go home. I have a coffee maker. And I’ll make a quick sandwich or something.” They got in the car. Flug suspected that was Black Hat’s way of making sure he ate. Not that the man himself had eaten anything. If it was that important to him, hell, he could come up and supervise. Not like he hadn’t made himself at home before. “I can make you one too, if you want. You haven’t eaten either, have you?”

“I’ll be fine.” Flug felt that was a bit hypocritical of him to say. “I’ve actually got some meat on my bones.”

“I’ve gone longer without eating.”
“That’s not good for you.”

“Commiting to a life of crime probably isn’t either, but I’ve done that too.”

“Flug, that’s not-”

“If you’re going to tell me it’s not the same, I know that. I know this isn’t the end of the world either. You were right about that. You were also right when you said this was still bad, and it doesn’t stop being bad just because it’s not the w-w-worst thing ever.” He saw a very sad face in the rearview mirror. “I just wish I could actually do something.”

“You will.” Black Hat squeezed his shoulder. Flug turned solemnly to meet his stone cold gaze.  
“We’re going to find the figlio di puttana who did this and you will have your vengeance.”

Flug wondered if he should tell him about Demetra. He considered it, but he wasn’t sure he could trust Black Hat to keep himself from doing God-knows-what to her based off a hunch. Hey, he might have some suspicions himself, given how he shoved her away this morning. Or maybe that was just how he treated everyone aside from Flug, it wasn’t as though they often hung around other people. Just Demetra. Who may or may not have brought one of Flug’s worst fears to life.

He wasn’t going to tell him. Not until he had more conclusive evidence. He didn’t want to spill blood if he didn’t have to.

Black Hat pulled up in front of Flug’s apartment building, as he had done so many times now. Flug looked up to the newspaper covered windows that he knew belonged to him. Black Hat had been right, it was a bit obvious that he was hiding something. He imagined going back into that dark space, curling up alone for the next day and a half because he just didn’t know what else to do with himself. He had no direction, no sense of where to go from here. He could try and distract himself but he’d always be forced back to a reality he didn’t want to confront.

Not on his own.

He kept his eyes trained on his lap as he spoke. “W-Would you like to, uh,” He cleared his throat. “Would you like to come up for a m-m-minute?” Oh God he felt like he was shaking. He wasn’t going to break down and cry again, was he? He had hoped he’d gotten it all out yesterday.

“Sure, ok.” Black Hat and Flug got out of the car silently, neither one speaking until they were both upstairs and behind the closed front door. Turning on the lights only slightly brightened up the closed off living space, it still felt so dark and dreary in here. Maybe it was time for some brighter bulbs.

“Anything to dr-drink?” Flug offered, nervous though he wasn’t exactly sure why this time. “I can still make you that sandwich.”

“Just a soda,” Black Hat didn’t sit down or anything, he walked over to the living room windows, seeming to inspect them or something. Flug hoped he wouldn’t start taking the newspaper down, he still needed his precious wall to keep the outside world from knowing about his dirty pleasures.

Flug got a soda can out of the fridge, Black Hat probably already knew he only had one type of generic soda, and tried to think of something to talk about while he made that sandwich. Nothing
special, just ham and cheese, very light on the mayo. As he munched away, he wondered why he’d put himself in this position. Why exactly had he invited Black Hat up here? He knew that was what he’d been doing, and he was sure Black Hat knew as well. It was as obvious of an invitation as could be. The man accepted. He was here. They were both here. Why? Flug couldn’t think of anything to say, and Black Hat was just kind of awkwardly standing around and taking small sips out of his soda can. Flug hung out in the doorway to the kitchen, facing the living room where Black Hat was. Both of them were just oddly looking around and seemingly avoiding looking at each other, no one saying anything, probably hoping the other would first so that they could have something to go off of. Somewhere to go with things. Flug finished his sandwich, so he supposed he could actually talk to Black Hat now, but what on earth about? God this was too quiet. Someone please say something, anything at this point.

Black Hat was the one to finally shatter the uneasy silence.

“Would you like to go to the movies?”

“Go to the movies?”

“Yeah. There's a movie theater only about 20 minutes away from here. I don't know what's playing right now but we can go see if anything catches our interest. Maybe get something to eat after.”

Black Hat was...asking him to the movies? And...and then dinner after?

“I-I-I-Is, is this another date?” Flug asked hesitantly.

Black Hat frowned deeply. “If you’re that much against it, it doesn’t have to be a date. It can just be the two of us watching a movie together and maybe getting a reasonably priced chain-restaurant dinner. No fucking pressure, Flug.”

“N-No, I-I-I didn’t mean it like that!” Flug said. “I just--I wanted to be clear that w-w-was what it was! I didn’t wa-want to just as-s-s-sume that it wa-was or wasn’t a d-da-d-date!” Flug wrung his hands nervously and spoke in a soft voice. “I-I just don’t want to m-m-misinterpret things.”

“Misinterpret, eh?” Black Hat finished off his soda and approached him, tall and dark like a looming shadow with classy fashion sense.

“Y-Y-Yes, um,” Flug stuttered, looking away. “I d-don’t want to, uh, g-g-get the wr-wrong idea or anything.”

“And what would the wrong idea be?”

“U-Um, I, I d-don’t, I-I-I-” What would he say? That he couldn’t tell if Black Hat’s interest actually went beyond villainous alignment and technological genius? He didn’t know if his own interest in Black Hat wasn’t anything more than him being horny and lonely and all too willing to submit if given the opportunity? That he didn’t want to get too attached in the event things didn’t end with happily-ever-after? In case they didn’t work well as romantic partners and it made their future working relationship really really awkward? That he had no idea what was going on in Black Hat’s head or even his own and he was walking on eggshells trying to figure out what this was going to be for either of them without giving Black Hat the wrong idea in turn? What was the wrong idea
exactly? Was it that Black Hat might want to at least give “them” a chance? Was it that Flug might want that? Just to see if there was a possibility of actually being partners in that way? Was there something wrong about that? Other than the possibility of it being false for one of them? Or that it might be real? For one? For them both? Which was a more frightening thought?

Black Hat had crossed the room in the time it took Flug’s mind to whirl through all the possibilities and leave his mouth struggling to pick which one to go with.

“Flug,” He said, his commanding voice halting the flurry of garbled words spilling haphazardly from Flug’s mouth. “I have told you that you can say ‘no’ to me at any time, haven’t I?”

“Y-Y-Yes. You have.”

“If at any point, you are uncomfortable with what I do, you can tell me to stop. Have I not made that clear?”

“N-No, you’ve, you’ve said that too.”

“Then why are you still so hesitant to reject my advances?”

“Huh?” Oh God Flug was just so confused right now. What exactly was it Black Hat wanted from him? Did he want to be rejected?

“There are many things I will not allow you to refuse.” He grabbed the smaller man and roughly pushed the two of them together, making Flug cry out in surprise. Flug’s arms were in front of him awkwardly, apprehensively braced against Black Hat’s chest. One of Black Hat’s hands grabbed his, oddly gently. “This,” He continued, bringing that hand up to his mouth. “Is not one of them.”

Flug was even more perplexed by these feather light kisses Black Hat was leaving on his knuckles. And that strange look Black Hat was giving him beneath the brim of his hat. What did it mean? What was he talking about?

“Wh-What are you--What-?” Flug asked, fighting to get a full sentence out. Black Hat cut him off before he could manage.

“I will not allow you to leave my employ,” He said, still holding Flug’s hand up to his face. “I won’t tolerate it if you refuse to do your job. If at any point you become a hindrance to my plans, believe me, there will be consequences.” The predatory look in his eye died down as he kissed his way from the knuckles down the back of his hand to the wrist. “But that doesn’t mean you have no choice but to be with me. In this way at least.”

“Uh, th-thank you? For that?” Is this really a situation that required thanks? God what does one say here? Has anyone ever actually been in a situation similar to this in the entire history of humankind?

“Oh, of course,” Black Hat kissed his way up the rest of Flug’s arm tenderly, his gloved hand coming up and holding his head firmly as his mouth left the appendage and raised to face him. Flug tried turning away, but he apparently wasn’t allowed. “Now, I am going to kiss you, unless you stop me.”

“W-Wait, Black Hat, I-I-”
Black Hat got up close and personal, what would be almost nose to nose if the man had one, scaring Flug silent. He spoke in a whisper. “Decide, my Pet. What do you want?”

Huh? What? Why was he doing this? Why was this happening? He didn't want this to happen. Or did he? He didn't have any real problems with kissing Black Hat again, in theory. But this wasn't so much kissing Black Hat as it was being kissed by Black Hat. Who was either done waiting for an answer or no longer cared what that answer might be. Was he only going to kiss him? Or would he escalate things? If Flug didn't stop him. If he didn’t stop him, would he do more than just kiss him? Was he even alright with just kissing? He’d done it before, and it hadn’t been bad, but did he want to again? Did he want to right now? Was it bad if he didn’t? Was it worse if he did? Didn’t he want someone in his life like this? Didn’t he want to be close to someone? Doesn’t everyone, in some way, crave to be with someone? Wasn’t that why he spent his sleepless nights imagining he had someone, someone there with him? He wanted someone. Black Hat was someone. And was someone who gave him the choice to say if he didn’t want it. Did he want it? He couldn’t decide. But he had to. He had to because if he didn’t then the choice would be made for him. And as much as he fantasized about that, about having someone else make that choice for him and taking him and having him and making him feel so good, he didn’t think he could do that in real life just yet.

Or trust this man with so much.

Black Hat’s lips came into contact with his, and he found himself jolt and shriek, “I don’t know what I want!”

Black Hat jerked back as if Flug had slapped him, and Flug continued. “I, I don’t know w-what I want or don’t want right now! I-I’m just so confused! I have no idea what I’m thinking, o-or you’re thinking, or anything! W-W-What do you want from me? Why are you doing this? I c-c-can’t figure it out! Y-You say it’s just for show, but you invite me to dinner, an-and you ki-kiss me, and I just don’t understand why! Why do you do these things?! Why do you m-m-make me feel so-” Flug felt his throat and chest tighten and just getting air into himself became a struggle. Black Hat stopped holding his against him but didn’t completely let him go. Rather, he changed it from an intimate embrace to simply holding his underling steady.

“I,I just...” Flug stammered, trying to get his bearings back and keep talking. “I don’t unders-s-st-stand why you do stuff l-l-like that.”

“Why do I do these things?” Black Hat repeated. “I do them because I want to.” Flug found himself free of the man’s hold, only stumbling a bit at the lost of support. “It seems like you don’t.” With that, Black Hat made his way towards the door.

“It-It wasn’t exactly a ‘no.’” Flug called out, unsure of why exactly he was telling him this. Did he want this or not?

“It wasn’t exactly a ‘yes,’” either.”

“Black Hat, I-”

“Flug, you need to stop taking this so seriously. If something happens between us, then it does. If not, then it doesn’t. You aren’t going to hurt my feelings if you say you don’t want to date me. Or
anything else you’re uninterested in. I’d much rather appreciate it if you would just tell me outright. So, once you’ve figured it out…” The man tipped his top hat to him as he opened the door and stepped out.

“I-I want to know you better.” Flug said before he could get more than halfway out. He saw him turn back slightly and stand in the doorway. “I enjoyed our d-date, and I like talking with you, and I think I’d l-l-like to keep getting to know you. B-But not right now. I think, I think there’s too much going on with me right now for me to be able to get cl-cl-close to, well, anyone. S-So, if it’s not too much to ask, could you wait until I can give you a def-definite answer?”

“We have a long lifetime ahead of us, Flug.” Black Hat smiled a bit. “I have no problems taking things slow.”

“Slow.” Flug repeated, nodding his head as it rolled off his tongue. “Yeah, take it slow, please.”

“You don’t have any exams until Thursday, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Want me to be here again Thursday morning?”

“Yes sure. I think I’d l-like that, actually.”

“Then I’ll see you at 10, Flug.” He shut the door behind him as he strolled out into the hall.

Well, that was pretty okay. Whatever might happen, might happen. Black Hat seemed to have a more “take things as they come” attitude, which didn’t sound so bad. Flug could be on board with that. If he could stop tormenting himself with endless thoughts of “what if’s” and “what does it mean” and “what will people say”? He was exhausted of thinking about what other people would say, and scary hypotheticals, and endlessly analyzing his life. He didn’t want to do that anymore. He wanted to live, and enjoy life, and just fucking do things. Kind of like Black Hat. He just did whatever he wanted. Did Flug find it reckless and even irrational at times? Like when he bought a lethal snake on a whim? Yes. But it was also kind of admirable to him. The way the man did whatever he pleased, and for no reason than it pleased him to do so. He wasn’t held back by fear or logic or anything. He saw something he wanted and he just made up his mind to make it his.

He didn’t seem to care that he’d just assaulted a man today either. Flug found he didn’t care all that much himself. He’d have beaten him up on his own...if he wasn’t so weak, and so worried about consequences. Hell, Black Hat was probably just going to stroll onto campus with Flug Thursday morning as if nothing had even happened.

A sudden sound roused Flug from his flood of thoughts concerning Black Hat. A text? From Aurelio? Jesus, why was everyone trying to talk to him? Had no one in this city been taught to respect other people’s boundaries?

So, how have you been this week?

Flug was about halfway through a very long response of ranting and raving about what an emotional hurricane this past week had been for him, none of it having to do with academics, when he stopped.
He froze completely mid-word, his thumbs hovering over the screen. Something in his head just clicked.

Why was Aurelio just out of the blue asking how his week has been? And why his week specifically? Wouldn’t it make a bit more sense to ask someone how their day has been, or maybe how their exams have been? It was like he knew that this week in particular had been something out of the ordinary. Ok, he’d probably heard the gossip about him going around to everyone and their mom and even their maiden aunts (hopefully not his, or he would have a stroke), but then why not just ask outright how he’s doing? If he’s handling it well, if he needs to talk, the standard things people say when being supportive? Unless...

“Oh you gorgeous son of a bitch.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
papi chulo = Google translate came up with "pimp daddy" for this one. And that's basically what it comes out to mean so I'm not changing it. (Spanish)

marica = sissy/queen (Spanish)

figlio di puttana = son of a bitch (Italian)

Part 2 will be along shortly. In the meantime, you can follow me on tumblr @fallinforaguyfelldownfromthesky. Do it soon, too. Cuz after this little 3-parter adventure in cliffhangers I'm not going to be updating this for a while. Ask box is OPEN and I've made a seperate blog for my neverending stream of reblogs, so my FanFic Blog is now much more focused. Though you'll still get a few here and there that aren't fandom related.

Please, pleasepleaseplease, give me your sweet sweet feedback.
Chapter Summary

Part Two.

Might as well grab a bucket of popcorn and brace yourselves, because it's about to get REAL.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

He’d spent nearly the entire day yesterday perfecting his design. He put in his hours at Radioshack, and he got back to his real work. Everything he could possibly fathom putting into the Stun Gun to make it lethal with a single charge. He practically crammed in every little idea he had; electroshock, pulses, using the brain’s own electrical wiring against it, oh he looked forward to what it was going to do. It was almost enough to get a smile out of him. The ghost of a simper playing on his lips as he lounged in the familiar leather seat of Black Hat’s car. He had to give it to him, he had a real talent of showing up right when he said he would. Flug was well past questioning how or why, he just accepted that this was happening and this was life now and he was going to use it to his advantage. It was another thing he found himself appreciating about the man, his punctuality.

“You seem to be in better spirits,”

“Oh, do I?”

“You aren’t sulking quite as much,”

“I did a lot of thinking yesterday.” Flug kept his gaze out the window. “And I know what I want to do to the one who did this.”

“And what’s that?”

“I want to make them suffer.” He said calmly. “With my own two hands.”

Black Hat chuckled evilly. “That’s the spirit. Do you know specifically what you want to do?”

“OOOOOOOh I have so many things I want to do.” Flug breathed out in a voice that sounded far too relaxed to belong to the usually jittery and troubled young man. “And I’m going to need your help.”

“Just tell me what you need,” Flug felt the man lean over towards him. “I told you, I’d pour as much as I can into you.” They’d been talking about money when he’d said that, back when they first got acquainted. Now, with the way his deep voice rumbled the words at him, Flug couldn’t help but feel they took on a more...provocative meaning.

“I’m glad you feel that way, because I’ve put together a list of everything I need.” Flug pulled out a loose piece of paper filled with all the necessary materials to upgrade his machine to its full potential. Black Hat took it and gave it a proper read once they came to a red light.
“What is this, your Christmas list?” He raised his eyebrow and grinned lopsidedly at him.

“You could say that.” Flug grinned right back. “It’s everything I need to make a real deadly weapon for you, Master.”

Things were going perfectly, the subtle little changes in Black Hat’s face were extremely telling. While the man might be an enigma on the deeper levels, his surface thoughts were easy enough to dissect. That, and Flug was starting to really get a firm grasp on what drove him. While Flug was driven by ingenuity, Black Hat was driven by desire. Flug wanted to make things, Black Hat wanted to have them. Flug could see things working out that they both got what they wanted, plus the sweetness of revenge.

“It’ll take me some time to get some of these things.”

“That’s fine, I’m not in any particular hurry.” No, he wanted to savor everything he would do. If that meant he had to wait a little bit, so be it. He wanted to take his time, go about things at his leisure. He didn’t want to rush a thing.

They exited swiftly upon arrival and Flug found himself freely taking Black Hat’s arm. He might’ve been smiling faintly, and he chose not to pay any mind to a single other person lest this little joy be stolen from him again.

Black Hat had two exams himself today, so Flug would be on his own for a bit. That was fine. He had some things he wanted to do today anyway, and being alone would make them go much smoother. Flug would meet him outside the classroom once he was done and they could leave together.

As he walked in, still willfully blissful, people stared at him. He took notice of it, but nothing more. No thought to it, no worry, so strife. It was happening no matter his views on it, and he couldn’t change that at the moment. So, he’d just go about his day as he would regularly.

“Hey, uh, Flug?” asked the girl who sat next to him.

“Hello,”

“Yeah, hi, um, it is okay if I-”

“If it’s anything having to do with my sexuality, the answer is no.”

The girl was caught off guard by such a blunt rejection, so Flug continued.

“It most certainly is not okay for you to just ask me about something like that. Or try and get the juicy details of my relationship with my boyfriend. I don’t know you like that. I don’t know any of you like that.” He glanced around at the room, all very interested in this sudden turn of events. “Even if all you want to do is let me know you support me, it’s not okay to just come up to me and act like we have some close bond or like I’ve ever shared anything about my personal life with you before. It’s none of your business and it’s going to stay that way. So, if you don’t mind, I’d like to be left alone.”
He said that entire speil with a confident little smile and a concerningly ominous look it his eyes. It made the girl turn around in her seat and everyone else look away.

Perhaps they’d finally get the message. Flug pulled out his notes and skimmed them quickly before the exam began. He finished first this time, even after double checking the multiple choice section. He walked up to the professor’s desk and smoothly stapled his short answer papers together. He was about to collect his bag and leave when the professor spoke up, “Um, Rocinante?”

He turned and saw her pointing downward. He followed her eyes and saw that his papers were currently stapled to his hand, the little metal thing embedded into his thumb. He didn’t even feel it.

Rather than being scared or concerned, Flug just laughed a little. With a roll of his head and some crap about not having enough coffee this morning. He pulled the staple out, hardly bleeding at all, and correctly stapled his work together.

He left that room, with everyone staring at his back and wondering what the hell was wrong with him. Spoiler alert: it was them. They’d done this to him. Bitter though he was for it, he refused to give them any more satisfaction. He wouldn’t let them see anything more than what he chose to be for them. Currently, he chose to be happy. He chose not to allow anything to bring him down today. Even the little errands he laid out for himself today; he was going to do them, do them efficiently, and get on with his day.

Number one: get his Stun Gun.

It would be much simpler to modify and upgrade his existing model rather than build another from scratch. He just had to act as he usually did and no one would be wiser to his deeds. He walked in, no one gave him odd stares here. It was normal for him to hang around here, even when he didn’t have a project to work on. He never had anyone else to talk to and nowhere else to be (until maybe this year) so there was nothing out of the ordinary. Most of the students were too busy rushing to finish their own work to pay attention to him. He’d been that way his first year, when he’d messed up picking his class schedule and half his finals revolved around assembling machinery. He wasn’t making that overworked mistake again.

Although...now that he was soulless...maybe he could handle it...

He got his Stun Gun out of his locker with ease and was out of the door with it tucked securely in his backpack within maybe two minutes. If no one had cared the first time, it was unlikely they would care now.

Number two: find Aurelio.

Almost as easy as the first one had been. Partially because he’d already had a clue.

He had been following this man’s every move for years, it is really so unthinkable that he’d noticed a pattern? Aurelio liked open spaces, where he could have a wide field of vision and where the little
parasites he kept as his posse could all be together. And be watched easily. So where else would one find him other than a courtyard, a pavilion, a terrace, a quad, places that were empty save for benches and chairs to hang out on and some greenery surrounding it to give off that regal aesthetic that just made his already picturesque image even more magnificent. It’s where his spot had been in middle school, where it had been in high school, and it was where it was now. Funny, humans truly were creatures of habit. Aurelio was drawn to the place, and Flug was drawn to Aurelio. In this way, neither of them could help where they ended up. With Flug watching from afar as he always had and Aurelio never knowing.

There he was, there they were, Aurelio Cruz and all his airheaded little lackies who were either too scared to refuse him or too dumb to know any better. Flug noticed Bianca and the girl with the Rapunzel hair among them. Only more proof, they’d probably been in on it. If they hadn’t been, why not tell him outright that they’d heard from Aurelio? Or tell someone after Flug had goddamn fainted and been taken to the nurse’s office?

Aurelio would mostly likely be here regularly. A creature of habit on a pedestal too high to notice what went on below his almighty gaze. Easy prey, under the right circumstances. Flug wasn’t sure how long he watched him, feeling the familiar rush of endorphins with a new twist of malice before he (also familiarly) forced himself to look away. There’d be time to gaze at him when he helped Flug test out a few things. He shivered with glee at the thought.

With that taken care of, Flug went to where Black Hat’s class should be and waited outside the door. Wouldn’t be too long, another hour at most. He passed the time scrolling through his phone and daydreaming about his revenge. There were still so many little details to work out. Where would they do it? How would they get him? Would they be able to do all that Flug wanted? Would he have to sacrifice a few of his fantasies for time, or just plain practicality?

Black Hat walked out eventually, and the two sauntered back to his car, holding hands. He still hadn’t told Black Hat about Aurelio, because he couldn’t have him jumping the gun and beating the man to death himself. Not before Flug could have his own fun. Even at his most coy, he didn’t want to risk his revenge on not being flirty enough to get Black Hat to calm down and not murder Aurelio on sight.

And, you know, he might’ve accomplished that, had they not caught sight of what had become of Black Hat’s vehicle in their absence.

All over Black Hat’s car, phrases like “Maricón, Marica, arder en el infierno, morir, matense,” the taillights were broken for sure. Along with at least one window. Probably more.

Flug felt Black Hat’s grip on him tighten, to what should be painfully so. He was almost sure he heard something in his hand actually crack from the force of it. He felt nothing. No pain. No terror at his top hatted companions temper flaring. Only rage, shooting through him. Perhaps equal to Black Hat’s. Rage that he had allowed this to happen.

Ok guess what motherfucker, new idea.
“Flug,” Black Hat spoke through clenched teeth. “I swear I will make the ones who did this suffer *dez vezes.*”

“Not if I beat you too it.” Flug declared as he wrenched his hand free and stormed off.


Flug didn’t stop or even acknowledge his Master, he only picked up that pace, fighting the urge to sprint back to where he’d last seen Aurelio. There was no telling whether or not he’d still be there, he’d only intended to confirm the location today, but it was the only thing he could do. If he wasn’t there, he’d just go to his house and wait for him. He’d tell Black Hat everything and have the man show him firsthand how a *real* villain deals with disrespect. He didn’t care if they had to steal someone else’s car to get there, they’d get to him one way or the other and the man. Would. **Suffer.**

He was in luck, he was still there. They were all still there. Maybe they’d been waiting for this. Hoping for a final confrontation. Oh ho ho ho if that was what they wanted, he’d give them one they’d never forget for as long as they lived. They’d have nightmares about it for weeks!

He slung his backpack around to his front, unzipped it quickly, and pulled out his Stun Gun. It was a small thing, honestly. Barely bigger than his hand. He’d have to bulk it up for the higher more powerful currents he wanted it to generate, but for what it was, it was enough. He could *make* it work.

“Flug! Flug what are you-” Black Hat caught on quick enough. “Him?!”

“Yep.” Flug said calmly over his shoulder. “But, just for the hell of it, let’s confirm.”

“Flug wait-”

“No,” He held back a scream. “I’m sick of waiting!”

He walked right up to him and his little squad, Aurelio immediately noticing him (for once) and giving him such a blatantly false surprised look Flug almost wanted to throw up.

“You did this, didn’t you?” Flug asked.

“Why, whatever do you mean Rocinan-”

“Don’t give me that crap Aurelio.” Flug cut him off without even raising his voice. “You’re the one who spread it around about me and Black Hat, aren’t you?”

Aurelio shrugged, seemingly bored with the fact he had been found out. “I told a few people, fine. Are you really going to hold me responsible for what *they* did? I can’t control what other people do. Not like that. Or maybe I can, who really knows?” Aurelio gave him a look filled with such
contempt and annoyance, it almost left Flug confused.

Until he understood what this was all really about.

Oh, oh no. Was it really *that*? It fit the timing, sure, but... *really*? Aurelio got the entire student body talking about Flug and Black Hat being gay, all because *Flug didn’t help him with his Gift*? It was so asinine that Flug actually had to laugh out loud about it. Making a few among the entourage jump in surprise.

“Ar-Are you serious?” He asked, fighting the chuckles back. “*That’s* why you did this? You’re butthurt that I didn’t drop everything and cater to you? That’s...that’s actually kind of pathetic, to be honest. It’s not very attractive to throw a fit when someone tells you ‘no.’” Black Hat was snickering from behind. Oh shit Aurelio looked so goddamn mad. Flug felt *great.*

“There was so much more I wanted to do, you know? I wanted to drag it out for hours. But, after the car, I just couldn’t wait. Looks like we have to do this here and now.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Aurelio scowled at him.

“Yeah Flug, what exactly *are* you talking about?”

Flug turned partially, so he could only see Aurelio out of the corner of his eye. Black Hat was trying in vain not to let on how goddamn elated he was to witness this. This was the most sinister Flug had acted or spoken since they’d met, and he seemed over the moon to finally see him act on his darker thoughts. Flug smiled at him, mouthed the words “*Mira esto*”, and shot Aurelio before he could lay a hand on him. He turned to look down on his shocked (pun *very* intended) face as he lay paralyzed on the concrete. One arm still outstretched to touch him.

Did he look away just to bait Aurelio into approaching him and trying to use his Gift? Knowing full well that at point-blank there was pretty much no chance of him missing? Knowing exactly what angle his arm had to be at to be aimed right at Aurelio’s upper torso, the largest area on the human body and the easiest target? Knowing that Aurelio liked getting his way, and had a bit of a tendency to “act out”, let’s say, when he didn’t (As demonstrated by this past week's events)? Knowing from countless firsthand observations that without fail, Aurelio’s strategy was always to initiate skin contact and dominate his opponents? Why wouldn’t it be, when it essentially guaranteed victory for him? Once he touched a person, they were mere dolls for him to puppeteer. Whether it be holding them still so they couldn’t fight back, or even collapse from their injuries; or forcing them to injure themselves. They were under his control until he decided to let them go.

And Rocinante felt immense satisfaction at knocking that man to the ground with one hit.

But, oh, oh that wasn’t enough. No no no, not *nearly* enough. Flug swiftly punched him in the face and felt his hand spasm and twitch. He flexed his fingers and found them to be a bit stiff. “Ah, electric current.” He said, mostly to himself. “Amazing I didn’t think of this before. Probably shouldn’t touch him for too long without maybe some rubber gloves? Something that doesn’t conduct electricity? Yeah?” It didn’t hurt, but it might be able to do some harm if he kept at it. Same
with his other hand, he felt no pain but Black Hat might’ve used a bit too much strength there. It wasn’t handling too well. He’d have to watch that. “Well, that wasn’t my plan anyway. Might as well get on with it.” He aimed the Stun Gun back at Aurelio; right at his broad, well defined chest.

“Stop it!” screamed a female voice. Flug glanced up and saw that it was Bianca, her nails growing long and talon-like. “Yeah, he did a shitty thing, we all did, but you’re taking this too far you maniac!” The rest of Aurelio’s brainless followers seemed to rally behind her, gaining confidence and rising.

“You’re right,” Flug said, halting them temporarily. Then he turned his weapon to them. “You did all do this.” Ooooh the fear that flashed through all of their eyes, even though he was only one man with nothing but a gun in the face of all their superhuman abilities.

“Fuck this shit I’m getting an adult!” Yelled one, who seemed to be one of the younger of the group. He took off sprinting in the direction of the administration building.

“Ooh, we have a volunteer,” Flug remarked, tracking him calmly.

“No!” Flug turned just in time to see Bianca rush at him, but before she could reach him or he could adjust his aim Black Hat came in and delivered a punch to her stomach that knocked her down. Black Hat then kicked her in the face, laying her flat on her back with her talons retracting instinctively.

He addressed the rest of the crowd, tone light but threatening. “Don’t try that again.”

Flug sighed, he’d let that one guy get away. He was too far to stop. Meaning they were really on a time crunch now. But there was still so much he wanted to do, so much he wanted to say! Cliché as it was, he had a lot to say to Aurelio right now and his often-neglected ego demanded some good stroking.

He looked down at Aurelio again. This man who he’d devoted so much time and thought and effort to. So much of his life he’d spent hyper focused on him. Was it just his looks? No, but that had certainly been a part of it. He was tall, and built well, tan and dark and handsome. Chiseled and sculpted features like he was a piece of art come to life. Coupled with his abilities, both superhuman and natural masculine charm, it was like looking at everything a real man should be. Big, intimidating, dominant, in control, seductive, everything he wasn’t. Everything he wanted. Not quite for himself, but for someone else. Everything he wanted in someone else. Someone who could do what he couldn’t, complete him in a manner of speaking.

It seemed foolishly naive, now that he was looking down on his terrified face. Still stuck in a scowl, but his eyes revealing layers upon layers of horror. And rage, but Flug was transfixed by the horror. Something he’d never imagined he’d see in those beautiful orbs.

Flug stared down, maintaining eye contact with him. His heart was racing but he couldn’t stop. “This has never happened to you before, has it? You’ve always been the one to steal away a person’s autonomy, to bend them to your whims. You’ve never felt what it’s like to have your own choice ripped away. You’ve never been the one to be held down so hard. Can you breathe? Is it hard? Can you even think straight? Do you think this is anything like what it feels to be touched by you? Do
you think this is what you’ve been doing to everyone around you nearly every day of your life? It
doesn’t end when you go away, you know. It stays with you, even after it’s done. You stay afraid,
doing everything you can to make sure you never have to feel this again. It will stay with you, like
it’s stayed with all of us. That’s how you’ve kept order, isn’t it? How you’ve kept everyone around
you in line. You had to know on some level that it was a horrible thing you were doing. Of course
you knew. Did you enjoy it? Did you enjoy seeing how desperate everyone was to placate you?
Having everyone around you always so eager to please? Always hoping you’ll keep your hands to
yourself this time? But I know you don’t. You didn’t. Does anyone else here know? About what
happened at your party? About what you tried to do to Demetra? About what you tried to do to me?
"

“Flug, you may want to stop...shit, what’s the word? Oh God, now is not the time. It’s right on the
tip of my tongue. Is there a translation for monologuing in Spanish?”

“Monólogo.”

“Yes, that.” Black Hat kicked Bianca towards the crowd, who rushed to her aid. “Stop doing that.”

“And why should I? I have a captive audience.”

“Number one, never monologue. We are not caricatures. Two, we have company.” Flug looked to
where Black Hat pointed and saw the boy from before, with another man in tow. Funny, no campus
security. Though they were surely on the way.

Well, might as well go for it. Flug tightened his grip and-

Oh. Well that was interesting. Very interesting. Though it complicated things a bit. Looks like things
would be dragged on a little longer. And people would be wanting an explanation sooner rather than
later. To think, Flug had wanted to go about this slowly and carefully. To prevent that exact thing.
What a drag. This might get complicated.

Flug sighed. “Well, this day hasn’t gone like I planned. What now?”

“Now, we do what we must.” Black Hat got right up next to him and draped an arm over his
shoulders. He really seemed to like doing that. “Tell me,” he whispered. “How good are you
at...uhhhh...screw it, improv?”

Flug stared at him. He really thought they could lie their way out of this?

“Hey, all the best lies have a bit of the truth in them. All that matters is which truths you tell.”

Fair enough, he supposed. It wasn’t as if he hadn’t lied his way out of compromising situations
before. The boy came back to find Aurelio still stuck on the floor with no way up, Bianca crumpled
over in defeat, Flug pointing a gun at a man already on the ground while Black Hat just casually
hung out, and half a dozen other people frozen in their own confusion and fear. With him, that
American professor, what had his name been again? Flug recognized him immediately from the pale
skin and dark hair, but his name escaped him at the moment. Huh. That guy was still around? Had he
just been in the area and decided to come try and diffuse the situation? Buy some time for authorities,
perhaps?
Well, that might be manageable.

“H-Hola,” The professor said. His Spanish sounded odd, maybe it was the American accent. What was it, California? “You’re, uh, um, Rocinante, right? We met once before, do you remember? My name is David. David Evermore.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Yes, and...I’m sorry, I don’t believe we’ve been introduced.”

Black Hat introduced himself, leaving everyone to wonder what exact language that was and how one goes about replicating it. “But ‘Black Hat’ is fine.”

“Alright, alright. Nice to meet you...Black Hat. Rocinante, I see you’ve got your, uh, what did you call it again? You presented it before, very impressive by the way, but I can’t remember what you called it.”

“My Stun Gun.”

“Ah, right. Fitting. So, Rocinante-”

“Hold on- Ah ah ah! Nobody move or I pull the trigger!” Flug had noticed a few of the group slowly inching their way towards him. They halted again. Scanning the crowd, he vaguely remembered a few faces and abilities. The inner circle (the ones who were present) were comprised of mostly close range or nonviolent Gifted types. Ones whose Gifts weren’t well suited to these types of confrontations. They had other uses, but certainly weren’t much help like this; disoriented, afraid, directionless. Their strings had been cut and they were but limp marionettes, inert without outside input. They looked to each other for a sign of what to do, but no one knew. They’d spent so much time under the influence of another’s will, they didn’t know what to do with their newfound autonomy.

Should they stop him? And rescue Aurelio? Did they really want that? Did they really want to just keep bending over backwards for this guy, who just gotten taken out by some dorky twink and “Like a Sir” over here? Would there be consequences if they didn’t at least try to save their assoholic puppet master? Because Aurelio was getting up eventually, right? It wasn’t as if Flug was actually going to kill him, right?

“Rocinante, Black Hat, please. Listen to me. Just for a minute.” David Evermore pleaded. “Just put the Stun Gun down, and let’s talk, huh?”

“Sorry, but the gun stays. For now.”

“Ok, ok, the gun stays. The gun stays, but let’s talk. Please?”

“Sure, why not?” Flug said. It would give them something to do until the cops arrived, now that what passed as his plan was ruined. God damn him.

“Ok, thank you. You want to tell me why you’re doing this?”
Flug switched from checking up on the peanut gallery to David and what’s-his-face. Only moving his head, his arm remaining fixed in place. “Well, you brought him here. Would like to get him up to speed?” He saw the guy turn away, incredibly guiltily. “Well, since everybody already knows, guess I’ll just come out and say it. I’m gay. This is my boyfriend. I told Aurelio this in confidence and asked him very politely to keep it between us. Needless to say, he did not keep it between us. Not only did he tell everyone you see here—’who cringed heavily in their shared shame. ‘—He had them spread the word to as many people as possible. My boyfriend and I have been getting harrassed nearly everyday this week, culminating in the vandalism and wreckage of his car today. Was there anything I missed?’

Black Hat was the only one to speak up. “No, that’s about it.”

“For the record,” Flug continued, “I did not intend for things to come to this. It was just, seeing those messages, ‘Die, burn in hell, kill yourselves,’ I had enough, you know? That’s where I draw the line and honestly I think that’s reasonable.”

David took a second to process that, looking around for someone, anyone, to deny it. They didn’t. Didn’t even try. They just hung their heads woefully, knowing that they were guilty. “Ok, ok, I get it. That’s awful. I can’t even imagine how that must feel. But, please, this isn’t the answer. Hurting the ones that hurt you never makes the pain go away.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that,” Black Hat mumbled in his ear. “Revenge is a hell of a painkiller.” Flug had to agree. It didn’t make the pain go away, but it certainly helped to dull it.

Security finally showed up. About time, seriously. Imagine if they’d been after more people. It was also about time that Flug started acting a bit more like the Flug everyone knew him as. That was the only one who could get out of this cleanly. The weak one, who was oh so delicate and meek and nervous. Such a fragile little man. One who was pushed too far, but who can really blame him? He couldn’t handle something like this. It wasn’t that he was a bad person, he was just pushed past him limits. Poor guy.

And Black Hat...was Black Hat. Flug had to trust that he knew how to present himself in this situation. Because it wasn’t as if they could have much of a strategy meeting here.

“It’s time we stop this.” He said lowly. Flug’s shoulders slumped as he got more into his usual feeble stance. His arm was still fixed straight at Aurelio’s heart.

“Yes, I suppose it is. Remember, do what you must.”

“Naturally.” Flug allowed himself to smile down at his victim. The smile vanished smoothly as Black Hat separated himself, right as security encircled them. They didn’t have firearms themselves, but they had tasers. More painful than the Stun Gun, more harmful. Flug wondered offhand if he could get tased and just...take it. Like, would he still twitch and jerk from the voltage, but be relatively fine? Regardless, he shouldn’t get himself tased just to see what happens. Thinking like that was hazardous to his health, something he needed to take even more precaution with since he might not feel the warning signs of a serious injury. David Evermore was talking with the security team, trying to get them to put the tasers down, telling them that the situation was under control, Flug wasn’t paying full attention. Aurelio’s “friends” snuck off with the “help” of some cops when he wasn’t directly looking at them. That was fine, that actually helped. What he wanted was everyone’s full attention with nothing to distract from what he had to tell everyone.
Black Hat had his hands up and approached them slowly, they pulled him off and might’ve cuffed him, Flug wasn’t fully sure. But now that they were separated, the real hard part began. They wouldn’t be able to consult with each other past this point, so it was up to a lot of chance and a lot of trust that they’d both walk free by the end of the day.

“Rocinante, please let Aurelio go and just come with us.” David pleaded again. “We’ll go to the dean, explain everything, it’ll all be okay. I promise, you can come back from this. Please, don’t let one mistake ruin your whole life. Just put the gun down.”

He sighed, looking so tired and exhausted and overwhelmed and ready to give in. Except his eyes. They held all his murderous intent. And were fixated right at Aurelio’s. “Ok. Ok.”

“Just let him go, put the gun down, and come with us.”

“As soon as I’m able to move my hand, I will.”

“What? What do you mean?” There were confused looked had by all. Aurelio had not touched him, so how could he not move his arm?

“I believe I’ve asked you this before, Aurelio. Once you touch a person, they’re under your control. Unless there is more than 5 meters between you, which is the limit of your range. Once they’ve passed that threshold, they regain control. I asked you once if you need to touch a person again to control them after they went out of range, and now you’ve finally answered me.”

“Wait, wait, Flu- I mean, Rocinante, what are you talking about?” One of the lackies spoke up from the sidelines. Much to the surprise of the cops trying to get them all far away.

“The answer is that he doesn’t. He can still control you if you get within range, without having to touch you again. But it’s not permanent. It fades, the more time passes the less power he has over you. Right now, he’s able to make sure I can’t pull this trigger and shock him into unconsciousness.” Or death, but let’s not bring that up. “What he can’t do is move my arm. See? I’m stuck from the forearm down.” He demonstrated by moving as much of his arm as he could, his hand only just barely staying in place. “From what I remember, the last time you were able to touch me was at your party, about two weeks ago. Shortly after I walked in on you and my friend Demetra, when you were forcing her into a rather... intimate position.”

Both the cops and David Evermore looked to each other in shock. All wondering if Flug was really implying what the word “intimate” entailed. Even Black Hat making a small but believable gasp of surprise.

“Oh, and while I’ve got you here, Aurelio, I might as well ask you, did you put anything into my drink that night? Because, I’ve got an eyewitness that says you did, and multiple that can prove you also followed me and my friends back to my apartment. Why’d you do that Lio? Hmm?”

Aurelio was silent. Probably because he couldn’t physically talk. But the police had heard, and everyone here was going to be questioned. Someone was going to give Aurelio up, because from the looks of his cronies, they had known. Not all, only a few guys here and there looking so obviously called out. It was enough. One of them was giving him up. It was too good of an opportunity.
And Aurelio seemed to think he had one as well, if the way Flug’s hand began turning experimentally to and fro. Seeing where it was possible to change the trajectory. Anything not to let Flug win, even if was the littlest act of defiance. It meant the world if it showed that he wasn’t beaten completely.

Flug sighed. “Aurelio, I’m the only one who can put a stop to this right now. Even if you made me shoot someone else or even myself, I’m the only one here who can set you free. I know how the Stun Gun works. I built it. I know what will release you and what will increase the voltage.” There wasn’t anything that could increase the voltage, but he didn’t need to know that. It made Aurelio think twice, and that was all that mattered. “It’s been nearly two weeks, all you can control is this one limb. Not even the entire limb at that. And you’re probably losing more and more power the longer you go without touching me. Or does it only fade when I’m out of range? Will I stay at this level of affectedness so long as I’m near you?” Again, no response. Why was he interrogating someone who couldn’t even answer him? Just to put these questions in other people’s minds?

Was it to show Aurelio that he was the powerless one now? His only option was to submit to another, and he had no choice but to comply or risk further harm.

“Either you let me go, or we stay like this until the electricity fries your nervous system. I don’t know how long it would take, but I estimate it to be quite a while. Your choice.”

Flug felt the stiffness in his hand leave him, and he briefly flexed his fingers. As he said he would, he deactivated the Stun Gun and allowed Aurelio to lie limply on the ground catching his breath. Before he left him, he stooped down and whispered, “Now, you stay away from my boyfriend, you stay away from my friends, and you stay away from me. Otherwise next time, there won’t be anyone to save you. I told you there were so many more things I wanted to do to you, and if I ever catch you within arms reach I’m going to make sure I do every single one.” He rose and relinquished the gun to a member of security as they led him away. “Goodbye, titiritero.”

Flug was escorted to the administrative building with everyone else. He noticed that he and Black Hat were being kept apart not-so-subtly. As was Aurelio, way in the back and being handled carefully. Everyone was making sure they were completely covered with no chance of any accidental skin contact with him.

The next few hours were a blur. Everyone had been rounded up for questioning by campus security, the dean, the counselor, David Evermore was going around the halls talking to people. Making himself useful, or something. Flug caught hints of private conversations, confessions of things people had done for Aurelio, things Aurelio had done to them. Things they’d never told anyone else. Cops were taking statements, secretaries and miscellaneous staff were handing out cups of water, it was very dull. Flug slouched low in his seat, hanging his head.

When it was finally Flug’s turn, he found himself led to the dean's office by David, who asked them both if he could possibly stay and hear him out. Flug and a Sr. Huertez faced each other with David and one of the cops staying off to the side and observing. He explained the situation much the same way as he had before, only now detailing the types of harassment he had been going through, what he’d overheard at Aurelio’s party, a bit of what Black Hat had told him, citing again the vandalism
done to Black Hat’s car. Perhaps exaggerating a bit, to make himself all the more sympathetic. He stuck to facts where he needed to and took what liberties he could. Doing everything to making himself look and sound weak. Which really came in handy when he had to defend Black Hat up and assaulting a man earlier this week. Which apparently hadn’t been an isolated incident.

“That was the third one, actually.” Sr. Huertez said. “I’ve also got numerous reports of him giving other students aggressive glares, and threatening to-” he read directly off one of the papers on his desk. “‘invert their ribcage’.”

“Ohhh,” Dude, what the fuck? “M-Maybe something got lost in translation?” Ok, no. He had to come up with something better than that. “This is the first I’m hearing of that one, I’m sorry.”

“But you saw him repeatedly strike a man’s head against a wall. And just walked off with him.”

“Well, y-yes, I did, but-”

“Were you scared, Rocinante?” David asked all of a sudden. “Was that why you didn’t do anything? Were you scared of him, at that moment?”

Oh God. Should he say he was? That he was scared of what Black Hat might do to him if he resisted? If he so much as spoke out against him? It was a tempting card to play, but it didn’t feel right. He didn’t want them thinking he was trapped in some sort of abusive relationship. Were that the case, they’d do everything to separate them, and look at Black Hat with even more scrutiny. That certainly wouldn’t make either of their lives any easier. No, he needed to keep them both framed as the victims here.

“N-No, I wasn’t scared of him.” Flug said. “I know that, that he can be a little...prickly, sometimes, but that’s not what he’s like all the time. He’s never that way with me.”

“That a very lenient way of putting it.”

“Look, this week hasn’t b-been the greatest for either of us. We just wanted to be left alone, and then all of a sudden the en-entire school starts coming up to us like our relationship is any of their business.”

“Was that really what he wanted? Or was it what you wanted?”

“David, please.” Sr. Huertez gave him a mean frown. “You’re only here to observe.”

“I’m sorry,” He backed off. “I just wanted clarification.”

“It’s fine...it was what I wanted.” Flug admitted. Time for some truth. “I asked Black Hat to keep our relationship private. He respected that. And finding out that someone else hadn’t...was a heavy hit for both of us. I have my way of dealing with it...” He trailed off, very aware that it was kind of a poor excuse.

“So he threatens random people with violence, and you shoot the guy who outs you both with a fancy taser?”
The Stun Gun was much more than just a fancy taser. “The car was the last straw.”

“Rocinante,” Sr. Huertez said. “I can’t believe that you would do something like this. You’ve always been such a diligent, promising student. You’ve had no history of anything like this before. Was it really so important that no one find out about your, erm, relationship?”

The way you said that is answer enough. Flug thought, though he knew he had to come up with something better than that. “Well you see, the thing about that is, I-I’m a very pri-private person, especially about my personal life, a-and I really hadn’t told a-a-a-anyone else, and...” He broke off and remembered what Black Hat had said. All the best lies have a bit of the truth in them. All that matters is which truths you tell. He was already stuttering, he’d been doing it on and off throughout the interrogation. It would be easy to confirm that it was a result of nervousness, anxiety, fear. What was the number one thing Rocinante Flugslys was afraid of? Aside from getting caught in his lies?

“Oh God I ha-haven’t even told my parents yet.” He said. Tears welled up instantly and he began sobbing loudly. It was like Monday night all over again, but with an audience. He just had to keep thinking about that, that he was crying and lamenting all his misfortune in front of actual people. People who had some sway in his future. Law enforcement. He could be expelled. Hell, he could be arrested! There was so much on the line right now, because he couldn’t just fucking wait and deal with the situation cleanly. He had to go and jump the gun and do things publicly! What a fucking failure of a villain he was! So long as he kept tearing himself down inside, he could keep it coming. “I haven’t even told my p-p-p-parents! An-An-And now everyone knows! I on-only told Aure-e-lio because he g-got me drunk! And he, he said he wo-w-wouldn’t tell anyone! I asked h-him, and he s-s-said he wo-wouldn’t tell! A-And it’s-it’s-it’s been everyday this w-week, strangers, coming u-u-u-up to me and knowing! P-P-People I don’t even know! But they know about m-me! And they ta-ta-talk like it’s no big d-deal! Well it was a big deal to me!” He was literally screaming by this point, the sobs racking his body and making his face a mess of tears and snot. He rubbed at his eyes, messing his glasses up. But he was pretty sure he had this in the bag. “Bl-Black Hat, he’s b-b-been trying to cheer me up. He said it wasn’t so bad, that it was just other people’s op-p-pinions, and I shouldn’t c-care so much. I thought, y-yeah, it’s not so bad when you get right down to it. L-L-Lots of people have it much worse. It’s n-n-not s-so bad. Th-Then, we were going to leave, g-g-going to his c-car, and...” He broke down, too torn up to speak clearly. “People th-think we should d-d-die.” He sniveled. “People think I should die.”

David Evermore put a hand on his shoulder and tried consoling him a bit. He asked Sr. Huertez and the officer if there was anything else they needed, because in his opinion all they had here was a delicate young man who was bent by others until he broke. They all agreed that Flug was certainly no crazed lunatic, and under normal circumstances was an exemplary student who would never hurt a fly. No way would he ever attack another person without being pushed to it. Of course, he wouldn’t be getting off with just a slap on the wrist. He wasn’t going to be expelled or even so much as suspended, given his academic record and what it meant for this university, as well as the semester being over already. He would however be suspended from his club and not allowed back into the Robotics Lab for an undetermined amount of time. He would also not be allowed to take any courses giving him access to any materials he might foreseeably be able to craft a weapon out of. Sr. Huertez recommended he start seeing a therapist, or make regular appointments with any of the universities counselors. Flug nodded at all of it, falling into silent streams of tears and small sniffles as he agreed. He was the picture of remorse, eager to make up for his little slip.
The only thing left for him to explain away was why exactly he’d had his Stun Gun on him in the first place.

“I was, uh, I was going to see if I c-couldn’t make it even better. I wanted to t-take it home, to brainstorm. I work better if I have things right in front of m-me.”

“Rocinante, you know you’re not allowed to remove materials or projects from school grounds.”

He froze like a deer in headlights. “I-I can’t? Oh God I’m s-s-s-so sorry! I completely forgot! I didn’t mean to! Y-You got it back, r-right?”

“Yes yeah, son, you can relax. We got it.” Said the cop, holding up the small thing in an evidence bag. “You just count yourself lucky that this place has got so much invested in you, otherwise we’d have to put this on your permanent record.” Wow, he wasn’t even getting this on his record. Damn did it pay to play the part of the model student. “You’ve got your whole life ahead of you kid, don’t go wrecking your future just to get back at some asshole you’ll never see again.”

Flug used to think that way. That he just had to endure whatever came because it was only for a short time. Easier to just take it rather than fight back. What would it matter, when he’d never see them again after?

He didn’t think that anymore. The names may change, as well as the rationale, but there was always something he was forced to suffer through. He nodded and sniffled again and they let him go with the promise that he would begin seeing someone to talk about his issues with. David Evermore offered to walk him out, leading him through the still packed halls and out into the night. How long had it been since this whole ordeal started? How many hours had it taken just to weasel his way out of any serious consequences?

Had Black Hat left already?

“So, do you live very far?” He asked.

“Not r-really.” He said, still keeping up the image of the tender young man driven to violence by an imposing, manipulative antagonist. “I can take the b-bus, or walk. Doesn’t take too long. U- Usually Black Hat drives me home, though.”

“That’s...nice, of him.” David said a bit uneasily. Which struck Flug as being rather odd. Had this man also sat in when they’d been talking to Black Hat? “Would you like me to give you a ride?”

“No th-than you, señor. I can get home on my own.”

“Yes, of course. Mind if I ask why you don’t live on campus? Seems like it’d be much easier than being on your own.”

“I like my p-privacy.”

“Right, right.” It seemed like this man really wanted to talk. They were almost to the bus stop, so his time was running out. Unless he insisted on waiting for the bus with him. Or perhaps walking with him. Please, would this man just leave him be? He was tired of playing the weakling to the maximum
and just wanted to be home. Alone. “Hey, uh, you don’t have to answer this if you don’t want to, but, I was just wondering, how long exactly have you and Black Hat known each other?”

“A few months.”

“And how long have you two been an official couple?”

Oooh, no uncomfortable hesitance or skirting around their relationship. That was a welcome change. “A few weeks.”

“Is he your first, or have you had secret boyfriends before?”

“I’d rather not say.” He ducked his head down, feigning shyness. In reality, he was more irritated. What was with this guy? He didn’t like how nosy he was being right now. He wanted him gone.

“That’s fine, that’s fine. You don’t have to say anything you don’t want to.” Flug thought this guy was a professor, not a shrink. What was with the overbearing repetition that Flug was under no obligation to speak? Although now that he thought about it, he didn’t know what exactly Mr. David Evermore was a professor of.

“Well, this is my stop.” He said, plopping himself down on the cold bench. “Thank you for walking with me, but I’d really prefer to be left alone now.”

“Right, sure.” He said. Though it was obvious there was more he wanted to question him about. He stood, awkwardly staring at him until he worked up the nerve to ask it. “Just, one more thing, please?”

“Yes?”

“I, uh...again, you don’t have to say anything if you don’t want to, but I was just curious, how exactly did you and Black Hat get together? You two don’t seem particularly compatible.”

“D-Did you hear his statement like you did mine?”

He was taken aback by the question. “Well, I’m not really allowed to disclose things like that. Officially, I don’t know anything either of you said.”

“But...?”

David sat down next to him. “Ok, I can’t repeat anything that either of you said, and I understand that the both of you were angry and upset by what happened, but I can say that he seems to be a much more...uh, how do you say, volatile person. I’m actually a little surprised that he wasn’t the one who went after Aurelio. Or...was he? Did he find out and try to go after him? Were you worried about what would happen if he tried to fight Aurelio?”

Flug stared at him. What, did he think that perhaps Flug was worried about what Black Hat would do to Aurelio? Or what Aurelio might do to Black Hat? Now that would be a match up for the ages. Aurelio had his Gift, and had a good amount of weight behind him, but his fights tended to be a bit one-sided. He didn’t actually physically fight himself all that much except as a last resort. Black Hat on the other hand seemed quick to violence when provoked and had actually murdered people before. Many of his scars were obviously from fights, which had mostly likely been to the death. And he was covered nearly head to toe. The most skin revealed was that on his face, so all he had to do was protect his head and he was pretty good. Actually might be rather interesting to see, who
would be victorious in a fist fight.

“I told you, he’s not like that. Not when you get to know him.” Though Flug still barely knew him.

“What is he really like then? How is he with you?”

Flug went red in the face, intentionally thinking of that in the wrong way. He mumbled a few words, so that David would think of it in the wrong way as well and drop the subject. “Slow. Patient. G-Gentle.”

Yep, he was thinking of it. He looked so uncomfortable. “I’m sorry, I think that might’ve came out wrong.”

“It’s okay.” He said softly. He sounded a bit like he might start crying again. He rubbed his hands together and winced a bit when his hand moved a certain way. It was the hand Black Hat had been holding. It was beginning to bruise a bit.

“I, uh, I better get going.” David got up and walked away backwards. “I hope things get better for you.”

“Me too. Goodbye.”

As soon as he was out of sight Flug got up and walked home. He was not in the mood to sit still and wait, even if it would be faster by bus. He wanted to move, to be active, to fucking *do* something. Something that wasn’t just stuffing down who he really was. So, half an hour later, he walked through his front door and went about his usual routine of stripping to his underclothes and checking himself out.

Hmm, you know what? He didn’t like what he had on. He took off the white panties and small socks and slipped on a skimpy black pair and some knee high stockings with skull and crossbone patterns. He ran a hand threw his tangled mess of curls and let out a deep breath as he gazed at himself. Much better. Didn’t even need the corset or garter, he was feeling more like his inner self already. A relief, he felt he’d been keeping this part of himself buried down longer than usual. It was so nice to let go and be like this in the privacy of his own home, where no one else could lay eyes on him.

A call. Black Hat. “Are you home yet?”

“Yes, I am. And I’m going to need a few more things, since they took the Stun Gun prototype.”

“I’ll get you what you need.”

It really wasn’t much, just increased quantities of the metal alloys and a few parts that Flug had planned to reuse from his original model. Easy enough to get, just took time. And it wasn’t as if Flug was on any sort of time limit. He was still building an improved version of his Stun Gun. He didn’t care that he’d already publicly humiliated Aurelio and pretty much gotten him arrested, he wanted more. Even if Aurelio did leave him, Black Hat, and Demetra alone, he wanted more.
Oh...Demetra. He supposed he owed her a bit of an apology for the way he acted. He’d pop in sometime and tell her it hadn’t been her fault. It had all been that damn Aurelio. Though if the cops had gone to get her side of things, she might already know.

“Well, now that we’ve put most of the worst consequences behind us, can I just say you fucked up today?”

“What?”

“Today. You fucked up. Don’t get me wrong, it was amazing, and I enjoyed it, and it was a real treat to see you punch that motherfuck in his smug face when he couldn’t fight back in front of everyone. Seriously I wish I could’ve recorded that, but you still fucked up. Everything after that was a fucking mess that could’ve and should’ve been avoided.”

What...the actual fuck...

“Tell me, how long had you known that it was Aurelio?” Black Hat asked.

“Uh, m-maybe a day or-”

“A fucking day. And you didn’t think to let me know? The one with years of experience, both with getting revenge and breaking the law? The one who has, oh my bad, had a car and knew where the guy lived? Like we couldn’t have gone to his house last night and dealt with him at our leisure? Without witnesses? Without getting the goddamn cops involved? You don’t think to tell your Master these things?!” He hissed out the words. And then sighed deeply. “If you had told me, this whole thing would’ve happened so very differently. It would’ve been handled cleanly, efficiently, with no evidence of either of our involvement. Law enforcement would’ve been none the wiser, I guarantee you that. It could’ve all been nice and neatly dealt with. But no. It had to be public. It had to be sloppy. The man’s not even missing a limb! And then you started fucking monologuing! Like you’re in a fucking movie or something! Never do that again, ever!”

“If...If that’s how you feel, then wh-why didn’t you stop m-me?”

“Like I said, that was kind of amazing. You took control of the situation and kept your composure throughout everything. I especially liked how you baited Aurelio into approaching you and then shot him without even looking. That was fantastic! Too bad it wasn’t under better circumstances. I have to say, though, it makes me wonder just how much you knew about him to be able to predict what he would do.”

“With a G-Gift like his, it’s pretty obvious once you think about it logically.”

“Is that really all it took? I’m not convinced that even you would be able to play him so well without seeing him get into altercations beforehand.”

“Fine. You really want to know how I pulled that off? I stalked him. All f-four years of high school.” Flug admitted, though it had actually been longer. “I knew exactly what he’d do because he’s been doing the same damn thing his whole life, and I was always right there in the shadows, watching it all. Are you happy now?”

Black Hat was silent for a few seconds. “No.”

“Yeah, well, didn’t see you doing much to make things any less ‘sloppy.’”
“Don’t take that tone with me, you’re the one who had to make a scene because you couldn’t wait to take revenge properly. And, if you remember, I protected you. It’s what I’ve been doing for the past five fucking hours. Damage control, trying to tie up all of your loose ends. Hoping you’ll have enough sense to do the same. Thank whatever god you want that everyone sees you as being such a feeble individual, it made lying simple. No one questions the notion that you are oh so delicate and fragile.” The way Black Hat said those worlds made Flug want to throw things. “But I forgot, that is your protection, isn’t it? No one could possibly fathom you to be a ruthless murderer, so long as you keep up the appearance of the eternal victim.”

Flug tried to come up with a rebuttal, but the words kept getting caught in his throat. Black Hat wasn’t wrong, that was how he had framed things, but it was kind of insulting to have it phrased this way. Like he was disregarding all of Flug’s work, all he’d done to keep both of them out of hot water.

“I’m trying to be patient with you, Flug. I really am. I know this hurt you deeply. You wanted to kill him even more than I did. But that’s no excuse for such poor form. Under no circumstances are you to ever act without consulting me again. You clearly cannot be trusted on your own yet.”

Ok now this condescending bullshit was really getting to be insufferable.

“I’ll get you what you need, you will build me a fully realized Stun Gun, and you will do nothing with it until I give the order. Are we clear?”

Flug voice was harsh. “We’re clear.”

“Good. I’ll let you know when to expect me.”

He hung up. Leaving Flug wishing he had something more than the walls to take his frustration out on. He couldn’t even bury his emotions in his work, not until he got all the parts he needed.

He turned on his computer and got comfortable in bed. Just a little something to relax.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Maricón = faggot (Spanish)

Marica = sissy (Spanish)

arder en el infierno = burn in hell (Spanish)

morir = die (Spanish)

matense = kill yourself (Spanish)

dez vezes = tenfold (Portuguese)
Well, that sure was a ride, wasn’t it? I hope you all enjoyed, I've just got one more part to wrap everything up with a nice big bow on top ;)
And, I'd like to mention that a good deal of events in this chapter were inspired by Aviators song Paralyzed

And...you guys...it has a spanish cover. For all my native Spanish speakers, this one goes out to you!
Chapter Summary

The actual CHRISTMAS part of "Coming Out For Christmas"!

Featuring more of Flug’s family!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had taken nearly a week for Black Hat to deliver all that he said he would. An entire week spent binging anime and hypno-videos in his panties. Even *that* wasn’t relaxing for him, because all he could think about was what he’d done to Aurelio, what he’d said to the police, and Black Hat’s criticisms. The man might not have been wrong, but did he really need to talk down to him like that? Or keep throwing in confusing approval? Did it still count as a backhanded compliment if he kept switched from praising to scolding? Whatever it was, it left a bad taste in Flug’s mouth and he couldn’t wait to bury himself in his work. He was running out of shows he actually wanted to watch anyway.

The few days Flug had left before Christmas Eve he spent working nonstop on building a new and improved Stun Gun. The only thing he stopped for was switching the discs of whatever anime he had put on as background noise and going to the bathroom. Oh, and eating. When he remembered too. He caught himself skipping a few meals, but it wasn’t as if he was starving or anything. He was just focused on his work. Even when eating, he was still tinkering around with the circuitry. Got a little messy.

Yeah, ok, he should probably take better care of himself. And should probably go grocery shopping. His supply of microwaveable meals was running low was and kind of bland, honestly. That was the one thing he was looking forward too, come Christmas this year. The food.

Every year on Christmas Eve, before Midnight Mass, his family would get together and just, you know, be a family. It was something he usually loved, from the drive to *Tía* Cristabela’s to seeing his favorite cousins again, to the buffet of food prepared for Christmas dinner, to exchanging presents. A time of familial unity and love. Which he wasn’t particularly excited about, because of all that had happened recently. He’d come more to terms with his inner evilness and homosexuality, even acted more on his lustful and malevolent desires, and having to hide it all away again wasn’t something he was eager to do. I mean, it never was, but he’d just let it *all* out and now he had to put it away again. He’d never be able to brag about his little victory (he didn’t care how “sloppy” it was, it was more than he’d ever done before and he was counting it as a win), or how he’d actually said the words “I’m gay. This is my boyfriend” out loud for the world to hear. He’d never actually thought he’d ever been able to say something like that, even if it was only half-true. He was proud of himself. And no one in his family would ever be able to know.

Well, at least going would put him in the vicinity of tons of mouth-watering home-cooked meals. Many of which he’d be taking home as leftovers. So, *there* was food for a few more days. And he was nearly done anyway, so, just a little longer. Just a little longer. He considered putting some
hypno-tracks on instead of the anime, he’d found a really good set of videos from this one person on YouTube that he wanted to watch more of. But he couldn’t really watch those and work at the same time. While the audio-only ones he found online were good, they were a bit imitative. After listening to one, he’d listened to the vast majority. The problem was most likely his urge to pay more attention to the words rather than what was going on with his hands, the exact opposite of what he was supposed to do. He was supposed to only just hear the voice, not giving it a second thought and allowing it to work its way into his mind without him even noticing.

But...he wanted to focus on the hypnotism. He liked the ones that required his full attention, and called him demeaning things. And those ones he’d found, that actually gave him commands, they were so...

No, he had to keep working. He had to focus on this. Just get this done, and then he could relax. That was why he had an anime that he knew front and back playing. Something he could tune out without being worried about missing any of the good parts. Ones that didn’t demand he pay full attention for him to enjoy. Peeking up from his table and his refurbished tools to catch the fights scenes was all the break he needed. Just a few seconds (ooooh Kamina!) then it was back to work. He was almost done. He might be able to finish this within the next few days. That’d be great, he’d just put on the final touches and then he’d be able to finally allow himself more than a mere moment’s rest. He’d been giving this project all his available time, his bed unused and his clothes smelling a bit funky, but it would be worth it when he was finally done. He’d shower, change, get some real food in his system, get what little rest he could while not being able to fall into a legitimate sleep, it’d be so nice. He just had to finish it up and then he could do absolutely whatever.

Until his parents called to ask what time they should pick him up tomorrow.

Crap, Christmas Eve was tomorrow!? Where had the time gone?! He still had so much to do! If he had another day or so he could do it, he knew, but if he was going to see his parents tomorrow then he needed to start cleaning up right now- no scratch that, he needed to start cleaning up hours ago because he has done nothing but sit around in his underwear hunched over a desk and occasionally eating taquitos!! The one non-microwaved food he had in his freezer which was especially low in stock! Which may have left a few stains on his shirt, from salsa. Or was that just sweat? Yeah, he should really change and shower regardless. And make some time to go food shopping, but that could still be put off. Cleaning up could not.

Fast forward to after a quick shower and change of clothes, Flug inspected his face in the mirror. God he looked tired. He had heavy bags under his eyes, which were a bit red. He was growing a bit of stubble, on the half of his face that was capable of growing facial hair. Hair that didn’t sprout up in sporadic patches between his scars like little scratchy weeds. Man, it was going to be a bitch trying to get it all. No way was he going to see his family looking like this. Maybe he should invest in a better razor. One of the ones with the little interchangeable tools meant to shave in multiple harder to reach areas. That might make getting between his scars a bit easier.

He wondered, what should he wear? His plain white button down shirt? His baby blue long sleeve? That dark blue one he’d gotten for his date with Black Hat? That horrid Christmas turtleneck he got last year (Sorry Tia Isabel)?

Ehh, his neck looked fine. So long as no one stared at it for too long they’d probably never notice the
faded scabs. The bruises were long gone, no danger there. No need for a turtleneck. He went with the dark blue one, the only reason being that it was newer and therefore nicer. He had one formal jacket, which went fine with the shirt. Black slacks were always a good call, when he had to look presentable.

His parents were going to pick him up around ten tomorrow. He should at least make an attempt at resting tonight, to get rid of these bags and his generally worn out aura. But he still wanted to keep working! He knew he could get it done, he could get it finished, he just had to work harder at it!

He made a promise, he was only going to work until midnight. Then, he’d go to bed and force himself to relax. Then, if he really wanted to, in the morning he could work a bit longer after he ate, but he had to stop at nine to make sure he was still clean enough to see his family. There, he was setting an alarm for nine o’clock tomorrow to ensure that no matter what, he would look good for his parents. He had all night to work, he could do it.

So he worked...until he heard his alarm go off. And laughed a bit at what a damn liar he was. But he was done, and that was all that mattered. He collected his finished project and put it in one of his drawers for safekeeping. Couldn’t just go leaving something deadly like that laying around now, could he? He showered again, brushed his teeth, shaved, scrubbed at his eyes as best he could, changed, and was all ready to go once his parents arrived.

Reaching Tia Cristabela’s took no time at all. She didn’t live particularly far. It was actually a wonder they didn’t visit more often. There, he went around greeting each of his relatives; Tia Cristabela, Tia Isabel, Tio Antonio, Tio Orlando, Tia Rebecca, Tia Glenda, Tio Salvador, Tio Héctor, Tio Ernesto, Tio Adrián, Tia Esmeralda, Tia Rosa, Tio Alan, Tia Nidia, Tia María, Tio Cesar, Tio Giovanni, Tia Yvette, Tio José, his grandma Luz, and all his cousins; Enrico, Alejandra, Noe, Charlene, Juliana, her husband Mateo, Mario, Delia, Ricardo, his wife Marina, Estrella, Nora, Victor, his wife Stephanie, and their newborn Esteban. All happy to see him, though they all remarked how tired and skinny he looked. Was he getting enough to eat?

He waved them all off. “Of course I’m eating, Tia. I’ve just been very busy. No, not with work, that’s really pretty boring. No, not school either, I just finished the semester. I’m building something very special at home. Yeah, sure, I’ll put it up on Facebook when it’s finished. No, I can’t tell you what it is, it’s not done yet! Yeah, I’ve been staying up pretty late working on it, I really don’t feel tired though. Oh, my hand? I just banged it up, no big deal. I’m fine. Really, I’m not tired. I’m going to bed around...midnight? Yeah I know I shouldn’t, but I’m just so excited to finish it! Ooh, tamales? ¡Gracias Tia! ” Yeah, they were going to have dinner later, but it was only one or two, that wouldn’t hurt. He was feeling a bit hungrier. He hung out with his cousins and a few aunts and uncles, just catching up and hanging out, like family. Chatting about this and that, and what everyone’s been up to lately.

And then, the inevitable. From Tio Orlando. “So, Rocinante, do you have a girlfriend yet?”
You know what? He was feeling a bit daring. And was tired of saying no everytime. He didn’t want to hear another sorrowful sigh about how he was still single, or how Juliana and Ricardo and Victor were married already, hell Victor just had his first son, and they were only a few years older than him so what was the hold up? He didn’t want to hear another word about how he really needed to go out and meet people, or how he couldn’t just live his life at his desk. Black Hat would never know, so...

“Actually, there is someone.”

“Oh really Rocinante?” His mother perked up. As did his father and most of his female relatives

“Oooh what’s her name? What does she look like? Tell me everything.”

“Her name is, uh, Blasa.” Odd choice, but it’d do. “I met her at school, we went out for coffee a few times and things just kind of happened. She’s...I guess you could say she’s got a unique sense of style. She dresses up everyday like she’s going to a party or something.”

“OOh a party girl.” His cousin Ricardo teased. “Nice going, wey.”

“No, not like that. Kind of...old fashioned. Like some high class old school masquerade party or something.”

“So what, she a rich girl?” Charlene asked. “You dating some millionaires daughter?”

“No, nothing like that. She sure spends money like she’s rich, that’s for sure.”

“Oh that’s just all women.” said Victor, who immediately got a light slapping from his wife. “What?” Laughs were had by all.

“So, is she from a good family? Have you met her parents?” His dad asked.

“Actually...she doesn’t have parents. She told me they died when she was young. I don’t think she has a lot of other family, either. She’s not exactly from around here, and she...moved around a lot.”

“Oh Rocinante, you should’ve invited her!” His mother squealed. Everyone was just dying to meet her. Lots more laughter, and playful pats on Flug’s back. While he forced his own little giggles and bashful blush. “Did you ask what she was doing for Christmas?”

“W-Well, no, but it’s only been a few weeks.” He said. “I didn’t want to scare her off by doing something like that so soon.”

“Oh nonsense!” Tia Glenda chimed in. “We’d treat anyone you brought home just like they were part of the family. No one should be alone on Christmas!” Seconded by everyone.

Speaking of, it was almost time to get going. Everyone got up and split into their respective cars, Juliana and Mateo carpooling with Rocinante and his parents. Making light small talk on the drive to the church and congratulating him again on finally getting a girlfriend.

Flug didn’t pay much attention during Mass. He kind of tuned everything out, just saying “amen” at all the right times and standing and sitting with the crowd. Everything felt very false. More so than every other year. Maybe because there was usually less distortion of the truth than this. Usually he didn’t have anything to lie about, he had nothing in his life except his work. Both academic and part time. Now that he did, all of it was things he couldn’t talk about. He couldn’t even work up the nerve to tell them he was gay, and now he’d gone and made up a girlfriend. Just so he could have something to tell his family.
Maybe...he should tell them. All of them. Well, his mother’s side at least. They really didn’t keep in contact with his father’s side, which was just Tio Paul and his two kids. What were their names again? Flug didn’t think he’d so much as seen them since they were all children.

He had been terrified of people finding out he was gay. Then they’d found out. It had been frightening...at first. But it had passed. It would pass out of people’s minds like the latest pop song as new things came along. People might remember, but they wouldn’t really care. It wouldn’t matter to everyone. It didn’t matter to everyone. There had to be people who just hadn’t cared, people who had known him. People in his club, people in his classes. People who didn’t see him any differently, who didn’t care who he might love. So then, was it so wrong to hope that maybe his family could feel similarly? Regardless of religion, they could still love him, still tolerate him, even if they didn’t exactly understand or agree. They were family. Family was there for each other. It was something he was grateful to have, and it tore him apart thinking he might lose it over something he couldn’t possibly change.

Family...Black Hat didn’t have any, did he?

He’d mentioned his parents had died, yes, but he hadn’t spoken about having any other relatives. At least, Flug couldn’t remember any being mentioned. No siblings, no uncles or aunts, nothing. He said he’d been raised in an orphanage, did he ever get adopted? Given how he’d seemingly been able to go from country to country with little to no hassle, it seemed unlikely that he had any firm roots to hold him to one place. The fact that he never spoke much about his homeland, and hadn’t said much positive about it either, certainly fit the narrative of not having anything or anyone to return to.

Was Black Hat all alone on Christmas?

He tried putting those thoughts of out his mind. So what if Black Hat was alone? So what if he had no one to be with on this one holiday? He’d evidently been that way for years, he was probably more than accustomed to it. He was a grown man, he didn’t need Flug worrying over something like his feelings. Did he even celebrate Christmas? Flug hadn’t thought to ask if he did or if he was doing anything. Maybe he had his own holiday traditions. He probably wouldn’t have wanted to come anyway. He couldn’t imagine church service and some tacky family dinner being all that enjoyable for him. And what would Flug say? Oh, this is my...friend. He doesn’t have any family of his own so I invited him to join us. I don’t really know what his name is, I just call him by the color of his hat. Yes he’s a very physical sort of person. This is normal for him. He’s European, they have different notions of platonic touch.

...Was Black Hat European?

Flug was startled out of his thoughts by everyone rising one final time. Guess the service was over. On the drive back he stayed quiet, only responding when he was directly spoken to. All throughout
dinner, which he picked at in his usual bird-like manner, he was similarly silent. At least then it was more excusable, he was eating. Barely, but he was. He snuck off to the bathroom, splashing his face with cold water. He took a deep breath and decided that yes, he should tell them. He should’ve told them a long time ago. Not only had he kept it from them, he’d lied about it. He couldn’t keep doing that and he couldn’t wait any longer. Waiting until he finally worked up the courage. Waiting and dragging it out wouldn’t make it any easier, in fact all it had done was make it that much worse. He’d been building up this tempest in his head of what would happen if he ever told anyone, a maelstrom that left him paralyzed.

The storm had hit. He had survived. Painfully so, but here he was. Carrying on even though it had hurt. He was in the eye of it, the one calm place surrounded by his innermost vulnerabilities. All of them swirling in the surrounding winds, ready to rip him apart when they became reality. Would he be able to take this? Would he be able to take it now that he had once before, and pushed back against the heartache? Just one more trek facing the disaster before he was free of this imposing hurricane threatening to destroy him?

He opened the door slightly, just a crack, nothing more. He could hear his family talking, laughing, joyously feasting on homemade food prepared just for tonight. They’d be opening presents soon. It was a time of such happiness and positivity and love.

Was he really going to risk taking that away?
Was he going to potentially ruin this holiday for everyone?
Was he going to spoil Christmas for not just his parents, but his whole family?

All of those were “if’s” and “maybe’s”. none were definite possibilities, but did he really want to bank everything they all held dear on some childish hope that maybe it would all be okay? When he still had such a big “if” in his soul?

His soul, he remembered as he clutched at his chest, which was no longer with him. It was with Black Hat, in the contract he’d signed. He’d given his soul as well as his future to that man. If he wasn’t careful, he’d give him even more, and have nothing of himself left but a hollow shell that pretended to be happy.

Or was that what he already was? How long had he feigned happiness just to avoid souring everyone else’s good time?

He wasn’t doing it. He couldn’t do it. Not on Christmas. Maybe...maybe next time. Yeah. Next time. For sure.

He walked out, as jolly as he’d appeared when he went in, and continued picking at his food as his little cousins began opening their presents. Little Alejandra and Noe were so excited to get their first cell phones. Delia made out like a bandit, getting a full kitchen play set. Estrella ignored the pajamas she got in favor of some dolls, as kids do. Little Esteban got the most, the entire family pretty much getting him a full wardrobe of clothes to grow into, as well as a very soft and warm blanket that Flug’s parents had gotten him. Flug himself had found a small teddy bear to give the little guy, which
he completely ignored. Victor and Stephanie sure appreciated all the shopping they didn’t have to do now.

Then the old people (like him) opened their presents. Mainly clothes, a few books, his family knew he liked planes so he always had an assortment of aviation themed gifts. From T-shirts to boxer shorts (which he may still have unopened somewhere), it was the one thing they knew he liked. Tio José had gotten him this little desk toy of a balancing plane, which he thanked him heavily for. He would put it right on his desk in his room, he swore. He remembered he’d gotten some of his model planes like this, gifted to him from his family. And then he’d build them with his dad. His cousin Enrico also gave him a case of beer. Which he was probably going to either give away or re-gift. Maybe his dad would want it.

People started leaving after that. Going around saying their goodbyes, until the next time the family got together. Tia Rebecca kept trying to get others to agree on getting together at Abuela’s for New Years, but no one was really up for it. Thanking each other again for their presents and saying how much they loved each other. Flug’s parents drove him home again, he thanked them again for the small travel tool set they’d given him. He hadn’t told them he already had one, which had come with even more tools and variety. The way he saw it, he now had a backup in case he lost or broke any of his standard equipment. Saved him a trip to the store. He made it home, faking a yawn and promising he was going straight to bed. His entire life was a lie. How would he ever tell them anything?

Flug opened the door and trudged into his apartment, feeling miserable and sick of the holidays already. He was so lost in his jaded thoughts he almost didn’t notice the present sitting on his coffee table.

At first, he thought maybe he was so out of it he was hallucinating. He cleaned his glasses to make sure it wasn’t something smeared on his lenses. It was still there. He rubbed his eyes to make sure he wasn’t just imagining it. No, it was still there. Finally, he tiptoed over and poked it a bit. It didn’t give at all, it felt like a solid square shape. Covered in bespeckled white wrapping paper with a large red bow on top.

Yep, that was a present. Which he most definitely had not left there.

Flug sat down on the couch and pulled the thing onto his lap gingerly. Inspecting it further, he found a small card attached to the bow. There was no “to” or “from”, only the words “Feliz Navidad” in elegant handwriting. It didn’t have much weight to it, shaking it gave no hints as to what might be inside. There was some soft rattling of...something, which wasn’t particularly comforting. Especially given that there was only one person who could’ve possibly left this here. Who really needed to stop breaking into his apartment. Time to get the locks changed. Cautiously, Flug pulled at the bow until it came undone, and gently ripped away the wrapping paper.

It was a model plane set. Like the ones he used to build with his father. A Red Baron Fokker triplane. He didn’t think he’d ever built one of those before. He and his dad had mainly built biplanes, commercial fliers, maybe the occasional warbird. Where did he even find this?

It was about 3 in the morning now. Was it too late, er, early to call?
Fuck it, why not? The man broke into Flug’s apartment for the umpteenth time, even if it was to leave him a surprise Christmas present. This hardly came close to the same level of disregarding boundaries.

The phone rang for so long it seemed like he would just sleep right through it. Flug was ready to just leave a voicemail when he finally picked up. He sounded cranky. “Whaaaaaaaaaaaattt?”

“I was just going to thank you for my Christmas present.”

“Why noooooooooooow? ‘M sleepiiiiinnnnggggggg.”

“Well, I was also going to say that you better not have peaked at your present, but since you’re sleeping I guess I’ll just say ‘bye bye.’”

“Huh?” He seemed to wake up a bit. “My present?”

“Yes, I’ll give it to you tomorrow.” Wait, it was morning already. “Errrr, later today.”

“Yeah, ok, be there around...nine?” His voice got really muffled. “Bye.”

“Goodbye Black Hat.”

He should probably get to wrapping that present. As well as finding a box or bag or something to put it in. He took out the T-shirt his Tio Alan had given him and put the Stun Gun 2.0 in it’s bag. There, just put the colorful paper back, peel off the sticker, no one would ever know.

So, that took care of that.

Now what? Was he just gonna rot his brain with more japanimation and solo degradation play?

You know, he did have a new model plane. And it had been a while since he’d built one. Either with his dad or on his own. Might take a few hours.

Black Hat knocked right as it hit nine o’clock. What, was he just waiting outside the door for the exact time to make his presence known? Was Flug going to have to start checking his front door to make sure Black Hat wasn’t just lurking around the halls like an overly attached boyfriend?

Flug opened the door and let him in, still wondering why the man bothered knocking when he came and went as he pleased a good 80% of the time. Flug had his present ready on the couch, so he just led the man to it and told him “Feliz Navidad, Black Hat.”
The villain dug inside excitedly, like a kid who just knows he’s getting that hot new toy he’s been begging for, and pulled out the new Stun Gun with glee. It was slightly bigger than its predecessor, had a bit more weight to it.

“It’s just what I wanted,” He said with a grin aimed at Flug. “Thank you Flug.”

“You’re very welcome.”

“So, how is this one different from the last one?”

“It does everything the old one did, and more.”

“Ooh, like what?”

“Same as the first one, it can paralyze a person in one hit by blocking off the electrical synapses of their brain.” He said, sitting next to the man and motioning to the weapon. “What I’ve added is once you’ve got them, you can change the voltage. Making it all the more painful, and past a point, fatal. Of course, if you want, you can just shoot out a lethal amount of electricity right from the start, but I personally think having them frozen at your mercy is far more satisfying. It also doesn’t have to be one continuous pulse, you can alter it with this knob here, making for an electroshock type of treatment. Which, again, can be as painful as desired and fully controlled. Good for causing pain, and a very slow and painful death. I had planned to add a feature allowing for controlled bursts mimicking the synapses of natural motor function, but I’m afraid that’s beyond me at the moment.”

“Oh, don’t you worry. This is more than enough for now.” Black Hat got a mischievous smirk all of a sudden. His sharp teeth hidden by tight lips. “It can really do all that you say?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know?”

Flug blinked. “I...I designed it. I build it.”

“But how do you know? How do you know it works?”

“I...what?” Did he not like it? Was he expecting more?

“Have you tried it out? Have you ensured that it is fully functional?”

“I-I...I haven’t.” He admitted.

“Then, we’ll have to test it out. To make sure it’s worthy of being my first product.”

“We, we’re going to t-t-test it out?”

“Yes, Flug.” Black Hat pulled the scrawny inventor close. “We’re going to kill someone.”

Flug stomach growled right then. Which it shouldn’t have done. Really. He should’ve been fine for a few more hours.
“When was the last time you ate?”
“...Earlier today.”
“How much earlier?”
“Around...one or two in the morning.”

Black Hat lowered the new Stun Gun. “Waffles or pancakes?”

“Uh, pancakes. I love pancakes.”

Black Hat sighed as if he really didn’t like that answer. “Ok, come on.”

“How?”

“Let’s get pancakes.”

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Chapter End Notes

Translations:
- Tia = Aunt (Spanish)
- Tio = Uncle (Spanish)
- ¡Gracias Tia! = Thank you Aunty! (Spanish)
- wey = dude/guy (I think this one is more exclusive to Mexico)
- Abuela's = Grandma's (Spanish)
- Feliz Navidad = Merry Christmas (Spanish)

Sorry that this ones pretty short. Shortest chapter I've ever done, I think. There is a reason for this. That reason being I'm kind of burned out and I'm all out of chapters for you. So no more consistent updates for a while, I'm putting this on hold. In the meantime, I'll get to writing the next little burst of chapters, maybe get around to finishing some of my other on-going fics that have been piling dust for the past couple of months, maybe branch out and write some stuff for those other fandoms I'm occasionally in, who knows? I certainly don't. All I know is I've been writing this fic for over a year now and it doesn't feel like it's anywhere close to being done. There's still so much to do, so much more i can put everyone through, so many more ways I can wrench a heart! I've been doing this since December of 2017 and I've loved every minute of it.

Thank You to everyone who's loved it right along with me. I probably wouldn't have kept at it if it hadn't been for you, and I look forward to hearing what you think when I post the next chapter.

When will that be? I don't know. Follow me on tumblr
@fallinforaguyfelldownfromthesky, I'm still going to be posting weekly updates and sneak peeks every Tuesday. They may not be about BHO(tp) but you'll see what I'm working on.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!