Hot Venom

by gurobuff

Summary

A brush with a shadowy figure soon spirals out of control. How can you protect your secret identity when he is doing everything in his power to tear down your defenses?

Notes

Hey you guys! This is my first crack at writing something like this in a long time so bear with me! Constructive criticism is appreciated! This is going to be a slow burn, so hold on to your hats everybody!
Night is falling on the plaza as you exit Gar’s bodega, arms full of snacks for the late night of homework you have ahead of you. You've procrastinated your school assignment for too long already, and the pressure is weighing down on you. It's not your fault you're not feeling inspired! Writing is hard! Heaving a sigh, you make your way to your motorcycle. You’re ready to tackle the arduous task ahead when suddenly, you notice a figure watching you from the shadow of an alley. You squint at them, unable to see their face in the warm lighting of the sunset. They back away into the darkness as you stare at them.

Just who does this clown think he is? You huff to yourself, stuffing your art supplies into your bikes storage bin before cautiously pursuing the shadowy figure. You're no hero, but letting a skeevy man run around in a trenchcoat unchecked seems risky. You know you can handle yourself in a fight. Cob forbid he bothered someone who can't. You’re light on your feet, but can hardly keep up with the flapping of the figures coattails. The alleyway begins to wind, not unlike a maze, and as you gallivant further into its depths, more clutter and debris stand in your way. Your target deftly maneuvers past obstacles, seeming almost weightless as you struggle to jump and dodge garbage in your worn sneakers, hot in pursuit. He can't run forever! You can see a dead end approaching. You have him cornered!

“Stop right there!!” you demand, standing tall on top of the rusting corpse of a junk fish. To your surprise, the ominous man complies. You draw your weapon, an extendable silver staff with a spiked mallet on each end. You twirl it in warning. “State your business, shadow lurker!”

The man eyes you from bottom to top. You can't see his eyes but you can feel them scanning across you as he tilts his head slightly, analyzing your form, your outfit, your weapon. Your ears turn red as you see him smirk.

“I won't ask you again!! Why were you watching me??” You point your weapon at him more directly, mere feet away from the potential danger. You can practically smell the evil on him. You know villain types. Unpredictable. Dishonest. Fucking weirdos. You don't take your eyes off him. He eyes your weapon yet again before giving a bemused chuckle;

“Hm. Cute.” He steps forward.

“Don’t move!” you warn.

“Or?” He doesn't falter.

“Or you'll be getting a taste of this!!”

You lunge forward, swinging your staff with careful precision when--WHIP!! Your weapon clatters to the ground, far out of your reach, and before you can even process what just happened, you find yourself up against the wall, the shadowy figure looming ominously over you, arm blocking your only escape. Shit. This was not the plan.

“I see.” He cooes, and you feel a sweat start to prickle on the back of your neck. “Your form needs some work, Ettie.”

How did this freak know your name?! You can practically feel his breath on you, and despite his closeness his face is as mysterious as ever. You lean to push him off of you, but before you can even lay a finger on him, he launches himself back and practically flies up the alley wall, disappearing into
the night. You stare at the space where he used to be, heart pounding, before quickly grabbing your weapon and rushing back to your bike. Your fingers shake as you turn your key, motor sputtering to life. You drive off. Who the hell was that guy? What was he doing?? Would anyone even believe you if you told them what you had seen? You doubt it.

As you pull up to your house, you hurry in, greeting your noisy cat before locking yourself in your room with a microwaved dinner. You search the web for anyone who matched your assailant, to no avail. Feeling defeated, you resign yourself to doing your homework and going to bed. You sleep restlessly that night.

The next morning greets you with the tweeting of dinosaurs and a comfortable breeze. You go about your day as normal, hanging out at home and watching heroes defend the plaza on the news. Lakewood Plaza was never boring. That's one of the things you love most about it. But despite it's charm, and despite your admiration for certain heros, you have a little secret of your own. As night begins to fall again, you have somewhere to be. You whistle for your cat as you change from your sporty day wear into something a little more….. appropriate for your plans tonight. You zip up your costume and shimmy into your shiny thigh high heels, click clacking down the hallway and checking yourself in the mirror. Ah! Almost forgot! You whip off your glasses and slick your hair back a little more. With a touch of black lipstick, your ensemble is complete. Perfect for a night doing what you love most. Stealing!

The moon is bright tonight, and you take a deep breath of cool air before biking over to central Lakewood. You wouldn't consider yourself a villain. You know stealing is wrong. You don't want to be evil, but the adrenaline rush feels too good to quit. You try not to have victims. You steal from insured businesses, from rude people, even from other villains. If anyone at school knew what you really did in your spare time, you would be ostracized. That wasn't going to stop you. You've had your eyes on this prize for too long! The last limited-edition pair of strength-enhancing, silver-skull earrings at the plaza! Tonight, you strike.

You sneak into the plaza silently, slipping through the shadows and working your way over to the antiques store where your prize was stashed. No alarm. You knew you weren't a real villain. The system would be blaring if you were, wouldn't it? Slipping into the vents, it is mere minutes before you have your earrings in hand. You smirk to yourself. Too easy. Sliding out the way you came, you hastily trot back through the dark of night until-- thwack! You walk right into someone lurking in your shadows.

"Move it or lose it!" you quietly hiss, grabbing the someone by the shirt in an attempt to intimidate. You glare at his face and…. wheres his face?? Wait a minute! Not this fucking guy again! "You!!" "Me?" he hums. You want to bury your fist in those sharp, sharp teeth as he smirks. "You know, I'm starting to get the impression you're following me, Ettie."

You feel like a piece of glass shattering as he utters your name. Your real name. “E-Ettie?? Who’s Ettie? I'm Eclipse…” Fuck! FUCK!! If word got out about this, you'd lose your hero ranking. And your job. And probably some friends, too. This was bad.

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Your hands begin to summon a thick choking smog. It feels good to use your real powers. You stifle them usually, someone told you once that they were gross and made you look like a villain. You're not a villain. But, you don't want to be obvious, if you used them all the time people would catch on to your identity pretty fast. You love your staff, it was one of your first major heists, but melee never came naturally to you. This? This felt more right than any sword or staff ever could.
The shadow man chuckles. “Of course. How rude of me.” He pulls away from your hold. “I'm not here to trouble you. Just tending to some business. You can continue lurking if you so wish.”

“Oh, yeah right! You just happen to be here at the same time as me??” You sneer. “These shadows are my turf!”

“Don’t be narcissistic. You don't have anything I need.” He begins to walk away. “Although, the more I run into you, the more I think that might change.”

Your face feels hot. “What's that supposed to mean?”

He smirks again, before disappearing into the darkness before you have a moment to even realize he’s gone. You could scream. Who does that guy think he is?? You don't have time to find out. The sun is coming up, dinos tweeting in its wake, and you need to hurry home before anyone sees you. You swear to yourself that this isn't over. You head home. Another round of frantic internet searching yields no result. You sigh with frustration. The mystery of the whole situation was killing you. Who was this tall, dark, mysterious stranger….? It's gotten personal now. Like it or not, you were going to figure out his plan!
Today was a big day! As your alarm blares, you hastily scramble out from under the blanket and hurry into the bathroom. You go through your speech in your head as you brush your teeth.

Project HVR. Hero-assisted villain reform. With a hero sponsor, even the most devious of villains can be shown the path of kindness and friendship…!

Your cat, Smokey, saunters into the bathroom and rubs his fat little face on your leg. You pick him up and kiss him on his head, before repeating your pitch out loud to him. You had been working on your social sciences presentation for weeks, and now you were eager to present. You know that your stance is controversial, but you believe that some villains are only playing that role because they don't have the support they need to reform. Research shows that a majority of all villains have some sort of trauma that influenced their rise to evil power. Many are evil out of necessity. You know how that felt. You're almost positive that a community approach to rehabilitating villains would reduce attacks on civilians by sixty percent. You finish putting on your face, straighten the hem of your pencil skirt, and make your way to class.

“…..and that's why I believe we should dedicate more city funding to citizens in high-risk for malice zones, and develop our available resources for villains in need of assistance. Thank you for listening!”

You take a quiet breath and await your applause. And await. And….. nobody is clapping. You're getting some pretty stern looks. Your professor coughs.

“Ettie…. Your presentation was… interesting, but I fail to see how this fits in with our prompt.” he says.

“Well, we were supposed to propose ideas for making day to day life safer and happier for heroes and citizens of Lakewood.” You rebut.

“So why is your presentation on villains?” his face is deadpan as the class begins to snicker in the background.

“Because by providing villain support, statistically we would be reducing evil levels by at least---”

“How would wasting our time on a bunch of dumb ugly villains be happier?” The buff cowboy who sits behind you interjects.

“V-villains are technically citizens of Lakewood too!” The class murmurs and whispers as you defend your point. “And the fact of the matter is if we spent less time vilifying villains and more time trying to understand them, maybe there wouldn't be so many of them!” The chattering of the class grows louder, almost drowning you out before the professor shushes them.

He taps his pen, examining your slides quickly on his computer screen. “The bottom line is that you're off prompt, Ettie. You get full points for presentation and citations, meaning you get a C.”

“B-but--!” You've never made a C in your life…!

“Don’t make me dock points for professionalism.”
You resign to your fate and shirk back to your seat, disappointment pooling in your stomach heavily. You felt humiliated. Suddenly, a sweaty meaty palm claps down on your shoulder. That ugly cowboy bothering you yet again.

“Man, I really can't believe you were ballsy enough to go up there and say that. Are you a villain fucker??” He laughs at his own joke with an undignified hurr hurr hurr. “At least you're kinda hot. You could flirt with the professor.”

You nervously chuckle to appease him before turning around again, pretending to be taking notes. You wanted to throttle him. Him and everyone else who chuckled along. You're practically sick just thinking about it. Your professor for dismissing you just because he doesn't agree with your stance…! It wasn't fair!! They're idiots! All of them! You couldn't stand being berated by this gang of buffoons. You feel your hands grow hot, and realizing that you were losing your grip a little, you quietly slip out of lecture and rush to the bathroom. You lock yourself in a stall before letting out a deep sigh of frustration. You run your palms under the sink faucet until they cool down again, grateful they didn't get hot enough to smoke in class. Out of nowhere, you hear a splash from the stall behind you. Two little green feet appear behind the door, and then out walks a little girl.

You raise an eyebrow.

“.... Did you come out of the toilet…?”

She glares up at you. “No! And so what if I did??”

“Um…. Are you lost?” You can't remember the last time you saw a child on campus.

“No…! I'm here with my bo--- uh, my dad!! He teaches here.”

Oh! That makes sense. “Neat! Who? What does he teach?”

“Ummmm….. sssssscience? He’s Dr….. ” She glances around the room. “Dr Tile.”

“Hm. Dr Tile?”

“Yes!”

“Do you wanna come to the front lobby so we can find him?”

“I got it…!” She moves to scurry past you, exiting the bathroom. You get ready to follow her out, but by the time you leave the room, she's gone. Glancing around, confused, you notice a piece of paper on the floor. A card.

**Dr. Vee**
*Bioengineer and Toxins Specialist*

The other side has a contact handle. You enter it into your phone and save it, just in case. You never knew when someone like that could come in handy.

Brushing your strange bathroom encounter aside, you head back to class and impatiently wait for it to end.

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Home is truly a sanctuary today. You kick off your heels and flip into the bed, groaning in frustration at today's affairs. You hate your class. How is a supposedly “neutral” school employing such biased and closed-minded faculty member? You were beyond over it. You were angry. You know you had
gone above and beyond on your presentation. Cowjock got a B minus for a presentation on why heroes should get free nachos at Gar’s! How was that factual at all??? You feel your resentment starting to boil and swirl inside of you. You’ve never felt so disrespected in your life!! You couldn’t just sit there and do nothing!!

You kick your blanket off of yourself and abruptly stand up. Throwing open your closet doors, you slide your holiday sweaters and nicer dresses aside to reveal your favorite outfit. Your Eclipse outfit. You shimmy into it, zipping your boots up before whipping your glasses off. Without them on, nobody could even tell who you were. Last time you showed up to class without them, Cowjock started hitting on you in butchered French because he thought you were a foreign exchange student. Stupid idiot. You grab your phone and head out to put your plan into action.

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It didn’t take long at all, but with a few casual break ins, and a few hacked passwords later, you had pilfered the steal of the century. Embarrassing fetish photos involving Professor Douche and a collection of Small Tiny Horsey dolls. You’re pretty sure that this should be made illegal. All you had to do now was superimpose the image into the classroom projector. The school was easy, you snuck in there all the time when you needed to use the equipment and library after hours. For the amount of tuition you pay, its a crime to not allow late night access. You get to your social studies lab and begin your devious plot, teetering on a chair as you mess with the projector. These heels really weren't practical. But they were cute! Your scheming grinds to a screeching halt when you hear someone beginning to open the door, and in a moment of panicked disgrace you twist your foot wrong and fall off the chair, landing on your ass. The door swings open. You look up, putting on your best deer in the headlights expression.

In the doorway, a man stands silhouetted, a heavy binder tucked under his arm. He has his hair up in a messy bun, a pair of rectangular glasses, and a black scarf on over his lab coat. His face is stubbly and he has bags under his eyes. Ah. He must be a professor. He stares at you nonchalantly, you don't break eye contact. You don't say a word. Easy now. No need to cause trouble.

“This lab isn't open for students past 9pm.” he chides, voice soft. Praise Cob. He thinks you're a student. Well. You are a student. But that's besides the point!

“I-I'm sorry…! I left my USB in here and needed it to meet my deadline….! I'll be leaving now…!” You stumble to your feet, gulping.

“Hm. No worries. Wouldn't want to stand in the way of a blossoming young mind.” He hums. “Have we met before?”

You look at him intently. Hmmmm. He looks vaguely familiar. “Uh, you've probably seen me around the bio labs….”

He extends a purple-tinged hand in your direction. “I'm Professor Vee. I'm a member of the biological sciences board here at Avenue Academia. I don't teach often, but I help with the lab development and research when I can.”

You shake his hand. His skin is cool.

“I'm…. E. I go here.” You don't wanna blow your identity.

“Hm. I see. Well, I must be getting back to work. You should head home and finish your assignment.” he hums, before leaving the lab. You breathe a sigh of relief. That could've been bad. You quickly exit the building and hurry back to the safety of your bedroom, ready to call this day
done. Thank goodness for relaxing showers, because you were definitely in need of one.

The next day in class, you eagerly await your revenge. You're hanging on the edge of your seat. You had arrived early, watched the bozos that doubted you file in and sit down. Professor Dickhead walks in late, as per the norm. He flops down into his chair and gets ready to launch one of his typically dry lectures. Boots the projector. You bite your lip in anticipation.

The sheer force of the classrooms reaction alone has your professor slammed against the wall. A brief gasp, a moment of silence to process… three, two, one, and then a bellowing cacophony of laughter fills the room. Some people were gagging at the scene. Professor Dingus hastily turns the projector off and begins screeching at the room to be quiet, face flaming red. The commotion attracts campus security. One cautiously attempts to calm the professor as the other hushes the crowd of rumbling students.

“One, one of these little deviants!!! T-they---!!!”

An awkward explanation to the administration later, and the entire class was now being dedicated to investigating the identity of the prankster. You are a little nervous, but careful not to show it. The head of student affairs stood at the front of the class to make an announcement.

“Students, students. I'm sure you are all aware that this is a serious breach in faculty privacy and certainly not tolerated behavior here at Avenue Academia. We will be investigating this as a harassment case. You are all going to be called in for a one-on-one interviews with our faculty. Starting alphabetically…..”

You glance at her faculty panel. Professor Peaches, Professor Army-Man, Professor…. SHIT. Professor Vee! If he hadn't already, he was definitely going to rat on you. He's looking right at you as we speak. You don't dare look directly back at him, but you know he's looking. One by one, students are ushered out to another classroom to talk with the auditors. You gulp as your name is called, and soon find yourself escorted to a room and left alone with your biggest worry.

“H-hey…! Professor Vee, was it…?”

He looks at you from over his clipboard. “Hm. E, short for Ettie, Ettie Rauchen?” He has your file. And what's worse, he can somehow recognize you, even with your glasses on…! This man must be a genius. You're screwed.

“Yes. I'm Ettie Rauchen.” you might as well submit to your fate without struggle.

“And I take it you weren't really looking for your USB last night?”

“No, sir.”

“So you admit to being the mastermind behind this… prank?”

“Yes. I did it. I'm not sorry, either. He had it coming.”

“Did he?”

“Yep.”

“I see.” He jots something down on his clipboard. “I haven't told anyone about last night.”

“You haven't…?”
“No. You’d be expelled.”

“Expelled??”

“Mhm. Of course, I believe that may be a little harsh. There are better ways to deal with students like you.”

“Like me?” Delinquents?

“You're suffering from malicious tendencies, are you not? Harassment is a gateway into the world of villainy.” He chides.

“I… I'm not evil, if that's what you're asking.” Your heart is pounding. You feel a little sick.

“No, of course not. But you're on a slippery slope.” He sets his clipboard down. “I can help you, Ettie.”

You look up at him, wringing your hands.

He puts his hands together and begins to elaborate. “You see, I'm a firm believer in the theory that with the right support and guidance, even the most neerdowell of youths can be sculpted into something… Brilliant.” He emphasizes his last word with a little fan of his fingers. “Of course, this will all be off the A.A. books. You'll be somewhat of a test run, I admit.”

“And if I refuse?”

“You'll be free to go. I'm not throwing your future away for that bumbling oaf of a professor.” He states.

“Oh.” You fidget with your hair. “Thanks, then… you know, my presentation I gave yesterday was about how society could benefit from a program like the one you're suggesting.”

“I take it it wasn't well received?”

You shake your head.

“I would imagine so. I understand your frustrations, Ms. Rauchen.”

“Call me Ettie.”

“Ms. Ettie.”

Close enough. It had a nice ring to it.

“…..I'll do it. Your project. I think it would be good for me.”

“I intend it to be. Here's my card. I'll be in touch with you shortly. In the meantime, try to keep a low profile. Don't brag about this prank to your friends.”

Ha. What friends? You wanted to bury this situation as far into the ground as possible, anyways. You take his card, stuffing it in your pocket.

“I'll be cool, don't worry. Um…. I'll see you around…?”

“Indeed.” Professor Vee smiles at you. You smile back, before hurrying back to class, heart racing at breakneck speed. Just what were you getting yourself into?
Nose to the Grindstone

It had been a few days since the photo-incident. You've gotten off the hook, and that in itself was a miracle. You can't stop thinking about it. Professor Vee hasn't gotten in touch yet, you wonder if he will at all. The chance to work on an experiment like this would be amazing, you had to admit.

Burying into the blankets of your bed, you refresh your school email. Sigh. Nothing. Maybe he had found someone else to work with. You had tried lurking around the biology department earlier, to no avail. His office had been empty this morning, too. You're starting to feel restless. Maybe a quick heist after the sun goes down would make you feel better. You get dressed, taking your time as you wait for the perfect hour to strike. Smokey yowls at you from behind the bathroom door, you feed him before slipping out the front door and hopping on your bike.

Gar's has been closed for an hour or so when you pull up. You know the store like the back of your hand. Which vent is the biggest, which floor tiles had pressure sensors. Where the cameras filmed. You saunter through the store with ease, loading up your reusable bag with beauty supplies, cute accessories, and pizza puffs. Might as well stock up on snacks while you're here. Some sour chips, some gummy bears…. Hm. You grab a large bottle of wine and a pack of smokes too. There. That should make you feel better. You slip out the same way you came in, heels clacking onto the hard pavement below as you drop out with your loot. You stand up, and-- for Cob’s sake. How many times were you going to ‘coincidentally’ run into this shadowy fool?? He’s blocking off the exit to the alley, smirking at you obnoxiously.

“You again?? I'm really going to have to kick your ass this time, dude.” You set your grocery bag down, firing your powers up.

He holds up a hand. “Relax. I waited out here so as not to intrude on your "turf". Although, I would argue this is mainly Boxmore territory. I'm simply here because Gar has something of interest to me in that store.”

“Well you're gonna get us both caught if you keep raising your hand like that.” You gesture at the camera. “Take 3 steps to your left and you'll be in a blind spot.”

The shadow man does as you tell him. “Better?”

You nod.

He eyes your bag. “You're risking a confrontation with Eugene Gar…. For pizza puffs?”

Your cheeks flush and you squint at him. “Why don’t you mind your own business? The good pizza puffs are overpriced, ok? I make minimum wage.”

“Hey, whatever floats your boat.”

You want to punch him right in that shit eating grin. If this alley wasn't so camera heavy, you would. The shadowy figure is moving towards you now, you watch to make sure he stays out of sight, before bending down to get your bag. You could swear he glanced at you as you bent over, but didn't catch him looking. Creep.

You sigh. “I'm leaving. Hope you get caught doing whatever it is you're doing.”

“Pleasure seeing you, as always.” He hums, hopping up onto the roof. Pshh. Pleasure your ass. You hurry home before anyone else shows up to bother you.
Once you're bundled up with a plate of warm puffs and a glass of wine, you feel better. You watch TV as you eat, before noticing your phone as it lights up with a notification.

Email from: Professor Vee

Dear Ms. Rauchen,

I formally invite you to begin your internship as a lab apprentice and test subject at my personal lab. Lab internships are worth 3 credit hours per semester at Avenue Academia. Work begins Saturday at 9AM. Please be punctual.

Best regards,
Professor Vee

Attached to the message were holomap directions to his lab. Thank goodness he messaged you! You were starting to worry. You mark the date in your phone and settle back down, ready for a good night's sleep.

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It felt like a million years had passed, but Saturday had finally arrived! You had woken up early, had a good breakfast, and done yourself up to look prim and professional as ever. Perfect! This internship was going to look great on your resume.

You show up about 10 minutes early, ringing the doorbell at the front gate. A mechanic eyeball darts out of the wall and scans you, before buzzing loudly as the gate rolled open. You wheel your bike in and find somewhere to park it. The robot eye is still staring at you.

“Proceed to entrance.” It demands, voice harsh and electronic. Glancing around, you see the main lab entrance and head that way. You push the industrial door open and quietly slink in, shutting it softly behind you. You check the time. 8:56 AM. Right on time…! You look around. What a cute little lab. The are doors on each side of you, and before you have time to examine the room further, one slides up to reveal Professor Vee.

Clipboard in hand, he approaches you.

“Morning, Ms. Rauchen.”

You hated that name. “Please, call me Ettie. Ms. Rauchen was my mom's name. And, um, good morning to you too…!” You fidget with your hands a little awkwardly. First day jitters.

“Glad you could make it. Follow me.” he turns and begins to guide you through the left door. He takes you to an office, before handing you a clipboard with a little stack of paperwork on it. “Your terms of employment. I need you to sign and initial them. Liability and all that.”

You flick through the pages, it looks pretty standard. You sign where it asks you to before handing it back.

“Thanks. We can head down to the lab now.”

There was more lab? You thought you had just been there a minute ago. You follow your mentor closely as he leads you down a winding corridor and through a set of double doors. Whoah……! This place is huge! The metal walls lining the interior stretch almost 3 stories tall, with huge glass tanks
placed methodically throughout the floor space. Plenty of work benches and mysterious equipment scattered about. Professor Vee really likes the color purple, it seems.

“This is all yours?” you ask shyly. Professor Vee must be loaded.

“It is.”

“C-cool.” Cob, get it together Ettie. You hate how intimidated you feel with professors. Professor Vee doesn't reply, and finishes leading you down to a workbench with papers neatly laid out on it.

“I'd like you to fill out this power survey.” Professor Vee says, gesturing at the desk. “I'll be over here, let me know if you have any questions.” He goes and settles at a different bench, one with a microscope and slide stack set out already. You begin your work, taking care to be quiet. You don't want to bother him.

NAME: Ettie Rauchen
AGE: 20
SPECIES: Human
POWER LEVEL: ...Crap.

“Um…. Professor Vee?” You feel bad when he has to pull away from the microscope to look at you. “I haven't checked my power level since high school. I was never really into POW cards…”

“Ah. We can test that later. Carry on, just fill out what you know.”

“Oh, um. Gotcha.” You keep writing. The questions begin to get more and more complex, asking for detailed descriptions of your powers, your views on morality, your likes and dislikes, your aspirations and fears. It took you a solid hour to fill out the whole thing.

“Professor? I'm done.” You stand to bring him the stack. He takes it and begins glancing over it.

“Do me a favor, you see those slides and test tubes there?” He waves in a general direction. You nod. “Will you load them into sanitation racks? I've left some over there. I'll show you how to use the sanitizer later.”

“Of course.” You head over and begin working at it. He stops his microscope study and begins reading your quiz. He fidgets with his pen, tapping it against his lips every now and then. You try not to stare. Professor Vee is actually pretty handsome. In a perfect world he would be a cute student sitting behind you in class, instead of that dumb meathead jock. But this world wasn't perfect. You zone out as you look at him, still racking tubes, quickly looking away as his gaze meets yours abruptly.

His face is neutral as he speaks. “Hm. Smoke elemental powers. Mind if I ask for a demonstration?”

“Oh…. Uh, sure. They're not that useful though…” You hold your hands up and force them to heat, and soon billowing clouds of black smoke begin to rise from your palms. Professor Vee activates the lab fan. “...and they stink too.”

He nods. “Best suited for outdoor use. Can you do anything else?”

You shake your head. “I mostly rely on physical ability.”

“We'll be running tests on that. When you're done with those racks.”
“Yes, sir.”

You both quietly resume your work. You could get used to this. It was nice and quiet here. Professor Vee was a chill guy. You're feeling content for the first time in a long time.

An hour or two later, Professor Vee deposits a sealed package on your desk.

“There’s a restroom down the hall. Go put these on, please.”

You take the package, examining it. Professor Vee reassures you that it's just workout clothing for the physical assessments. You head out and change into them, examining yourself in the bathroom mirror. Ugh. The outfit was a skintight black bodysuit, not quite flattering on you, made out of a thin breathable material. It almost felt like a swimsuit. You step back into the lab, feeling a little exposed without your perfectly curated lab outfit.

“Ah, it fit. I thought it would.” Professor Vee hums, handing you a tracking bracelet with a red button on it. “This will monitor heart rate and other vitals. Click the red button when you feel that you're at your limits for the challenge. Understand?”

You nod. He leads you to a smaller but still spacious lab, equipped with a treadmills, weights, and submersion tanks.

“We'll start with speed and endurance. Get on the treadmill, work your way up to the fastest speed you can manage, then maintain that for as long as you can.” he instructs.

You do as you're told. Jeez. You hate cardio. And you really don't want him to see you get all sweaty. But, your sense of duty compels you. You do your best, managing a solid minute on your top speed before hitting the button and sliding off breathlessly. Professor Vee hands you a paper cup with water in it.

“Good effort.” he cooes. “Take a minute to cool off and we'll move on to strength analysis.”

The weight analysis is literally a giant rectangular weight. You hold it above your head, and gradually, more and more pressure is added above you. You feel your knees shake and begin to give out. “S-stop!”

With the click of a remote, the machine hisses into reverse and eases off of you. You huff, rubbing your arm before stretching, trying to feel less sore.

“Impressive. You scored 20 pounds stronger than I predicted.”

“Oh…? I can be tough, if I try.”

“My base prediction was fairly low, mind you.”

Your face falls. Well. Ok. Good to know he thinks you're a total weenie.

“Your strength lies in agility, no?” he asks.

“Yeah, I did gymnastics when I was little.” You nod.

“I'll have to prepare an obstacle course and analyze that as well. That'll be a task for next week. In the meantime, it's almost one. You can leave for the day. I'll need you back here tomorrow. You can wear the suit home, but, bring it back.”
“Right. Gotcha.” you nod. “Uh, I'll see you tomorrow then.” Smiling at him, you gather your things and head out. Working here felt good. You hope you don't mess it up somehow.

Sunday morning couldn't come fast enough. When it does, you arrive punctual as ever, eager to get back to work. Professor Vee greets you in the front lab.

“Morning, Ettie. There’s coffee over there for you.” He gestures to a desk, on it an @Cafe cup is sitting in a cup holder, still steaming hot. Aw. He bought you a grande…. he really must be loaded. “It’s a regular latte. I wasn't sure what you would prefer.”

“I like lattes. They're good.”

Professor Vee sips his own coffee, fogging his glasses up in the process. He turns as he takes them off to wipe them, leading you to the main lab shortly after.

“We’ll be going over feeding charts for our live test subjects here at the lab. On days that you work, I expect this to be the first task you accomplish before asking for another.” You follow him through the main lab, and off into a smaller side lab.

He pauses before you pass through the door. “Now, most of these are venomous. Wear gloves when you handle them. I know they're rather off putting to most people, but you'll have to do your best to tolerate them.”

“...Gotcha.” You nod. You brace yourself for whatever is there. He opens the door. The walls are lined with embedded holding tanks, each with some sort of scaly critter in it. Some held hairless rodents, but the majority appeared to be housing snakes.

Your eyes widen. “They're so…!”

“Disgusting? Scary?”

“Cute!!!!” You can barely restrain yourself from pressing your face against the glass. “Is this a yarnball-python?? I thought they were illegal in Lakewood….!”

“Not with a research permit, they're not.” He’s smiling at you. “You're my first assistant who hasn't hated this room.”

“I think reptiles are really cool…. I've always wanted one, but they freaked my mom out. I never really got around to investing in one after she…. After I moved out.”

“The pythons aren't venomous. If you want to handle one, the yellow one is the nicest. The pin for the lock is 9036.”

You type in the number and the cage slides out and opens. You gently scoop up the arm length muscle banana. He balls defensively at first, but soon relaxes as you drape him over your shoulder.

“He’s precious…..” you coo, stroking his smooth scales. The snake examines your face, tongue flicking against your cheek. You can't help but grin.

“He likes you.”

“Good. Because I love him.” You reply.

“You can keep him out while I brief you. Frozen mice are kept in this freezer. You must defrost them
all the way through in warm water before feeding. Snakes can't be handled for two days after eating, so we feed them in rotation so that there is always one available for research purposes."

You nod. Seems simple enough.

He continues. “Bite gloves are here, as are the tongs, make sure you use them. If you get bitten directly by anyone with a red label on their tank, hit the button over there with a skull on it for emergency treatment. Don't wait to tell me, because you will most likely die a painful death. Time is of the essence. Understand?”

You nod again, this time gulping at the thought of being poisoned to death.

“You should be fine. We've never had to use that button before. Other animals have their feeding charts on their cages, hit the blue button above the lock to view it. Dead and dry food is kept in the fridge here, live bugs are in the tubs under this counter. Dishes must be washed every three days, and make sure they always have access to clean water. Any questions?”

“No, I think I've got it.” you affirm.

“Good. Come join me in the main lab when you're done.”

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You breeze through the feeding ritual. You love these silly little reptiles. They're almost as adorable as your cat. You wash your hands once you're done, exiting into the main lab and glancing around for Professor Vee. Hm. He isn't there. You wander about the main floor, examining all the different items scattered about. Some of them looked super cool, some of them looked borderline dangerous. You wondered what kinds of other projects he was working on.

“Done already?” Professor Vee asks as he strolls back into the lab.

“Mhm.” You nod. “I really like your test subjects.”

He smiles at you. Wow. You've never noticed those teeth before. So sharp. You wonder if they would hurt if he….. wow. Did you really just think that? Get it together and stop creeping on your boss, Ettie.

“I like them too.” he joins you at your work bench. “Here. Training charts. Exercise is the first step in reducing pent up aggression.” You take a stapled paper stack from him and flip through it.

“You want me to work out…. 4 times a week?” Was he crazy??

“Is that too harsh? My calculations say you can handle it.”

“No, no, I can do it…..” Your eyebrows pinch a little. You hate working out. “It'll just be a little tough at first.”

“I'd be happy to join you if you need the company. I use the lab gym myself most days.”

Hold the phone. The prospect of seeing Professor Vee all hot and sweaty is very enticing.

“Oh….? That would be nice….. I don’t know how to do some of these.” You gesture at certain exercises listed on the sheets.

“Fair enough. I work out at 8pm most nights, does that work for you?”
“It does.” You nod.

“Good. Now that that's out of the way, I just need an extra set of hands over here by the dissection station.”

Your day goes fairly smoothly as you work side by side with Professor Vee. It hardly feels like work at all. When you get home later that afternoon, you lay in bed and think to yourself. Thank goodness your luck had begun to turn around. This felt like the start of a bright future.
Snake Bite

It’s a gloomy afternoon outdoors. You’re sitting at your desk, doodling in your notes as class dragged on. You hate mandatory classes that have literally nothing to do with your major. It feels like filler. You sigh quietly, eyes drifting to the window. It's raining pretty hard out there. Hm. You don't mind, weather like this was relaxing. Though, it made staying awake in this class tricky. Lightning flashes outside, and you see a glimpse of someone lurking in the forests around the school. You squint to get a better look. Huh. Nobody there. You must be dozing off or something. Who would be out in weather like this? Turning the page of your notebook, you look back at your doodle. Just a drawing of the cute yellow python back at Professor Vee’s lab. You're excited to see him tomorrow, though you're dreading the workout. Speaking of which, you need to get better running shoes. You know just where to strike.

That night, you creep over to the local shoe store. You retrieve your treasure hastily, the shoe store was poorly guarded. You would cackle if that wouldn't completely blow your cover. Some fools just make it too easy. You're still moving cautiously. The Plaza bozos might be easy to avoid, but that shadowy figure that lurks about here is nearly as sneaky as you. That guy really grinds your gears. Always smirking at you like he knows something you don't. You'll give him something to smirk at…! If you see him at all, that is. What are the odds he's lurking near this creepy ditch?

Speak of the devil. A flash of lightning darts through the clouds above, silhouetting the familiar figure of your new least favorite person. He's watching you from the roof of one of the stores. You keep walking. Not doing this tonight!

You hear footsteps approach from behind, and when they draw too close for comfort you spin around and bombard your assailant with a wave of thick black smoke. Perfect to make your escape in! You begin to dash off when you feel a cold hand grip your wrist forcefully, before yanking you back into the cloud you had created! Shit! You hated being the victim of your own smog…! You can't see!! Wrenching your arm from your attackers grip, you swing blindly in the dark. He snatches your shoebox. You back out of the smog again, and hop the ditch into the forest and wait for him to exit. The cloud dissipates, and to your surprise, he’s gone. You feel shaken. He's never actually been a threat before. You can tell he's strong.

"You're not the only one who likes to lurk in shadows."

A chill runs up your spine. You had felt his breath on your ear. You spin to kick, smashing your foot into the tree behind you. It splinters, you leave a considerable dent in it. You scan the area, spotting the shadow man retreating into the forest with your shoes. You follow. You need those!!

“Hey!!! Steal your own pair!!”

“I just did!”

EURRGHHHH. You were going to fucking kill this guy!!! He runs into a clearing, and you take the opportunity to launch yourself into the air and attempt to bury your foot into his head. Mere seconds before impact, his arm shoots up and snatches you out of the air, swinging you forward and smashing you into the dirt below. Mud splashes up around you, and your ears ring for a second before you shake to your feet. A crash of thunder and lightning rumbles around you, and the sky opens up. You're dripping with dirt, and he's laughing at you, soaked as well. You run and swing at him and he grabs your arm and twists it behind your back. A shove forward and you find yourself...
restrained against a tree. Rough bark scrapes your cheek and you feel the Shadow Man's weight pressing against you. Your arm was aching. He leans in, applying more pressure as he murmurs in your ear.

“You know, it really isn't smart of you to be running around this late at night.”

You strain to wriggle loose, to no avail.

“A pretty looking girl like you could get eaten alive out here....”

Oh jeez. Is he hitting on you?? His face grazes your neck and you start to panic. He could definitely just be a hungry vampire. You press your unrestrained arm into the bark of the tree and begin to heat it up. You need it to light up but the rain beating down is fizzling it out…!

“Would anyone even notice if you went missing?”

He has a point. Your friends were fair weather. You lived by yourself. You could be missing for days before anyone cared enough to report it. He squeezes your arm tightly, and your heart is racing like never before. You squirm under his grip, grunting with effort. You manage to slip your arm out just enough to grip his arm back, and at that second you concentrate all if your energy into that palm. He gives a pained hiss and loosens his grip momentarily. You take your chance and yank yourself free, spinning around and grabbing him by the chest, holding him still before ploughing your fist into his face. BLAM!

He stumbles backwards, silent at first, then grinning. His nose is bleeding, blood pooling on his lips before dripping off with the pouring rain.

“And here I thought you were a hapless damsel when dragged out into the open.” he hums. Your stomach twists, and you brace yourself with a defensive stance.

He arches back and swings a fist back at you. You dodge, and it hits the tree behind you. You shove him back, palms red hot as you press them against his chest. He gasps, seething as he realizes how much your hands could hurt.

“Yeah, they're pretty rough, aren't they??” You spit, stepping forward. “It's not fun, is it???”

“On the contrary,” He begins to lunge at you again.

“This is the most fun I've had in ages.”

He manages to grapple your hands this time, you swing your leg into his side repeatedly, he lets out a strained oof with each blow. You were going to murder this creep before he found someone easier to pick on. Or, pick off. You do your best to pry yourself free again, but he's stronger than you, and the wet ground beneath you slides beneath your weight. You begin to slip, and he takes the opportunity to pin you on the ground. Fuck!! He’s heavier than he looks. He holds your arms above you, sitting on your waist as he runs a clawed hand into your drenched hair. His hand balls into a fist, and you wince as he yanks your head up to expose your neck from beneath your costumes collar. Yep. Definitely a vampire. You yelp as he jerks forward and sinks razor sharp fangs into your skin. It burns at first, and you let out a breathless cry for help. His tongue runs over the wound and the sting begins to fade away... you're feeling woozy, heat rising to your cheeks as your vision began to blur. He pulls off. The bite was almost beginning to tingle, and as you feel yourself weaken and sink to the ground, you squint up at the Shadowy Figure looming above you, catching a brief glimpse of his eyes, barely visible beneath the dark of his cloak. Then, you faded out for good.
Birds are tweeting the next time you manage to open your eyes. Your head is throbbing as your pupils adjust to the bright light shining in through your kitchen window. Wait. Your kitchen?? You examine your hands. Still caked with dirt, and your arms are covered in bruises. You're still in your costume. What happened last night?? You stagger over to the bathroom and examine your neck in the mirror. A big purple bruise surrounds a ring of deep gashes, and your mouth gapes. What the actual fuck!! He sucked you dry like a juice box and also managed to leave a hickey?? You have work in the morning-- CRAP. It is morning--!

You scramble to your phone and check the time. Fuck!!! You're already a minute late!!! You peel your outfit off and climb into the shower, blasting hot water onto your bruised skin. You rush to scrub the mud off your body, hissing as the hot water ran over the wound on your neck. Your heart sinks as you remember how easy it was for him to overpower you. You wonder why he let you go…. How you had gotten here. Had he put you here?? Does he know where you live?? Your heart beats faster. You try your best to focus on getting clean. You soon finish, skipping your usual makeup routine and just slapping on some eyeliner before putting your glasses on. You opt for a long sleeved black turtleneck to cover your bruise, and a pair of shiny leggings that matched. Jeez. What a disaster. You race out the door, hopping onto your motorcycle and zooming down the road.

By the time you spiral up that stupidly long driveway, you're 56 minutes late. You burst into the lab, panting with effort, to see Professor Vee sitting at his office desk, sipping a cup of coffee.

“Ah. Ettie. You're late.” He glances at you. Siiiiiiip.

You gulp. “S-sorry. My phone volume wasn't up like it needed to be. It won't happen again.”

“Hm. Perhaps you should give me your phone number so that I can call if you've overslept. Likewise, you could text me if you're delayed.”

Direct line of communication with Professor Vee? Fuck yeah! “Of course. Good idea.” You unlock your phone and hand him the new contact screen. He taps at the keys before handing it back. You put a little snake emoji by his name. Then, you shoot him a text with your name in it. “You should put the moon emoji by my name. Not the creepy one. The crescenty one.”

“Uh…. Come again?” He raises a brow.

“Like the little smiley faces. I'll text it to you.” Blip.

“Oh, I get it. There.”

Heh. Did he really just not use emojis? Maybe he's older than he looks. He finishes his coffee before standing up and leading you to the main lab.

“After you feed the animals, we'll be trying out your new agility testing equipment.”

“Ah. I… yeah. That sounds good.” Jeez. You need to figure something out.

You take your time feeding the reptiles. Maybe if you're slow enough you won't have time to exercise. You can only procrastinate in here for so long though. At the 45 minute mark, Professor Vee comes looking for you.

“Almost done?” he asks as he enters the reptile lab.
“Yeah. Just uhhhh…. Had some fussy strikers today.”

“Ah. Well, meet me in the training lab when you're done washing up.”

You shuffle on your feet. “Um.. in my hurry to leave this morning, I forgot my workout clothes.” A lie. You had them.

“Hm. That's alright. I have plenty more test suits for you to use.” He heads to a closet and pulls out a new sealed pack, handing it to you.

“Hahaha, thanks….!” You don't know what to do. The suit would definitely show off your neck.

You go to get changed, opting to leave your sweater on over your workout gear. As you step back into the lab, Professor Vee side eyes you.

“That sweater is a snagging hazard for this activity, Ettie. I can make it warmer in here if you're chilly.”

“Oh. Uh, I just… are you sure?” You really don’t wanna take this sweater off.

“Positive.”

You reluctantly raise your arms and peel the sweater off.

“Oh my.” Professor Vee stands and looks at you. “What happened to you?” It's hard to tell what he's thinking. His face hasn't shifted at all.

“I… I think a vampire bit me.” You rub the back of your neck, face falling. Professor Vee walks up to you and carefully takes your arm in his hand to examine it.

“Where did this happen?”

“Behind the plaza.”

“When?”

“Uh…. Last night.” Geez.

“You were out behind the plaza at night? Doing what?”

“…..I was out with some friends.”

“Ah. Were your friends attacked?”

“No…. They ran faster than me.”

“Hm. You should let me disinfect that. Have you contacted the authorities at all?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I… I just don’t think it would accomplish anything.”

“…….I see.”

He approaches your neck with a bottle of antiseptic solution. It stings as he applies it, but it works fast. Soon, your neck gashes are mostly scabbed over. That bruise still shining bright, though.
“You should be more careful next time you hang out with friends. All sorts of nasty things hide in
the shadows behind that plaza.”

“Yeah. I'm aware.” You sigh. You don't want to be lectured.

“Mhm. Before we begin training, we need to do a levels assessment. Have a seat.” He gestures at a
padded chair with arm restraints and head strap on it. You glance at him questioningly. “The straps
are for difficult subjects. Don't be difficult and they won't be necessary.” He chuckles as you sit
down.

He then attaches a few sticky sensors to your hands and head, as well as one on your chest. Sitting in
a more friendly looking chair across from you, he crosses a leg and jots a note on his clipboard.

“Alright. Let's get started. On a scale of one to ten, how strong do you feel right now?”

You hesitate to answer. After being beaten last night, you're not feeling strong at all. “Um…. A
four.”

He notes it down. “How effective do you think you're using your powers? Same scale.”

“A six.”

“Have you been having malicious tendencies?”

“…..no.” You fib. The machine beeps and flashes with a red light.

“Your heart rate spiked. Are you lying to me?”

Shit!! You didn't know this was a lie detector type deal…!

“I…Maybe a little--!” You're turning red.

He shakes his head a little. “This experiment isn't going to work if you aren't open with me, Ettie. I
promise you we'll have full patient doctor confidentiality.”

“Right. I'm sorry…” Jeez. You're a mess, Ettie.

“Tell me about these malicious thoughts.”

“I… they're not so much thoughts and more actions. I went shoplifting. That's what that costume you
saw me in is for.” He's gonna hate you…. Everyone at your school despises villains.

“Ah. I see. Petty crime.”

“Y-yeah.”

“Anything else?”

“Not recently.”

More scribbles on the note pad. He pulls the info chart that had printed as your interview occurred
and slid it into a computer slot. It whirs for a minute before the little screen on the side glows green.

“Ah. Your power score. It's negative one.” Professor adjusts his glasses as he peers at the screen.

“N-negative one?? But I'm not… I'm not evil!”
“Shoplifting, whilst a minor crime, will definitely accumulate villain points on your POW score over time.” He explains.

“How do I fix it…?"

"Lots of hard work and community outreach. That's the goal here. It'll take time, but we can raise that power level to greatness if we keep at it.”

The task seems daunting. “Ok.”

“We start right now.” With the click of a button, a wall of the lab slides up to reveal a large obstacle course, complete with lasers, bombs, and a snake pit, amongst other villainous traps.

“Wow… your evil lair simulation gauntlet is amazing…!” you exclaim, running closer to inspect it.

“Simulation……... right. Yep. I worked pretty hard on it. Start on the left platform and work your way across, I'll be analyzing your time and form as you go.”

“Got it.” This was right up your alley. You climb up the platform, taking a deep breath before diving in and beginning the gauntlet. Boobytrap knife toss? DODGED. Giant buzzsaw attack? DODGED. Spike trap? JUMPED. This was a piece of cake. You swing across a bar and land on the small platform above the snake pit, but as you leap to clear the second half, your boot heel wobbles out from beneath your feet and snaps, leaving you to plummet into the pit. You are immediately bit by like, 5 snakes. You screech, swatting them off you and awaiting your death as you feel their poison rushing through your veins. Ohhhh, goodbye cruel world…! You brace yourself for a world of pain and…. Oh. These are non venomous snakes. Your bad.

Professor Vee taps the glass. Jeez. He watched that whole thing. You're mortified.

“Failed course. Time was 4 minutes and 12 seconds.” he announces. A ladder descends into the snake pit and you climb out, ashamed of your performance. “Not bad. It seems your choice in footwear impeded on your performance.”

“Yeah….” Your heels were cheap. You got them on sale at Shoe-Less when you were younger. They weren't made for powered antics. They really tied together your costume though. “I didn't have my sneakers on me. Plus, I'm used to doing this sorta stuff in these shoes.”

“Ah. Nothing wrong with that. I'll need you to take them off for the next round.”

You do as he demands. He takes the boots and one broken heel, setting them on his desk.

He pulls his clipboard out again. “Alright. Let's get back to it.”

Something tells you this is going to be a long day….

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An hour or two later, you're finally done. You're exhausted. You must have cleared that course at least 20 times. You pant to catch your breath, and Professor Vee hands you a cup of a strange blue liquid.

“Is this some sort of research chemical?”

“It’s blue lazer-aide.” He's completely deadpan.

“Oh. Just making sure you don't poison me.” You smirk.
“Ah. If I were going to poison you, I'd be far more efficient.”

You glance at him. Still deadpan. You wonder if he's joking back, or dead serious. He notices you eyeing him.

“I'm just kidding.” He assures.

“It's hard to tell with you, sometimes.”

He smiles. “I think you'll get used to it.” Leading you back to the front office, he retrieves something from his desk. An envelope. “Here.”

You take it. Examining it, you see it has your name on it. You rip it open. A cheque slides out.

“Compensation for your work, as per our contract.” He hums. Oh! You didn't read the contract. That makes sense. You read the cheque and…. Holy smokes!! This is a crazy amount of money for the time you worked. You do the math in your head and wonder who lied to this man about the going rate for interns.

“Is this right??” you hold the cheque up. He leans over to read it.

“Hm..? Yes? Is it not enough?” he starts rummaging through his desk, pulling out a cheque book.

“N-no!” You gesture for him to stop. “I mean, you're paying me like, fifty technos an hour…!”

“Ah. Well, decent employees deserve a decent wage.”

You could cry. Your last job had paid 7 technos an hour. You were lucky if you made 50 for a whole shift…!

“I…. I really appreciate you thinking that.” You say as you scan the cheque into your phone for E-Deposit.

“And I appreciate your hands on deck. Don't worry about it. We have plenty of profits to spare around here.”

“What do you- I mean, we- even do around here?”

“Development of biotechnology. Custom creature development for a large client base. My genetic modifications are the best around, people pay a pretty penny for them.”

“Ah. Makes sense.” You shuffle a little. He looks at you.

“Your shift over Ettie, you're free to go.”

Oh. OH. You feel hot behind the ears. “R-right! Must've lost track of time…!” Stop bothering your boss, you dweeb!! “I'll see you tomorrow….!”

You awkwardly shuffle out of the lab, but he ahems as you leave. You freeze.

“Ettie. You can retrieve a pair of slippers from the suit storage closet. Don't walk around outside barefoot. You'll get fungal infections.”

Were you really about to walk outta here without shoes?? SO EMBARRASSING. Think, Ettie!! Think with your tiny brain!!!! “Oh!! Of course! Thanks!” You hastily retrieve a pair and hurry out of the lab before you could humiliate yourself further. Why can't you think straight around that man?
That caring, handsome, wealthy, wealthy man. Hm. Well. There was your answer. You sigh as you mount your bike.

The last thing you needed was a crush on teacher.
Crash and Burn

Chapter Notes

Hey y'all!

I wanted to say thanks for all the lovely feedback you guys have been giving me! I really appreciate it! I'm glad you're enjoying this self indulgence as much as I am. Also, I've started a blog for concept art and chapter updates! There's already some Ettie doodles as well as a few of Professor Vee.

hotvenomfic.tumblr.com

Anyways, just wanted to give a heads up, this chapter contains attempted date rape. Proceed with caution if stuff like that bothers you.

As a whole, this fic will be dealing with heavier themes, so please be aware as we start to get into the thick of it.

Your favorite time of the year is here! Halloween! Well. Not quite Halloween yet, but that's not stopping your local fraternity from throwing a rager. You tagged along with your pal Jessie, who you lost to the costumed crowd ages ago. She was a wild one. You're definitely comfortable as a wallflower, lurking in the kitchen or on the couch and chatting to anyone who seemed interesting. There's no shortage of alcohol at this party, that's for sure. You're sipping galaxy-ale from a black solo cup with a spider drawing on it. At this particular couch, they were passing around a few joints of solar-haze as well. You're popular amongst this crowd, mainly because your hands function as an emergency lighter when the real thing goes missing. You indulge in a hit or two, eyes bursting with solar energy as you exhale a cloud of glimmering white smoke. Nice. Sitting across from you is a girl from you literature class, Amelie. She's a bubbly cheerleader, and naturally boys are gravitating towards her like flies. She soaks up the attention, smiling and giggling at them until the joint reaches her. Pufffff. Pass. She looks at you and smiles, before standing up to go dance. Heh. Whichever jock she's dating is a lucky guy. You get up yourself, heading to the kitchen in lieu of the dancefloor.

A cluster of jocks are grouped around the kitchen table, and as you mix yourself a drink, you silently watch them. They haven't been paying attention to you. You see the cowjock that sits behind you in sociology mixing his own drink. Half a cup of orange soda, a splash of liquor. And a drop of a mysterious liquid you haven’t seen before. You walk over to get a better view, and upon noticing you, the herd of meatheads goes quiet, quickly stashing the mystery bottle away. Cowjock stands up and exits the kitchen. You have a weird feeling about this.

Following him from a distance, you watch as he makes his way through the crowd and over to Amelie. She's bopping along to the music, sweaty and breathless, and you watch as he passes her the drink the boys had just concocted in the kitchen. Your heart sinks. Shoving your way through the crowd (and receiving an earful of grunts and complaints as you do), you barely make it in time as the rim of the cup touches her lips. Not knowing what else to do, you bring your hand down and SLAP it out of her hands.

“DON’T!--” It spills on the both of you. She gasps as the ice cold liquid soaks her dress. “--d-don’t drink that. It's not what you think it is.”
She's staring up at you, mouth agape, and she's not the only one. The whole room is looking at the scene you just caused. Cowjock looks furious.

Cowjock exclaims, “What the fuck is your problem!?” He puts his arm in front of Amelie, who trots back in her heels and distances herself from you. Her cheer team friends quickly usher her to the bathroom, leaving you alone with this angry jock and all eyes on you. You glare at him defiantly.

“Look. Whatever it was you were trying to pull there, it’s not cool.” You hiss. “What was in that cup??”

He realizes everyone is listening in. “Nothing!! You can ask my team!! It's just tornado-punch. You're a crazy bitch!!”

Now your jaw is gaping. Did he just say that?? Before you even realize it, you've already brought your hand down across his cheek with a SMACK that resonates across the room. Somebody must've turned the music down, all you hear are murmurs now. Cowjock turns red, practically steaming from the ears as he lunges at you. You brace for impact, but his friends jump in and hold him back, and someone from the crowd grabs your arm as well. You turn, your friend Jessie is looking at you.

“Ettie…” She sounds a little mad at you. “You need to calm down.”

You look back at the jock squad, all glaring daggers at you. Every other person has a judgmental look on their face. They're whispering to each other. You huff, yanking your arm away from her. Your face is prickling with the urge to cry, but you're not gonna give people the satisfaction.

“Fine. I'll be outside if you need me.” You say as you hurry out to the back porch, taking a bottle of Rainbow Vodka off the bar table with you. Everyone stares as you leave, but once you close the door behind you, the music starts bumping again.

You give a heaving sigh as you plant yourself down on the porch steps. It's quiet out here, the cool fall air a welcome relief from the sticky main room. You take a swig of vodka, and then another for good luck. Urgh. You were never going to get invited anywhere again. You bury your face in your palms, consumed with conflicting feelings of regret and righteousness. You knew something had been wrong. You couldn't prove it, but your gut told you so. You hope you did the right thing. You take another swig.

You hear the rustling of someone sitting beside you. Weird. You didn't hear the back door open.

“Rough night, firecracker?”

That voice sounded familiar. Professor Vee? Couldn't be. You look over, stomach dropping into your ass as you realized who it was. He's smirking at you with razor sharp teeth, shadows concealing the rest of his face, as always. You don't move just yet. The porch was the safest place to be right now, if an altercation happened you could run inside for help.

“You…!” You had only just recovered fully from your last run in with this freak. You stand to go back inside, a little wobbly now that you've been going solo with the bottle.

“Ettie. Wait.”

You freeze. He really does scare you, now that you know what he's capable of.

“I'm sorry for hurting you last time we saw each other. To be honest, you were quite scary.” He cooes. You raise an eyebrow. You somehow doubt that he's telling the truth. You sit back down, against your best judgement.
“I'm not in the mood for another hickey, if that's why you're here.” You slur, squinting at him.

“I apologize for that too. I had to subdue you before you got out of hand.” He chuckles, before pausing. You fidget with the hem of your dress, and he quietly hums;

“You should go back in there and finish what you started.”


“Nah?” He takes the bottle from you, sipping it. “Eugh. Who makes this stuff?”

“I dunno man. It's better with a chaser. But yeah. Nah. People are already mad at me.”

“So? You think he's going to stop at one attempt? If not the one girl, why not another?”

You think about it. Ugh. You hate how right he is. “It must take a creepy weirdo to know a creepy weirdo.”

“Hey.” He hands you the bottle back and puts a hand on your thigh. You stare at it, too tipsy to protest. “I'm not that creepy.”

You snort. Like full on drunken snort. “You're a fucking riot dude. ‘Not creepy’. Ha!” You remember the topic at hand. “But seriously. He's a football player. I'm not gonna fight him.”

“You fought me.”

“And lost.”

“I promise you, you won't lose to him. Let me show you something. Give me your hand.”

You hold it out for him. He takes the vodka bottle and pours it over your palm.

He smirks. “Now do your thing.”

You concentrate, heating your palms and then-- WHOOOSH. Your hand ignites, a mini flame roaring hot in your palm.

“Dude--!” You clench your hand, and the fire engulfs your fist. It doesn't hurt like you think it should. It just feels warm. “Oh my Cob…!?”

He douses the other one for you, and you light it. This is SO cool.

“Doesn't that feel good?” he practically purrs. “Kick the door open. It makes a good impression. Intimidation is half the battle.”

He's a good hype man. You're getting fired up. “Right.” You stand, stumbling a little. “H-hey. Why are you being so nice to me?”

“Because. Not every hero is good, and you can see that. You're going to be someone very special, Ettie.”

What does that even mean. You don't know, but it still made you feel warm and fuzzy inside. Maybe you're just drunk.

“...Thanks.” You head to the door, and bust it open.
“….Atta girl.”

~~~~~~~~~~

The disk scratches and the music shuts off as you enter the room with a bang. Fists-a-blazing, you scan the room.

“COWJOCK!! YOU, ME, RIGHT NOW. POWER BATTLE.”

The crowd audibly gasps before bursting into mumbles, and people step aside to reveal Cowjock, with a too-drunk-to-function girl hanging off of him. He turns to face you, and the girl practically flops onto the floor, half asleep.

“What, you roofie her instead??” you spit, walking up to him, flames growing hotter around your fists. Cowjock looks like a deer in the headlights as the crowd circles around you two to form a ring. Fight! Fight! FIGHT!

You slam your fist into his jaw, and it sizzles as his head twists with the impact. He grunts, before leaning back and head butting you square in the forehead. The force knocks you down, and you roll out of the way as he attempts to stomp on you with his spiked sneaker. The ground cracks where his foot impacts. You quickly stand again, spinning to kick him. It lands, he flies into the snack table, sending an assortment of chips and candy into the air and over the crowd. The crowd is going crazy. Every blow, block and dodge you two make is echoed with a deafening OHHHHHHHHHH! The DJ kicks the tunes again, an aggressive drum and bass track shaking the floor beneath you. Cowjock knocks the air out of you as he barrages you across the room like a football, you squirm in his arm before slamming your still red hot hand down on his shoulder. His cheap costume ignites like a pool of gasoline, and he drops you so that he could stop drop and roll. The crowd goes wild as he struggles out of the costume, left in his underwear. Then, his jock pals dump a bowl of water on him, dousing the flame entirely. The fire alarm is going off. You stand up, and begin to approach him. He crawls backwards, hands in the air as you draw nearer.

“N-no more!!”

Is he crying?? You grab him by the horn.

“Get up!!”

He complies. You hear a clink on the ground. The mystery vial! It was in his underwear! You scoop it up, reading the label.

Extra strength knock-out potion.

You had been right all along. You hold it in the air for the whole room to see. They gasp.

“Take this as a warning!! All of you boys!! If I catch any of you pulling this shit again, you're dead meat!!” You heat the bottle, and the sudden temperature change causes it to shatter in your hands. “And ladies….” You make eye contact with the cheer squad. ”You can do better than these sweaty animals. Ettie OUT.”

You throw deuces as you exit out the front door, grabbing a victory shot and taking it as you leave. You hop on your motorbike, basking in the glow of your victory. Who's the bitch now, Cowjock??
You speed down the road home, starting to feel a little nauseated. You probably shouldn't be driving right now. But. It'll be fine. Almost there. Focus. Oop. Swaying a little. FOCUS. You're holding steady when suddenly, a pothole comes out of nowhere! You slam your front wheel into it and go flying onto the road in front of you, eating shit as you land. You feel something crunch. Fuck!! Fuck!!!!

It takes you a second to come to after your crash. Your head is throbbing. Your stomach churns, and before you can move another muscle, it spontaneously ejects its contents onto the dirt beneath you, shining bright with all colors of the rainbow. Urghhh. You look down at your feet. One is definitely not facing the way it should be. You glance at your bike. The wheel is bent at a 90 degree angle. It's also completely on fire. Then, it explodes.

It never rains, it pours. You fumble for your cellphone, dragging yourself away from your vomit deposit before trying to call Jessie. You can't call the cops. A DUI would ruin your scholarships. It rings… and rings…. And rings. Fuck! You try again. No luck. You don't know anyone else with a vehicle. Except… No. You couldn't…!

Your ankle twinges with pain, and you hiss. FUCK! Alright!!! You pick up the phone again and dial Professor Vee. He was definitely going to fire you for this. But you're drunk and you're scared and stuck in the middle of nowhere…! It was an emergency! You hear it dialing. After the second tone, it picks up.

“Mmf.” You definitely woke him. It's like, 4 in the morning. “Ettie?”


You hear rustling on the other side of the line. “What? Where are you?”

You look around. Hm. “Ssomewhere on Elmwood road. I don't know. I crashed my b-bike and, and I can’t call the cops c-cause--” Your voice cracks and soon you're just kinda making a weird “uuuuu” sound into the phone.

“Ok. It's ok. I'm on my way. Are you alright? Have you been drinking?”

“I--” Hic. “I was at a party, and n-no, I think I broke m-my leg or s-something--” UUUUUUUU. You hear him sigh. Noooooo…! He’s disappointed in you….!! You're practically bawling.

He stays on the line. “Ok, ok. Sit tight. Don't mess with it and don't try to stand on it. I'll be there soon.”

You stop talking, the lump in your throat hurts too much. Your breath stinks. He's going to hate you after this. You can hear him fumbling and moving on the other end of the line. You lay back in the dirt and just keep crying. Your leg hurts so damn much. It feels like you're going to die out here.

“Ettie? I'm on Elmwood.”

You sit up again, wiping your face the best you could. You see headlights in the distance. A fancy white convertible pulls up, and out steps Professor Vee. He's in a pair of navy pajama bottoms and a black tank top. He kneels down beside you and examines the damage. He glances at the puke puddle.

“Hm. Rainbow vodka?”
You sniffle and nod.

“I'm going to pick you up, ok?”

You nod again. You're a mess. There's vomit on your shirt. He gently works his arms under you and stands up again. You can feel his muscles flex as he supports you. His dreamy… dreamy muscles. This is the only good thing about what had happened tonight. He carefully sets you in the passenger seat and buckles you in. Then, he hits a button on his dashboard, and a tractor beam engulfs the remnants of your bike, towing them behind the car. He's quiet as he starts driving.

“...You wanna talk about it, kiddo?” He offers.

You shake your head.

“Rough night?”

You nod. Your eyes are feeling heavy, and now that you're safe in Professor Vee’s car, your adrenaline burst runs dry, and you conk out.

~~~~~

Your ears are ringing the next morning when you wake up. It takes a second for your vision to focus. You sit up, fumbling for your glasses. This isn't your house. This isn't the outfit you wear wearing last night either. It's a big comfy black shirt. You find your glasses on a glass coffee table, and put them on to properly analyze your surroundings. You're in a neatly decorated living room, with modern art decor and a fancy TV. Seems there's a painting missing from the wall, you can see the paint had changed slightly around where it was. Huh. There's a bucket at your feet. Your left foot is tightly bandaged up. Your stomach churns you're suddenly grateful the bucket is there when you empty your guts into it. BLEHHHH.

A door slides open behind you, and you glance up from the bucket to see Professor Vee.

“Morning, Ettie.” He sits beside you, hitting a button on the coffee table. The bucket is whisked away by a robotic reptile and replaced with a fresh one. He hands you a drink. Blue lazer-aide.

“Drink. You'll feel better.”

You do as you're told, taking small sips.

“I'm not going to lecture you on the dangers of drunk driving. I think you understand. Promise me you won't do it again?”


“Oh?”

“I punched a guy for trying to slip my friend something. Guys hate that shit.”

“Ah.” He sips his own cup of coffee. “You did the right thing then.”

“Yeah. Just because I'm right doesn't mean people like me for it.”

“True. But I respect you for it.”

You could cry. He was being so nice to you.

“I-I'm sorry... f-for being such a hassle.” You're on the verge of tears. You feel a cool hand on your
“Heyyy. It's ok. Don't get worked up.” he starts rubbing circles. It feels nice. “I wasn't always a responsible adult, you know. People make mistakes.”

You sniff, finishing your drink. You set it down, before turning and practically throwing your arms around him. Nobody has ever spoken to you like that before. You try really hard not to cry on him.

“Oh~” He tenses a moment, before relaxing into it. Stroking your hair. You wish you could stay like this forever. But you know better, so you pull off and look away, embarrassed with yourself.

Clearing his throat, he stands up again. “I'll be in the kitchen. You eat meat, right?”

You nod.

“Mmh. I'll bring breakfast out in a minute. Stay off your ankle. I have a rapid healing pack baking in the lab, but it needs another hour or so. Here's the TV remote.”

He turns it on for you, and you flick through the channels as he leaves. He's not gone long, and soon returns with two plates full of bacon, eggs, and buttered toast. Yours is arranged in a smiley face. You smile back at it. Professor Vee catches you and chuckles.

“That works every time.” He sits down next to you and begins to eat. You quietly watch the news and dig in. They're giving an update on Boxmore’s latest plaza attack. Two regular robots and a rat shaped mecha. They put up the mugshots of the villains involved. Boxman, duh. Shannon, Darrell. Ho hum. Hello? Who's this? You squint at the purple figure on the screen when suddenly the channel changes. Cartoons?

“Sorry. Too much of the news stresses me out.” Professor Vee says.

“Oh, uh, no worries. It's your TV.” You like cartoons.

You watch quietly, and when you're done eating, Professor Vee takes your plate to the kitchen with him. He comes back with a strange green blob.

“Show me your ankle.”

You stick it out. He places the green blob on it, it wraps around your leg and soaks in rapidly. The pain dissipates as it does. Soon, you can wiggle your ankle like nothing had ever even happened.

“W-wow…! Thanks..!” you smile over at your professor.

“No problem. Here are your clothes. I had them washed.”

You look at the folded stack on the coffee table, then down at your shirt. Had… had he undressed you? You don't wanna think about it, your cheeks are already heating up. You couldn't be mad if he did, you prefer this over a dirty party costume anyways.

“You're really the best, Professor Vee. You like, totally saved my ass.”

“It's not a problem, Ettie. I would hate for anything bad to happen to my favorite student.”

“I'm your favorite?”

Now he's going red. “Look. I can have favorites if I want to.”
“Hey. I'm not complaining.”

There is no way in a thousand years you would ever, ever complain about this.
It was the Monday afternoon after the Halloween party, and you had been called into the Dean’s office to discuss the now-viral video of you beating the tar out of Cowjock. As you approach the office, Cowbitch in the flesh is leaving, and he glares at you as you pass him. You left a nice little red mark where you punched him.

You knock before entering, and the Dean looks up at you, tapping a pen on her desk. She's a bug eyed mantis woman in a frumpy librarian outfit.

“Ah. Ms. Rauchen. Have a seat.”

You oblige, settling into the chair in front of her.

“You understand why you've been called in here, right?”

“To discuss how Cowjock attempted to sneak multiple girls a sleeping potion at that party?”

Her brow furrows. “Can you prove that? According to the football team, it was a Halloween prop.”

You scoff. “It wasn't a prop! He tried to spike Amelie Jones’ drink, and I'm pretty sure he literally did drug Jessica Stone.”

“We spoke to Amelie, you knocked the drink down before she could drink it, correct?”

“Correct.”

“And Jessica Stone says she doesn't remember that night at all.”

“Probably not, she was roofied.” Where is she going with this….?

“Or perhaps she was just drunk. Were you not drunk that night too, Ms. Rauchen?” She taps her pen to emphasize.

“A little.”

“So it’s possible you might have jumped to some ill-informed conclusions?”

Is she serious?? “What?? No! I know what I saw! You can ask anyone.”

“Mh. Now, accusations like this are very serious, you know. Cowjock is our star athlete. If this hit the media, it would cause a scandal.”

“Good! Girls need to know about him!”

“It would really have a negative effect on the Avenue Academia image, as well, considering it happened with an affiliated fraternity.”

“Isn't that the point??”

“My point is, the only real evidence of assault I see in the video is you attacking Cowjock. You wouldn’t want us to enact our disciplinary policy for one-sided power battles, correct…?”

It takes you a second to process what shes saying. A disciplinary strike would void your scholarship.
You would have to drop out.

“Are…. Are you threatening me?”

“All I'm saying, is that if we keep the party gossip to a minimum- meaning none at all, then everybody can continue on with a clean record, yourself included.”

“You want me to cover up the story.” Your palms are itchy. You want to slap this woman. “For the sake of college sportsball?”

“Correct. Do we have an agreement…?”

You're quiet for a minute. You still have two semesters before you graduate. You've come too far to lose it now. You glare up at the Dean.

“......we do. But I just want you to know that what you're doing is evil.”

“Mh. If you see things in black and white. I do what's best for my school, Ms. Rauchen. You're a part of that school.” Her gross mouth parts move as she talks.

“No, I understand.” You stand up, feeling disillusioned. You know you had done the right thing that night. You can't believe how this went down. “I won't cause trouble.”

You leave the office, rage visible on your face as you head to the main exit. As you do, you're barely looking where you're going, and end up bumping into someone. Oof.

“S-sorry.” you stammer, stepping around them. You feel a hand on your shoulder.

“What's the hurry?”

You spin. Professor Vee…! You wish you could hug him, but you don't wanna stir campus gossip about you. There's enough of that going around as is.

You sigh. “I… I just had a really shitty day. I wanna get outta here.”

“Ah. I was just about to leave, myself. Are we still on for our workout today?”

You think. It would be a good outlet for all these feelings. “Yes.”

“Would you like a ride to the lab?”

“....yes.” Beats taking a ride share with a sweaty weirdo.

“Come along then.”

He leads the way, and you follow. You loved following this man. His glutes were so toned.

You take the passenger seat. This car was so cool. He puts the roof down and you feel so fancy. It makes you feel a little better. As you drive, you explain to Professor Vee. what had happened.

He sighs. “My sympathies, Ettie. You're learning that even the 'good guys' in our society are as corrupt as our villains.” He speeds up on the highway, and the wind rushes through your hair. You relax into your seat.

“It's whack. They act like he won't do something worse next time.” You sigh back.
“They’ll be stuck with the ramifications of that.”

“So will whatever girl he inflicts himself on.”

He remains quiet, turning up the radio.

“Try not to dwell on it. It isn't your responsibility.”

You don’t respond. You try and focus on enjoying the ride. The music is a fast paced classic rock track, perfect for cruising. You glance at your Professor out the corner if your eye. You really wouldn't expect someone who mostly dresses in baggy sweaters and poindexter glasses to be this cool. Go figure. It isn't long before you reach the lab.

You hop out and head in to change into a test suit. They're really comfortable, and don't get all gross and sweaty like regular gym clothes. When you emerge, you find Professor Vee already doing his cardio in the lab gym. Huff huff. He's wearing cute little gym shorts and a tank top with a snake graphic on it.

“Ettie, go open the box on the counter there.” He directs, breath heavy.

You do. Inside the box is a pair of athletic shoes. They look similar to the ones you attempted to steal a week or so ago. They're shinier, and have some sort of tubing laced into their sides. Way sicker than the pair you tried to steal.

“Are these for me?”

“They are. They have monitors so they can adjust to different environments, providing optimum traction in a variety of circumstances. They're also shock and heat resistant. I figured they'd be useful for our training.”

“You're really amazing, you know that, right?”

“It was just a side project, Ettie. No big deal.”

“I appreciate it.”

You put them on. They're beyond comfortable, it feels like you have nothing on at all.

He continues, huffing as he picks up the pace on the treadmill. “I'm working on repairing your heels in the same way. Of course, maintaining the design has its challenges. I hope to have them done by the weekend.”

“You really don't have to…” You feel spoiled.

“With you in the lab I've had free time. It's nice, having time for personal projects.”

You can't argue with that. You get on the second treadmill and begin jogging, working your way up to a faster pace. You try to keep up with your mentor, but he's obviously way fitter than you. Man. You really need to get in shape.

After cardio, Professor Vee leads you to the free weights. He’s shown you ways to use them before, but talks you through it again as you both start doing curls. You're using the smaller dumbbells, struggling to keep up with his regime. He's assured you its custom tailored to your particular needs, though, so you keep chugging along. You watch him as he brings the weight up and down, muscles
flexing with the controlled motion. Ughhhhh. Stupid sexy Professor. You have no business looking the way you do.

“Your form is improving.” He hums, snapping you out of your bicep-induced trance.


He smirks at you. Your heart rate quickens. He doesn't say anything before looking away again and moving into the next rep. You continue mimicking him, thoroughly out of breath by the time you make it through the full workout. He brings you a paper cup of water, and you gulp it down thirstily. So, so thirstily.

“Ahh,” you throw the cup away, “You're gonna kill me with this routine, you know.”

“I'm doing my best to not kill you.” He smirks. “It gets easier. You'll start craving the endorphins.”

“All I crave right now is a burger.”

He gives a quiet huff of a laugh. “If you want, I could drive you home. There's a Burger Bill's on the way.”

“Seriously?” Wow. Professor Vee was the ultimate soccer mom.

“Mhm. I gotta get dinner figured out, anyways.”

“Then yes.” You smile. You really loved this internship. It felt like… like having a best friend. Yeah. You both head out the main lab door, and hop into the convertible. He kicks the tunes as you speed down the highway, this time you're in a cheery enough mood to enjoy it. You pull into the Burger Bill's drive through as the sun is setting. Some greasy teen chirps through the intercom.

“Welcome to Burger Bill's, please try our new thunder-wraps for only a techno…!”

“No thank you, Ettie, what do you want?”

“Oh, ummm, can I get the number 6, please? With cosmic-cola to drink.”

The teen repeats your order back to you, then Professor Vee continues.

“I'd like a combo 8 with lemonade to drink, and a chicken nugget kids meal please. Milk with that, and make sure you put the race-car in the box. Not the dolly.”

You raise an eyebrow at him. You pull forward, waiting for the car in front of you to collect their food.

“.....So. Who's the kids meal for?” you inquire. You assumed he didn't have kids, he never spoke of them.

“Ah. My……niece. I'm…. Babysitting her tonight.” He replies.

“Oh, yeah? How old is she?”

“11 years, 5 months, and 12 days.”

“Wow. You must be really good with birthdays.”
“Heh. You could say that.” He drives forward, swiping his card at the window and taking the food bags, handing you yours. “No eating in the car, please. These seats stain easily.”

“Roger that.” You nod. “How much do I owe you?”

“Hm? Oh, don't worry about it. It's just Burger Bill's.”

“But--”

“Ettie. It’s pocket change. Don't fuss.”

You stop trying to argue. “Well, at least let me say thank you. I'm going to have to repay the favor someday.”

“I'm sure there'll be something you can do for me in the future.” He muses, before sipping his lemonade. It isn't long before you arrive at your house, he unlocks the door for you so you can hop out. You grab your food and head indoors, waving goodbye to Professor Vee. As you close the front door and hear him drive off, you sigh. This handsome man was going to be the death of you.

~~~

The next day, you have your headphones in as you're walking to class. You hate being here. You hate everyone at this stupid school. Except Professor Vee. But you hardly ever see him here anyways. So he doesn't count. You continue on to your practical design class, draft book in hand, when someone grabs your shoulder from behind. You gasp, startled, nearly, dropping your books as you spin around to defend yourself from--- Oh. It's just Amelie. Staring up at you from her wild puff of hair, held out of her face by two winding ram’s horns. You pull your ear buds out.

“Hey! I'm so sorry! I've been chasing you down the hallway, I didn't realize you couldn't hear me!” She beams up at you. You never realized just how short she was compared to you.

“Oh, no, my bad..!” You felt intimidated speaking to this bubbly popular girl. Why is she speaking to you? Everybody hates you at this school.

“You still go by Ettie, yeah?” She extends her hand, and you shake it.

“Right. You're Amelie...?” You reply.

“I am!” She smiles again. Fuck. She's so cute. You want to squish those chubby cheeks of hers. “I wanted to say thank you. That party was super crazy, and, what you did for me and Jessica was really cool.....” She rubs her arm. “I know the school thinks we were just misunderstanding the situation.... But, if you hadn't have been there, I really think something baa-aad would've happened.”

You blink at her. Oh my cob. You had thought she was mad after you splashed punch all down her outfit that night. “I... I think so too. I would've done the s-same for anyone, you don't have to thank me.”

“I'm sorry you got in trouble for it.”

“No, no. That's not your fault. It happens, you know?” You don't want her to feel bad. You would
kill anyone who made this adorable sheep sad.

She twiddles her thumbs. “Well…! I'm really glad somebody had our baa-acks. I was wondering if after class, you'd wanna come hang at the plaza with me…?”

Oh. Oh. Is she asking you to spend time with her?? Why?? “I--” You weren't prepared for this. “I would love to…!” Way to sound overly eager, dorkus!! You're gonna weird her out!

She bursts into a electric smile. “Great!! I'll meet you in the courtyard at 6, ok??”

“Got it…!” You nod, smiling back at her. What… what was this feeling…? Could it be… friendship?

Amelie runs off down the hall and you continue making your way to class. Heh.

Maybe you didn't hate everyone after all.
Bad Girls

Class had just let out, and you're waiting in the courtyard to go hang out with Amelie. You're still a little shell shocked at the invitation, you hadn't expected her to have appreciated your clumsy rescue, let alone appreciate it enough to want to physically hang out with you. You're sure she has better options…. Maybe this was just a pity thing…? That would make sense. You tap your foot as you wait. Where is she…? Maybe she forgot. Or, worse, maybe she decided she'd rather do anything but hang with a social reject like yourself. Maybe you should just leave…?

You pick up your backpack and pull up your rideshare app on your phone. It's ok, you have plenty of shows to watch in your nice, warm bed with your nice, warm cat. No biggie! You aren't even upset. You're about to hit “Summon” on the app when you hear something from behind you.

“ETTIEEEE!!”

You turn and see a small blur of fluff and designer clothing barreling at you at breakneck speed. Amelie! She skids to a halt in front of you, nearly teetering over as she does, but quickly regaining her balance.

Huffing for breath, she smiles up at you. “Ettie!! Sorry I'm-” Huff, “Late!! Class ran over. Professor Baaa-arns is a dick.”

Oh. Oh! You really thought she had bailed. “N-no worries! It's not a problem..!”

“I'm glad I made it before you left..!” She smiled. “We should trade numbers so that I can text you next time.”

She hands you her phone, and you tap in your digits, adding the moon emoji by your name. She shoots you a text, and you save hers with a little sheep and a little bow next to it.

“Perfect!” She grins, taking your hand. You feel your face flush. “Plaza time! I'm driving!”

She pulls you along to a cute little pink beetlecarr, opening the passenger door for you. You hop in, settling onto the fuzzy pink seat covers. You really couldn't believe that girls like Amelie exist, yet here we are.

“You feel your face flush. “Plaza time! I'm driving!”

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“There's a cute car.” You muse at her as she buckles in.

“Well, the radio is on button. A Kaktus Krew song begins blasting at a deafening volume. She quickly turns it down. Your heart is thunking a mile a minute.

“Sorry! I'll change it…!” She goes to eject the CD.

“W-wait!” You stop her. “I…. I like this song.”

She tilts her head at you, before smiling. “Really?”

“Y-yeah! They don't really make alternative like this anymore…! Everything is just kinda sad and whiny now. I like how… how angry these guys are..!”

“Ohmicob!! Yes!! You totally get it! Jessica hates when I play them but, like, it's total poetry!” She turns it back up, pulling out of the parking lot and singing along. Her bubbly voice contrasts the gritty tone of the music. Fuck. Does she even realize how adorable and non-threatening she is. It's
like a bag of marshmallows had a baby with a Pomeranian. You're not brave enough to sing along with her, but you tap your hands along to the drums, thoroughly enjoying the ride. It feels like no time at all before you reach the plaza.

It's a busy Friday evening when you pull up, and Amelie insists your first stop be the @Cafe.

“If you don't have an iced coffee to-go while you cruise the plaza are you even living?” She asks you.

“Hm. I guess not.” Hey. You like coffee as much as the next sleep deprived college student.

You receive your drinks, and offer to buy Amelie's. She accepts.

“Tha-aaanks!” She bleats as you swipe your card.

“No problem…!” You nervously smile down at her. You really like having a friend who isn't your professor. Or your cat. You can not fuck this up.

She sips her drink as she leads you back out to peruse the stores. As you browse the storefronts, you glance over at the menacing, heavily-armed factory opposite the plaza. Huh. That looks like Professor Vee’s car parked outside. Before you have time to dwell on it, you hear a whistling from the sky. You look up. A box is rapidly descending towards you and Amelie, who's off in her own world right now. Huh….? OH!

“Move!!” You jump to tackle Amelie out of the shadow of the box, and you feel it thunk mere inches behind you, shattering the asphalt around where it landed. Scooping up Amelie - and her coffee cup, you make a break for the safety of one of the alleyways. You duck behind an empty crate with your fuzzy companion, setting her down gently.

“Are you ok?? You didn't get hit, did you?” You had a scrape or two from the rubble that went flying. You look over, the box is hissing open. Inside is a limited edition Big Raymond. He's about double his usual size. The bodega workers hurry out to destroy him.

“No, no, I'm fine…!” Amelie is gazing up at you with starry-eyes. “You saved me…!”

“No I didn't…! I couldn't let us get smooshed...!”

“You could've just bailed…!”

“Well, that would've been really lame….!”

“Well, you're not lame! You're a hero!!”

“I… I'm not!- But thank you for saying so!”

She peeks out over the crate, and you look the same way. They're really wailing on that robot. In the background, you see someone exit Boxmore and hop into that white convertible. You squint. The man is purple like your mentor, but he's dressed differently. No glasses either. He's also accompanied by a little green child. Huh. Must be a popular convertible model. You go back to looking at the plaza fight as the car drives off. It isn't long before Raymond is launched back from whence he came. BOOM!! You and Amelie cheer with the rest of the plaza as the bodega employees soak it up. Then, everyone resumes business as usual.
“Wow, that was crazy.” Amelie hums, stepping out of the alley. “Let’s go to La Bougerié next!”

You’ve never been in there before. It’s definitely a rich people store. You are not a rich people.

You follow Amelie through isles of fancy decor and luxury outfits before she settles down in the shoe isle. She examines many pairs of shoes, before gasping. She’s holding up a pair of strappy crystal heels that look utterly impractical, but very shiny.

“They’re perfect!” She bleats with excitement. She looks for a worker. Spotted! “Excuse me, sir? How much are these?”

The well dressed man scoffs, eyeing her from head to toe, then eyeing you as well. “If you have to ask, you shouldn’t be holding ze shoes. Give zem to me.”

He takes them from her hands, and sets them back on their shelf with a hmmmph. Then, he walks away.

“Wow.” You can’t even believe it. “That was beyond rude.”

Amelie is googling the price on her phone. “He’s right… those shoes are worth more than my tuition this semester.”

You feel a plot bubbling inside of you. “Amelie. Go ask that man about signing up for their rewards program. I need you to keep him busy for five minutes, then meet me outside by Gar’s, ok?”

“Why?” She chirps up at you.

“Just trust me. Go now, while he’s in the far aisle.” You push her gently in his direction. She stumbles over his way, and follows your instruction beautifully. Ahhh. She’s a natural. You quickly swipe the shoes, slipping behind display cases and mannequins. Dodging the line of sight of cameras that line the ceiling. The door has sensors on it, so you carefully pull one of the vent panels off and slip out that way, covering your tracks carefully. When you get outside, you stuff the shoes in your backpack and casually wait by the bodega.

A minute later, you see Amelie leaving the store.

She trots up to you. “What was that all about?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute. Let’s go inside.” You lead her into the bodega. “I wanna grab some snacks.”

You load up on your favorites. Amelie stuffs her basket with flaming cheesems and strawberry soda. You both get a plate of nachos.

“Wanna get a case of cosmic-ale?” She hums.

“I’m not 21 yet…”

“I am!”

“Oh. Then yes..!”

You head to the front and make your purchases.

“I know a great spot to eat this at. Here. Hold the food and I’ll hold you.”

“…ok!” She’s so agreeable. You hadn’t expected that. You scoop her up and use the closed dumpster
to double jump up onto the roof of the bodega. The sun was just starting to set. You settle down, facing the forest.

“Oh, wow, Ettie…! This is a great spot! Look at the view!” Amelie is beaming. You eat a nacho.


“Check it out.” You unzip your bag, tilting it towards Amelie. She peers in, and her jaw drops.  

“No way…! Did…. Did you steal these??”  


“W-well, the guy was being really snotty about it…” You try to justify yourself to her.

“For me??” She's grinning from ear to ear as she launches herself at you, wrapping you in a vice-tight hug. You hadn't expected this. She's warm, and soft. Her hair smells like cotton candy. You don't know what to do with your hands so they just kinda stick out awkwardly until she pulls away.

You take a moment before clearing your throat. “Well, yeah. I wouldn't be able to walk in these.” You smile at her.

“Man, security was tight in there, how'd you pull it off??”

“A magician never reveals her secrets.” You hum, sipping your drink. You're starting to feel comfortably buzzed. “Don't tell anyone, ok? Word gets around quick.”

“GOTcha. Ettie and Amelie, partners in crime..!” She giggles, extending her hand. You take a second to realize what she's doing before shaking it. Heh. You'd have never expected her to be this cool. She finishes her drink and tosses the can into the dumpster below the building.

You don't say much as you both munch away at your snacks, occasionally chirping some gossip at each other. She asks what you think of the Boxmore bots. You say that Shannon is your favorite, but Raymond is a close second. She thinks Jethro is unappreciated in his time. Out of the corner of your eye, you notice motion in the woods. Hm. You stare out. Nothing.

“What's looking at?” Amelie inquires.

“Oh, nothing. Thought I saw a dinosaur.”

“Oh, ok.” She sips her drink.

A few minutes pass before you see a blur in the woods again. Your head spins, and you’re certain you saw a man this time. Nooooo...! Not now!! You're having fun…!!

“Amelie. I think you should head home.” You try to figure out an excuse. “I… I have to do something before I leave. But. I think it's risky being here too long with the shoes.” Not technically a lie. Your shadow man has snatched shoes before.

“O-oh?” She looks up at you. “You don't want a ride home??”

“No, no, I got it…! I, I think they're gonna take inventory soon, so, you need to skiddadle.” You help her off the roof forcibly, taking care to not manhandle her too much.

“Ok, ok. You're fine though, right? I didn't weird you out??” She bleats.
“What? No!” How could she ever make that assumption about herself. She's the perfect woman!
“You're great. This was fun, I just, I have a bad feeling. You need to leave.”

“Well, let me just--” She hugs you. “Ok! Text me when you get home safe, ok??”

Your heart is fluttering. “I will…!”

You watch her from the roof as she hurries to her car. Nyoom. You breathe a sigh of relief, turning
to gather your things and head out yourself, nearly having a heart attack in the process. The shadowy
figure is leaned on the air conditioning unit right by where you had been sitting. You jump upon
seeing him.

“Jeez!! Do you ever take a day off??” You hiss at him.

He breaks into a toothy grin. “No. Who's your new pet?”

“Pet? She's my friend, jerkhole.”

“Ah. Your friend. I see how it is.” His tone is mocking.

“You gotta problem with that?”

“None at all. Though, I do take issue with your absence these past few weeks. Have you given up
the life of vice?”

“I was never about that life in the first place.”

“Nonsense. I saw you take those shoes.” He hums.

“So? The shop is insured. They'll be fine.” A victimless crime couldn't be considered evil.

“Ah. I see. Well, I've missed you,” He steps closer. You get into a defensive stance. “And our little
game of cat and mouse.”

“I'm not fighting you, creep.” You step back. He follows, backing you into a corner. Fuck!

“Then I'm free to do as I please?” He blocks you in with his arm. You feel your face grow hot. You
haven't had any…. intimate attention since freshman year at Academia Avenue. You'd be lying if
you said you weren't semi-enjoying this. That's just your ego talking though, and maybe those
cosmic ales you had. This guy is a weirdo!

“I didn't say that…!” You put an arm in front of your chest to block him as he leans forward.

“So you are fighting me.” He cooes. You feel his breath on your hair as you struggle to push him
back. He grabs your wrist and pins it against the wall. You shove him with the other hand, and soon
he pins that as well. Panicking, you swing your leg as hard as you can directly into his groin.

“AURRGH--” He crumples to the ground. Was that even a human noise he just made? He's hissing
and rattling beneath his cloak, balled up on the ground, hands clutching his groin.

“What did you think I was going to do? Gasp breathily and wait to be ravaged??” You kick him
again him for good measure. “Get a clue!!”

It takes him a second to choke out his response. “Fuck!! I get it! You're not into the whole sexy rivals
thing!! But jeez, that was a low blow…!!” Hisssss.
“Yeah, almost as low as harassing girls in alleyways and spooky forests!”

“Point taken!!” He writhes slightly. “You can leave!”

“Oh, no, I'm enjoying this.” You've taken your phone out to film him. You kick again. He winces. “Is this sexy??” KICK KICK.

“Enough!!” He shouts. He grabs your foot and yanks, pulling you down to his level. Your phone clatters to the ground as you wrestle for dominance, ultimately ending up pinned face down on the ground. He is very sure to pin your legs this time. “You only get so many lucky breaks, you know!” He grinds your face into the dusty concrete beneath you.

“I'll scream!! I'll scream so loud the whole plaza will hear it!!!”

“Do it then!”

You gasp for air and… and. You don't scream. You don’t want him to stop.

He chuckles at you, tightening his grip on your hair. “Hm. I can't hear you, Ettie.”

You don't respond. _Come on_. You want to see what he'll do next.

“Cat got your tongue?” He muses, yanking you up and flipping you on your back, hands held above your head. He wedges his knee between your legs. You wriggle weakly in 'protest'. Honestly, you haven't been this turned on in your life. You'd rather eat your own tongue than admit that, though. His free hand grips your waist, and you give a breathy gasp and await your ravaging. You can't believe yourself right now. There was no way you wouldn't regret this. But your dumb horny brain isn't thinking. You want it. So, so badly. He leans in, hand snaking up your shirt and cupping your breast gently. You huff, squirming slightly as he squeezes, claws digging into your skin. You can feel his breath on your lips as he--

“HEY!!!” A gravelly, masculine voice slams into your eardrums with alarming intensity. “WHAT ARE YOU KIDS DOING ON MY ROOF??”

The shadowy figure jumps off of you and flees into the woods faster than you can process, and you look over to see Mr. Gar in the flesh, barging towards you.

“HEY, LADY!!!!! ARE YOU OK???”

His footsteps thunder as he approaches. Shit!! SHIT!! You're terrified of this big burly man. You grab your things and jump off the roof, disappearing into the shadows almost as fast as your attacker had. Nope!! You don't stop running until you're halfway across the plaza, and then you quickly summon a ride home on your phone and get the heck out of dodge. Fuck!! FUCK!! Why'd someone have to come rescue you???

You ponder that last thought. Are you ok in the head? What kind of weirdo gets off on being stalked? You, apparently. Cob. You're a freak. Maybe it's a good thing you were interrupted. You stare out of the window of the car. Sigh. What a day. You text Amelie when you get home, letting her know you hadn't died. She sends you a smiley emoji with confetti and you smile at your phone. Amelie really was a peach. You settle into bed- after feeding your hungry cat, of course. Exhausted from today's events, you soon drift off to sleep.
You're testing samples in the lab today. You were put on microscope duty, meaning you have to check each slide of the latest sample batch for interesting cellular mutations. You haven't found anything abnormal yet. Sigh. You can't keep your mind off of last night. You were really feeling some type of way. Before, you just hated the creep that stalked you after hours, but now, you weren't so sure. You could still feel his hands on you, his breath as he leaned over you-

“Ettie.”

You blink back to reality. Hm? Professor Vee is at your desk.

“Earth to Ettie. You've been chewing your pencil for the last 3 minutes. Is everything ok?” Professor Vee settles on the lab stool across from yours.

Your cheeks go a little red. “Yeah, I'm fine. Just, thinking, ya know?”

He scans your face. “About what?”

“Just. This guy I keep running into.”

“Ah. Boy troubles?” He smirks. Your face grows hot.

“No! It's not like that!” You protest. Even though it is very like that. “I, I think I have a nemesis. Or something.”

“Oh? Explain.”

“Well, you remember when I got bit? Same guy. It's weird, half the time I can't tell if he's trying to fight me or fuck me.”

He looks bemused. You're dying on the inside. “Ah. Well. It's actually quite common for rivalries to spawn sexual tension. Especially between villains.”

“W-well. Even if I was interested, which I'm not, I'd be more interested in actually winning a fight with him for once. He keeps tossing me around like I'm a damn ragdoll.” You frown. You hated how weak you were. What was all this training for??

“Hm. Perhaps a little combat training is in order. I'll swap it into your current regime… This mysterious man, what does he look like?” Professor Vee has his clipboard ready.

“Umm… kinda hard to tell in the dark. Off white skin. Maybe a little taller than you, you can't see his face but he has fanged teeth. Probably some sort of animal morph.”

He jots it down, smiling. “And, how strong would you say your violent casanova is, from 1 to 10?”

“If you call him anything along those lines again I'm quitting. Probably a 7 or an 8.”

Scribble scribble. “Excellent. Give me a strand of your hair.”

“What?”
He leans over and plucks one off your sweater. “I'll explain in a minute. Come to the rapid genetic-incubator with me.” He leads the way.

The machine itself is as tall as you and three Etties wide. It is connected to a giant bio-tank, big enough to house all sorts of creatures. Professor Vee starts adjusting dials. Two drawers slide out. He deposits your hair in the one, and then spits into the other. One final check on the settings, then he presses enter on the machine. Into the tank, a metallic skeleton is deposited.

“A collaboration between myself and one of my more robot savvy friends. The skeleton provides a frame for rapid genetic development. A fully fledged creature can be baked in about 4 hours.” He pats the glass, very proud of his creation.

“That's real neat, Professor, but why was I sampled for this?”

“I'm generating a training dummy for you. I provided the base DNA, though the strength and intelligence factor is all programmed into the robot brain. For safety purposes, I can disable the skeleton at any time. Your hair provides the skeleton with a bio-signature, meaning the beast will have one purpose - Fighting you.” Man. Professor Vee could really get into the whole crazy villain racket, giving speeches like that.

“You're crazy. Are you sure this is like, safe?”

“Positive. I use them all the time.”

“Is it ethical?”

“They're not sentient, Ettie.”

Hmmmmm. “Ok, ok. So I'm gonna fight whatever comes out of this tank?”

“Correct.”

Sounds spooky.

Professor Vee’s phone begins to ring. He picks up.

“Hello?” He listens, then frowns. “What do you mean, expulsion effective immediately?? ….A pressure bomb?? Where did she get a rice cooker?? Who was supervising? What am I paying you people for!!” He is literally yelling into the phone. You've never seen him angry before. It's kinda hot. “You're the last school in Lakewood that will take her-- No! You listen to me-- Hello??”

He looks at the phone. “They hung up on me…!” He looks at you. “Get your coat, we’re going for a drive.”

You blink at him, before doing as you're told. You don't also wanna be yelled at. “Um. What was that all about?”

“My... niece. She's obviously not being stimulated properly by these idiotic caretakers. I mean, if she were being watched, she wouldn't be blowing up the girls bathroom, would she?” He’s irate. “Not a single school that caters to budding protegees. I was 14 before I built my first pressure bomb! She's light-years ahead of her learning milestones!”

You smile at him. Aw. As weird as it was, it was cute how defensive he got over his.. maniacal niece.
“So… are you her main caretaker?”

“Currently, yes. Her… ‘father’ travels a lot.”

“That's really cool of you.” You knew how it felt to have parents absent from your life.

“It's just decent. She's really amazing. A chip off the old block.”

The drive is calming him down. He turns up the music, and you take that as your cue to be quiet and enjoy the ride. It's about 10 minutes more before you pull up at Budding Minds, a school for children ages 8 to 13. The fire department and the police are both pulled up outside. You follow Professor Vee in through the main entrance, and over to the disciplinary office. Sitting outside on a little bench is a green mouse girl in a cute little school uniform. Hey. Wait a minute. You know this girl!

“Ettie, this is Fink, Fink, this is Ettie. My intern I was telling you about.”

Fink glares up at you as you give a little wave at her. “The psychology experiment?”

Professor Vee frowns at her. “Don't call her that. She's a volunteer for our villains reform project. Maybe I should experiment on you, instead, terror.”

“No!!” Fink protests.


You shuffle awkwardly. This chair you had sat in was clearly made for children. “So, Fink…. Professor Tile?”

“Shut up, fart munch! You fell for it!”

Wow. She is so rude. “Hey, hey, what's with the attitude? I'm just making conversation.”

“Well, don't!”

You go quiet. Wait. You're not taking orders from a 10 year old. “…You know, my mom used to build bombs. Really big ones.”

“…And?” She looks intrigued.

“And I used to help her test them. She’d let me light the fuses.”

“What's the biggest thing you've exploded?”

“An 18 wheeler. We shot it 50 feet in the air.”

“….that's pretty sick. For a fart munch.”

You both go quiet as you hear muffled yelling from behind the door. You hear your Professor going at it with the administrator for a solid 3 minutes before he storms out.

“Fink. Ettie. Let's go.” He’s talking like he hadn't just blown a gasket in there.

You follow him to the car, where Fink tries to claim the passenger seat.

“Fink. You know the drill. Adults get front seat.”
She pouts, grumbling to herself. “Your girlfriend gets the front seat.”

“**Fink.**” He looks at you apologetically. “Kids, you know. They're crazy.”

You laugh nervously. “Yeah, I guess so.” You avoid children at all costs in your day to day life. They're weird and sticky.

He begins driving. “Well, Fink. You got expelled in record time. I really don't know what to do with you.”

“Guess I'll have to be home-schooled again!” She beams.

“I guess I physically have no choice.” He hums. “Unless I send you to boarding school.”

Her face falls. “No!! I don't wanna go to boarding school!”

“I don't know, I already bought the box to mail you off in.”

“B-but, Boss!! What about our evil plans??”

He chuckles, looking over at you like ‘this kid, amirite?’

“Guess I'll have to turn over a new leaf!” He laughs.

“I'll be good, I promise!”

He chuckles. “Ok. Maybe I'll save the box.” He pulls into a Burger Bill's drive through. He orders for all of you. Aw. He remembered your favorite combo. He adds a milkshake to each order, and you opt for chocolate.

“Now, Ettie.” He looks over at you. ”This does mean Fink will be joining us at the lab most days.” He sips his shake.

“Uh, that's cool.” You sip as well. Eurgh. You hope she wasn’t annoying. At least she's quiet when she has a milkshake to drink.

“Do let me know if she's distracting you.”

“Will do.”

You pull up to the lab, and all head in.

You go to examine the creature you had started making. It’s semi-formed, slimy lumps of sinew and muscle starting to rope onto the metallic bones. Gross. Professor Vee is gazing at it like it's his pregnant wife.

“Science really is something.” He cooes. “It won't be ready by today. Go ahead and eat. You can head home once you finish your slides. Oh, and could you please connect with me for Techno Transfer? It's easier than writing a check every week.”

You nod. “No problem.”

“We’re eating upstairs. More hygienic.” He leads the way, holding Fink's hand. Ugh. He's so dadly. It's beyond hot. You all end up sitting around a dining room table. Fink is chowing down.
Professor Vee clears his throat. “So. Fink. Why'd you blow up the girls bathroom?”

“Kennedy said it was her groups bathroom, and that a rat-nosed little freak like me could go pee with the boys. Now she's got no bathroom and I got to explode something.” Munch munch munch.

“I see.” Is he not going to scold her? You're not sure if you would, either. “I would've just threatened Kennedy. Given her the old Fink Shakedown.”

“Yeah. Well, I hate that school. Fuck 'em.” She asserts.

Your professor nearly chokes. “Language, Fink.”

You can barely hold back your grin. Man. This kid was a hoot. “I got in trouble for beating kids up in grade school, too.”

“Kids fight. It's natural.” The professor nods. Fink steals one of your fries.

“If you would make me a power suit already I wouldn't have to make bombs.” Fink argues.

“Hey. Christmas is coming, kiddo.”

She rolls her eyes. You finish your food.

“I'm gonna go work on my slides.” You say as you stand. Professor Vee nods at you.

You make quick work of it. It isn't long before your shift ends and you say goodbye to Professor Vee and his tiny ward. She sticks her tongue out at you as you walk out the door. Man. You really need to get a new bike. This rideshare thing was getting annoying.

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You have plans for tonight. Well. Sorta. You get your suit on and let your hair down. Nice. You're cute, it's crazy that you're still single. Though, you do admit your standards are pretty high for a social degenerate. You're not really sure what you're gonna be stealing tonight, you just thought you'd see what was happening at the local bike dealership. You prefer to go when you know the pushy salesman wouldn't be there to bother you. At this point, you have so much money saved up from your internship, you haven't really felt the need to steal anything too risky. The only thing you've been lifting is alcohol. 4 more months and even that would become redundant. Sigh.

You're in and out of the dealership within an hour. Sighhhhh. This whole alter ego thing was starting to get boring. Maybe you should just go home and watch TV. You wonder if you can find anything else to do. You figure you might as well go do some practice climbing in the forest behind the plaza. You remember playing there with your pals in middle school…. And then.. hm. You can't remember if you came here in high school. You honestly can't remember most of high school at all. You did smoke a dumb amount of solar herb senior year though. It was a rough year.

…..You're starting to bum yourself out.

You sneak a bottle of primo-vino from the Plaza on your way to the pit. You're silent as you walk through the forest. It's cold out here. You need a warmer outfit to do illegal things in. After finding your favorite climbing tree from back in the day, you marvel at how small it feels in comparison to
your memory of it. You make quick work of it, perching in the upper branches and making yourself comfortable. You could see the stars clearly out here, and the moon is out in a sharp crescent. Oh moon. You're truly the best friend a girl could ask for. You uncork your wine and take a swig from the bottle. Glug. Glug glug glug. Maybe enough of this would chase away that gnawing feeling of unaccomplishment. It's definitely warming you up. You finish a third of the bottle before hearing rustling on the ground below you.

You peer down, noticing a creepy hooded figure staring into a cellphone screen. He's looking at it, and then looking around confusedly. Is he lost?

“Hey!” You slur down at him “You ok man?”

He looks up, and holy shit. It's your creepy hooded figure!

“Not anymore! Hey, what's the easiest way up there?”

You smile down at him. For the first time in your life, you were actually happy to see him. “Not telling! This is my tree! Get your own!”

“Oh, it's your tree? Well, now I have to get up there.” He leaps impressively up the branches, but he's not as nimble as you are. He almost loses his footing once or twice. You start climbing down to defend your tree from his villainous clutches. Oop. Careful. Spilling your big ol’ wine bottle a little there, Ettie.

“Is that wine??” he looks up at you, and you realize he's probably getting an eyeful of whatever is under your flowy loincloth. You're in a leotard, but like, you don't want him staring…! You sit on the branch again.

“Yeah! Want some? Open wide.” You tilt the bottle over him, and it splashes on his face.

“Aughh--” He holds a hand up defensively. “Are you sober enough to be up 60 ft in the air like this?”

“No.” You take another sip. He's holding the tree trunk like he's afraid of falling. “Why do you care?”

“I don't. But a dead rival is no fun.”

“Why am I your rival? Isn't there some muscled superhero out there for you to antagonize?”

“Oh, plenty. But this is more interesting. You're the anti-hero. Far more dynamic than your typical do-gooder.” He cooes. “Will you come down?”

“What's in it for me?”

“I, nothings in it, just come down so I can actually reach you…”!

“What, can’t get on my level?”

“You're a spritely young lightweight and that branch is barely holding you. I'm not trying to hurt myself.”

“It's holding fine!” You bounce to prove it, and then realize that this was a bad idea when you hear a loud, slow crack. You jump down to the next branch, nearly slipping off as you do, splashing the wine again. Shit.
“Oh, yeah, really stable.” He can reach you now, though you're technically still on the taller branch. “Give me the bottle.”

You hand it to him. He takes a sip, then smacks his lips. Ooooh. Fancy boy knows how to wine taste. “Better than rainbow vodka.”

“True.” You hop down one more and sit on the branch with him. “You gonna beat me up now?”

“Hey. I don't beat you. We tussle. There's a difference. And no. I was going to, but, it seems unfair picking a fight with a drunk girl.”

“What, scared I'll beat you?” You take the bottle back and have another swig.

“Please.” He chuckles. “I'd eat my scarf if you beat me in this condition.”

“Yeah? Is that a challenge? I bet I could.”

“Oh yeah? Bet what?”

“Winners choice. If you lose, I wanna see what's under the hood.”

He smirks. “Is that an innuendo?”

“Your face hood!” You shove him.

“Aa. If I win, you have to do my bidding for a night. Not tonight though. A sober night.”

You think about it. If he means sexual bidding, then this is really a win-win situation for you, regardless of who wins the challenge.

“Deal.” You reach out and shake on it.

“Alright. Let's get in the pit. First one to pin the other wins. Three rounds. Sound fair?”

“Yeah, it does.” You hop from branch branch, quick to reach the ground. Shadowy figure soon lands behind you.

You stand face to face in the pit. “Ready when you are!” You feel hyped. It might be the wine talking, though.

“Alright. Begin!” He comes at you, and you quickly throw up a smoke screen while dodging his attack. You avoid his first few attempts to grapple you, but it's not long before he's in your face again. You hold his arms back as he attempts to grab you, but a sharp kick to your stomach soon has you reeling back to regain your breath. He uses the opportunity to duck down and uproot you by your ankle, pulling your leg into their air and forcing you onto you back. He steps on your shoulder, pinning you down.

“Three, two, one. Round one goes to me.”

You frown up at him. He helps you to your feet, and you dust your ass off before getting back into fighting stance. You throw the first punch this time. He dodges, and you quickly hop out of the way as he spin kicks at you. You need to think fast. You throw more smoke before using the tree behind you as a launch point, descending into your haze and kicking him square in the chest. He topples over, and you get on top of him, twisting his arm behind his back and perching yourself on his ass.

“Three, two, one! Point to me!” You grin, and he writhes beneath you before you let go and step off.
“Ah. Stealth maneuver. You're getting better at this.” He hums. Then, he comes at you, grappling your waist and heaving you into the air. You twist and wrap your thighs around his skull, squeezing his head as you swing back to try and throw off his balance. He teeters for a second, and you roll off, quickly standing up again and making a pass at his ankle. He steps on your hand. You yelp, and he holds his foot there while he grabs you by the shirt, before tossing you across the pit. Your head slams into a fallen tree trunk, and the world flashes white.

A soft, feminine voice calls out to you; “Ettie?? Ettie?!”

Who…. Where are you? You can barely see, but there's a figure silhouetted above you. You recognize her voice.

“M-mom??” You try reach out and touch her, hand brushing against her face. Her really stubbly face. “...Mom?” You blink.

“Ettie.” Her voice is masculine now, and the bright white lights shining in your eye fade. You squint and blink confusedly as the silhouette morphs into that of your rival.

“Ettie, can you hear me?”

He's shaking your shoulder. You suddenly feel very overwhelmed. Your heart is aching, and a tight knot forms in your throat. Hot tears well in your eyes, steaming as they spill down your cheeks. What was happening??

“Hey. Kiddo. Come on, look at me.”

You do. It's definitely not your mom. You suddenly miss her more than you have in years. The tears keep flowing.

“Hey, hey, it's ok, can you hear me?” He feels the back of your head. It hurts, but it's not bleeding or anything. You can barely see with your tears clouding your vision like this.

“I know you've taken worse beatings. What's the matter?” He’s rubbing your back. You shake your head, unable to choke out the words. Maybe you're just drunk and emotional, that would make sense. You try to take a deep breath. It's a struggle.

“That's good, keep breathing.” He dabs at your cheeks with his scarf. “In and out. There you go.”

You're starting to cool off, but your lip is still trembling as you reach up to finish wiping your eyes with your arm. A thick smear of black mascara wipes off as you do. Cob. What a mess. You're a disgrace, Ettie. You slump forward into your enemies arms. He holds you, squeezing gently. You cling to him, desperate for comfort.

“It'll be alright. You banged your head pretty hard there. I think we should take you home.” he murmurs, still rubbing circles on your back. You nod, and he helps you stand up. You're dizzy. He holds you up as you teeter over again, before deciding that carrying you bridal style was more efficient than watching you drunkenly stumble about. You don't protest. He takes you out to a parking lot, unlocking a black SUV style car and gently laying you in the passenger seat. He quietly starts driving. Huh. He knows where you live. This isn't the first time he's taken you home, either. Whatever. He walks you to your front door, picking the spare-key up from under the potted succulent you keep. Man. You forget he's a literal stalker sometimes. After sitting you in your bed, he helps you peel your boots off.
“Sit tight.” He says, before walking into your closet like he owns the place. You don't care. Your head hurts. You just wanna lay down. He reemerges with a pair of comfy shorts and a soft t-shirt from your drawer.

“Here. Get changed. I'll be in the kitchen. Let me know when you're done.”

You do. When you're changed, he comes back in with a glass of water and a plate of microwaved pizza puffs. Your cat follows him in, rubbing affectionately against his leg, before hopping into the bed with you. Shadow man sets the food down for you, and you gulp the water. Seems he fixed himself a glass too. He stands by the bed.

“You… you can sit, if you want.” You offer. He accepts, settling on the edge of the bed. “S-sorry. I ruined the fight.”

“Don't be sorry. You had no control over what happened out there.”

“B-but--”

He holds his finger to your mouth and shushes you. “Eat your pizza puffs. Technically, I won the last round. That's a good fight, in my opinion.”

“Y-yeah?” you cautiously eat a puff. Hot!

“Mhmmm.”

“Guess I'm yours for a night, then.”


He continues. “Get a good night's rest, ok?”

“Mhm.” You nod. He stands to leave. You don't want to be left alone. “W-wait. Can you stay a little longer…? Until I'm asleep…?”

He's quiet. Then, he sits again. “....You're really something, you know that?”

“Why?”

“Eh. Don't worry about it.”

You turn the TV on, setting it to play your favorite animal documentary. “This'll knock me out.” You explain. EarthLand put you to sleep without fail, every time.

“Ah. Very soothing. I'll have to be careful not to doze off myself…” He chuckles. Then, he does something with his watch. Ah. An alarm. “Just in case.” He stretches out next to you. You finish your puffs before scooting in closer. Was snuggling with your rival weird? Probably. Did you care? Nope. It isn't long before you're nodding off, head settling on Shadowy Figure's chest.

You have pleasant dreams that night, for the first time in a long time.
Hey! Just letting y'all know there's fresh art over on hotvenomfic.tumblr.com!
Thank you all for the kudos and great feedback, I'm happy you're enjoying the story so far! I'm excited for things to come.
First Date

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Sorry for a late update, life comes at you fast! Things are settling down again so I should have more time to work on updates. Enjoy!

You wake up to an empty bed. You expected as much, but you still feel a twinge of loneliness regardless. You sit up, yawning, and a squashed piece of paper rolls off of your chest and onto your lap. You unfurl the folded note and squint at it, holding it up so your bad eyes could actually read it.

Ettie,

*Do not forget our bet. I will see you tonight. Be ready by 11, I’m coming to get you.*

Wow. That was vaguely threatening. You're blushing though, this was exciting…. Cob. Was this a date? It felt like one. Your phone buzzes and you grab it. Amelie is calling.

You pick up. “Hello?”

“Heyyyyy!” She bleats. “Wanna hit the plaa-aaza before class?”

“...yes. I just woke up though, gimme a second to get dressed.”

“Ok! I'll be there in 30!”

“Ok!”

“Baah-ye!”

She hangs up. You scramble to find your nice leggings and brush your hair up into a ponytail. You still have last night's eyeliner on, so you smudge it out into a messy smokey eye. Good enough. You feed your fat cat and munch on a granola bar, barely finishing it before Amelie’s beetle pulls up outside. You head out.

“Heyyyyy.” You slide into the fuzzy passenger seat and buckle up.

“Hiiii~” She smiles at you. “How’s it going?”

“Gooood….” you can't help but smirk a little. You're excited about tonight.

“Oh? What's that face?” Now she's smirking too.
“What face??” You go red.

“That face! You're pink!” She leans in. “You get laid?”

Your eyes go wide and you snnnnrk defensively. “Me?? NAHHHH.”

“I know that face!! That's the I got laid face!!”

“I didn't!! Swear on my life!” you're grinning. “I have a date tonight. That's why.”

“OOOOOOH. With who??”

Shit. Fuck. “....a guy. Uhhhh. I met him.... At the gym?”

“You go to a gym?”

“Why is that surprising??”

“What's his name?”

“It’s….. Steve.”

“Steve…?”

“Shadowy Steve. He's .... He's a vampire and doesn't go out during the day. You probably don't know him.”

Amelie is side eyeing you. “Should I be worried?”

“Nahhh, he’s harmless. He does yoga.”

“Ah. Where are you guys going?”

“It's a surprise. But I've been out with him before, I think it'll be good.”

“Ok, well, text me if things get weird, ok?”

“I will!” You wouldn't. But she doesn't need to know that.

“What are you gonna wear?”

“Oh, uh, I have an outfit picked out. But, I kinda wanted to get some new underwear to match it.”

Amelie grins at you again. “OOOOOOH. Ettieee~”

You're bright red. “Stoppppp! You're gonna give me heart palpitations.”

“We should go to Violette's Whispers. Their stuff is so hot.”

“Yeah. We should.”

You've reached the plaza. Amelie parks and you hop out of the car, following her as she trots ahead to the lingerie store. Ughhh. Everything is so cute. And soooo expensive.

“I need something black. Preferably a push up.” You are definitely an honorary member of the itty bitty titty committee. Amelie nods.
“Gotcha. You're gonna be so hot, ok?”

She sifts through piles of different panties, holding up pairs for you to comment on. Ugh. They're all cute. It's hard to choose. You point at two pairs.

“I don't know if I like that one or this one more.”

“Get both!”

“They're 20 technos a pair!”

“Not if you're me!” Amelie glances around before tucking both pairs into her cleavage. You smirk. Heh. Nice to know you weren't the only degenerate in Lakewood.

You move to the next display. “Ok. Well. Let's find a bra.”

You both pick a couple options, and head in to try them on. It takes a few tries, but soon you find something cute and lacy that you know will work with the cut of your costume. You actually pay for the bra, to avoid arousing too much suspicion.

As you hop back into the car, Amelie settles in and pulls your underwear out of her shirt so that you can put it in your bag. Then, she pulls out like, 5 more pairs. You didn't even notice her grabbing them. They're mostly the cute comfy stuff from their Magenta line.

“These are mine. But look!” She hands you a pair. It says ‘friends’ on it. You're confused until you look up and see her holding a pair in her size, with the word ‘best’ on it. Oh my cob.

“You're beyond extra.” You laugh, folding your pair away.

“Hey! I gotta claim you before someone else does.”

“Oh yeah? Why not put a ring on it?”

“Maybe I will.” She waggles her brows at you. You're pink again. “I think I'll give Steve his chance first.”

You snort. “What a gentle-woman you are.”

“Fuck. Class starts in like, 30 minutes.” Amelie peels out of the parking lot and zooms towards campus.

“Ugh. What are you taking this semester?”

“I have language arts with Brett, it's ok. Then I have culinary skills with Cavanaugh, which is the bomb.”

“Ah. Sounds better than my line up. I'm taking stupid filler classes.”

She pulls into a spot, and you get out of the car. “I need to pee, I'll meet you by your locker!”

“Okey!!” Amelie heads inside with you, parting ways at the bathroom. You do your business and then head out into the hall. Amelie is almost at her locker, passing by Cowjock and his cluster of goons. One of them starts whistling at her, and as she ignores them, Cowjock leans over and pinches her on the butt. She yelps, and in a blur of pink fluff, spins around and grabs his hand, pulling him in and head butting his gut.
There's a crash as he slams back against the locker. You see his expression shift from laughing to enraged, and he gives an undignified bellow, raising his arm at Amelie. You shoot down the hall as he swings forward, getting there in time to block the shot. Well. Block it from Amelie. You get backhanded across the face and end up on your ass. You're quick to get up, defending against the next swing by grabbing his wrist and twisting.

“We beating up girls now??” You spit. “Fuck you!!”

You grab him by the horns and bring your knee up into his chest. He wheezes, before tackling you to the hard vinyl floor. Fuck!! He's so heavy!! A crowd is forming around you. He has you pinned, and manages a blow to your face before you wriggle free and press your thumbs into his eyes. You're gonna kill him!! You fucking swear!! He lets out a roar and wraps a meaty fist around your neck. You can't breathe, but you keep squeezing until you feel someone pulling you out from under him. Professor Apple and Coach Brawn were wrestling Cowjock off of you. Your throat starts to open again and you cough, stumbling to your feet and looking up to see Professor Vee behind you, arms locked around yours as you struggle to jerk forward. You're not done!!

“Ms. Rauchen. That's enough.” He yanks you back. “Come. We're going to the infirmary.”

You stop struggling when you see them pull out the emergency tranquilizer gun and aim it at Cowjock. Fuck. Fuck that guy. You cough again, your throat is aching. Professor Vee holds your arm as he guides you away from the crowd and over to the nurse's office. He's silent as he does. Your stomach twists, is he mad at you?

“P-professor.” Your voice is strained, it's hard to talk with your throat like this.

“Ettie.” He keeps walking.

“I-I'm sorry.”

He stops, turning you around to face him. You can't read his expression, it's so cob-damn neutral. He sighs.

“No. You shouldn't be sorry.”

“B-but-” You knew fighting wasn't allowed here.

“But nothing. You were fighting in defense. I can vouch for you.”

Your lip trembles a little. You were going to get expelled for this. You had been warned. He takes your hand, stroking the back of it with his thumb.

“Hey. Chin up. You did the right thing, ok? I promise you it'll work out.”

You nod at him, restraining yourself from crying. You didn't want him to see you like that. You're not a baby. You sniff a little, stepping back.

“I-I'll see you tomorrow.” You nod. He smiles at you. It must be pity.

“Of course. I look forward to it.” He leaves as you head into the Nurse's office. They patch up your scrapes and give you an inhaler to ease the throat pain. Then, they escort you to the Dean's office. The dean looks beyond done with your shit.

“Have a seat, Ms. Rauchen.”
You do. You have a nasty swollen bruise on your face and one forming on your neck.

“.....You're not in trouble. You can relax. Eye witness says you were acting in defense of yourself, and others.”

You nod. “I was. C-Cowjock needs to be expelled. He's out of control.”

The dean sighs. “As much as I do agree with you, Ms. Rauchen, it isn't that simple.”

“Because sports?”

“Because his father is on the board of directors. It could be my job on the line if I expelled his son.”

“.....So he can just do what he wants?”

“Essentially. The next dean they hire would just let him back in.”

“......that sucks.”

“It does. I sympathize with you. But this is your last warning. Stop involving yourself with him.”


“You may. You're excused from class today, it won't count against your attendance.”

“Thanks.” You nod. The dean smiles meekly at you as you leave, heading outside to order a ride home. You hate this school. You hate Cowjock. You hate his shitty dad. You hate everything!

When you arrive home, you bury yourself in your blankets with a bottle of wine and a tub of hummus and chips. You reach into your bedside drawer and retrieve a jar of solar-haze you saved for particularly stressful days. You roll it up and puff on it, flicking through your TV options. Just as you get comfy, someone knocks on your door. Ughhhhh. You hide the haze before opening it. Oh. It's Amelie.

“Ettie!!” She wraps around you in a tight hug.

You wheeze as she squeezes, stroking her hair.

“I can't believe it…! They just let that brute do whatever he wants, oh… your face…!” She looks up at you, eyes as sad as a kicked puppy.

“Yeah. It's pretty gnarly.”

“I bought some of this.” She holds up a can of bruise-be-gone.

“Oh.” You could cry. Amelie was an angel. “Thank you.” You hug her again, before letting her in. She settles on the bed with you, sniffing the air. You hand her the joint, and the bottle.

“We can smoke this, but don't let me get ugly drunk. I'm still going out tonight.” You dab the bruise treatment on your face. The giant lump is sucked back into place, but no matter how much you apply, you still have a purple mark where you had been hit. Oh well. It can't work miracles. You're feeling a little better now that you're in your warm cozy bed, getting tipsy with your bestie.

“You still are?” She hums, swigging from the bottle. You put the TV on a music video station.

“Yeah. He's hard to reschedule with.” You shrug. “And I don't wanna just sit around moping. Shit
happens.”

“.....You're so cool, you know that?”

You give a weak laugh. “Nahhh.”

“Yeahhhh. The coolest. You should let me do your makeup.”

You shrug again. “Sure. Just make me look hot, ok?”

She nods. “I'll do it closer to your date so we don't mess it up eating chips.”

Good call. You guys loaf about until about 8. Then, you try on your new underwear, examining yourself in the mirror. Pinching your tummy.

“You need to work it, Ettie.” Amelie comes up behind you. “You're slouching. Pop your chest out. Your ass too.” She pushes your back to force you into the correct posture.

“There. See? So sexy.” She smiles at you. “Where's your makeup?

You take her to your bathroom, pulling it out. She sits you on the toilet, and starts working on your face. You hope it looks nice. You have time to fix it if not. She's humming as she works.

“Ok. There's no hiding the bruise, but we're gonna work with it.” She dabs blush on your cheeks. “It makes you look like a bad girl. Totally hot.”

“Yeah? I think he'll be into it.”

“He better be.”

You smack your lips after she applies a gloss to them. She's taking her time, carefully shading and lining your eyes.

“Ok, you can look!” She steps out of your way. You examine yourself in the bathroom mirror, shocked by how good you look. Wow…! Was that contour??

“Amelie…. You should charge for this. I look like a movie star.”

“You're welcome. It's the least I could do, ya know?”

You nod, checking the time on your phone. “He's gonna be here soon.”

“Oh, snap. Lemme get going, then. Text me when you get back, ok??”

“I will, I will!” You nod, escorting her to the door. You hug goodbye, before hurrying to get into your outfit. It's snowing outside. You opt to wear tights with your costume, and don a warm face mask as well. It looks intimidating, its geometric pattern reminiscent of skull teeth. You're glad your mom emphasized the importance of weather appropriate costuming to you when you were young. You're prepared for this weather with a long sleeve thermal version of your top. Nice and cozy. By the time you're all dressed up, it's almost 11. You hear a knock at your door.

Butterflies flutter in your stomach as you open it. Your mysterious stalker is standing outside, smirking at you from beneath his hood.

“Ettie. You look ravishing.” He hums. You wonder what he's going to do with you tonight. If you were going anywhere, or if he was just going to have his way with you here. Maybe not. He seems
like the type to have a creepy love dungeon somewhere.

“Thanks.” You sound nervous. He gestures for you to step outside. You lock your door and follow him to his car.

“The mask is a good call for what we're doing tonight.” He coos as he pulls out of your driveway.

“Yeah?” Your imagination is running wild. “What are we doing, anyways?”

“Wouldn't you like to know?”

Ughhhhh. He's killing you.

“Give me a hint.”

“I'll give you an order. Stop asking questions.”

You gulp. Or what? You kind of want to find out.

“Ok.” You nod.

He looks at you. “Your face is bruised. You're not seeing another rival behind my back, are you?”

You can't tell if he's serious. “And if I am? I don't remember pledging exclusivity.” You hum.

He licks his lips. “Oh, you haven't. But I'll woo you tonight, I promise.”

“You know, if you're into me, you could've just asked me out for dinner.”

“Where's the fun in that?” He hums back. He has a point. This was the most exciting thing that's happened to you all year. You tuck your hair behind your ear. You're entering the business district. He pulls into an alleyway. Your body is ready.

“Get out.” He demands. You comply, and he locks the car and starts leading you up the fire escape of a large building. Eventually the stairs run out, so he starts scaling the side wall until you're both on the roof. Huh. Interesting.

“I don't fit in these vents. You do. Here's the building specs, I need you to get in and unlock this door.” He points at a rooftop entrance, and then points at its location on the spec. “Vent B will get you there fastest.”

You don't know if you feel disappointed or relieved. He's taking you out on a criminal activity, not a sexual one. Go figure. You nod at him as he pulls the vent panel off, giving you a leg up as you slip in. Oof. It was tight in here. You shimmy your way forward, having memorized your path before entering. Left, down, left, right, down. Nice. You see the hallway. You listen for sounds before shaking the vent panel loose and rolling out of it. You're careful to avoid detection by camera as you make your way to the roof again, opening the door cautiously for Shadowy Figure. He saunters in, putting a hand on your shoulder.

“Nice work. Follow me, now.” He leads the way, and you follow, burning with questions that you weren't allowed to ask. He's about to trip a laser detector when you grab his hand and pull him back, pointing at the beam generator protruding from the wall.

“Good catch.” He hums, stepping over it. You examine the hallway. It's lined with lasers pointing in all directions.
“I see the panel. Allow me.” You offer, and he nods. You dance through the gaps in the beams, very narrowly avoiding the last one as you land on the other side. Shadowy Figure gives a polite golf clap. You disable the beams and he walks forward to join you, leading you into the large office the beams had been guarding. He settles at the desk, and gestures for you to sit in his lap. He's joking, right? There's like, 4 chairs in here. You raise a brow at him.

“Hey. I'm allowed to enjoy tonight however I want. You know that. Sit.”

You settle on his thighs, leaning against his chest and looking at the screen. He's plugged a USB in, activating an automatic protocol on the computer. He puts an arm around your waist.

“It takes a little while to do its thing.” He hums. You shuffle a little, heart rate rising.

“Y-yeah?” Get it together. You're acting like a total virgin. You can't help but get so nervous around this guy!

“Mhmm. I could get used to this.” His hand slides down your waist and rubs over your buttocks. “You should go professional.”

“Professional?”

“Professional Villainy. You're good at it.”

“Yeah? Trying to seduce me into a life of crime, huh?” You lean in a little. You wish you could see his face.

“Trying to seduce you in general.” He squeezes. You huff a little, gripping the lapel of his jacket. You can feel him through his pants. He leans in, and your lips meet. You've been waiting for this all night. He's not shy with his tongue, and you feel sharp teeth pressing against yours as you move to straddle him properly. You huff as he starts to slowly rock against you, driving you absolutely wild. He pulls back to kiss at your neck, and you feel him leave a bruise or two on you. You don't mind.

Beep! He pulls back to check the screen.

“Ah. All done. We should get going.”

Fuck!!! He didn't have to get you worked up like that. You shuffle off of him, and he coughs as he stands and brushes the creases out of his coat. He removes his USB and allows you to lead the way out. You're so frustrated you could scream. It's easier getting out than it is getting in, and he's soon driving away from the business district, with you in tow. You're not letting him tease you like this. You lay your hand on his thigh, squeezing gently. He smirks.

“Was that not enough fun for tonight?”

You pout. “It's rude to leave me hanging like that, you know.”

“I love watching you squirm, what can I say?”

Your face is hot. He pulls off the highway into a forested exit. “You were so good tonight, though, I might just have to reward you.”

He drives up a pass and finds a look-out point to park at. You have a wonderful view of the Lakewood forests to admire.

“Get in the back.” He instructs. You do so, and he joins you. You lean back over the length of the
seats and he positions himself on top of you, pulling you in for another kiss. Your breathing is heavy as he holds your face carefully, tilting it to expose your neck. He kisses that next, sucking gently as his free hand caresses your thigh, working it's way up. He pulls your top up, exposing your fancy new bra, and smirks as he pulls that aside to undress you further, quickly latching on to your nipple with his mouth. You can't help but moan as he kisses and works his tongue over it, sending tingles of arousal through your body. You're practically melting as he palms you over your costume, working his way down again to kiss your thighs through your tights. Then, before you realize what's happening, he sinks his fangs into your thigh and you feel a rush through your body. You yelp, pushing his head back to see him smirking at you.

“B-bastard!” You hiss.

You're feeling woozy. The world is starting to shift color and shape around you, and you weakly wriggle beneath him as he sits up and strokes your hair. You feebly grab his hood and yank it down, squinting hopelessly to try and make out his face before you black out entirely. Man.

You knew this guy was trouble.
Foreign Body

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

You're late to your internship by about 30 minutes. You had woken up in your own bed, wearing comfy pajamas and snuggled up to your cat. You have hickeys on your neck and a big fat bruise on your thigh, highlighting a scabbed over bite mark. You are so mad. How dare he! That, that ass****!

You texted Professor Vee to let him know you're running late. You walk in groggily, knowing you didn't get enough sleep last night. As you enter the main lab, he looks up at you.

“Morning, Ettie. Glad you could make it.” He smiles. Ugh. So charming and handsome. You're so frustrated right now you can barely look at his adorable face. Someone small and green peers over the counter at you.

“Morning Professor. Morning, Fink.” You reply.

Fink sticks her tongue out at you. Heh. She's a cute kid. You excuse yourself to do your feeding rounds.

As you dangle a defrosted mouse into each tank and await a strike with anticipation, you think back to last night. You wonder if he did anything with you after knocking you out. That wouldn't make sense, would it? But some guys are into that…. He is a shadowy creep. It would make sense. You flinch as the iridescent mamba strikes. Hrmph. Fuck that guy. You should focus on someone who doesn't make a living being a freak in the woods. Someone responsible…. And handsome… and purple….. gulp. Well. You did get a lot of sage seduction advice from Amelie the other day. You're wearing a tight pencil skirt and a top that's low cut, but still appropriate as business casual attire. Time to put it to the test. You wash up the dishes from feeding time before heading out to the main lab. Professor Vee has left a work packet at your station. Fink is sitting two seats down from your seat, doodling with a big box of crayons. Your assignment today is mostly simple prep of chemicals and ingredients. You pull the appropriate equipment and settle at your station, opting to stand while you work. It's safer. Plus, it gives you the opportunity to use Amelie’s top advice. You arch your back and straighten your posture. Lean forward to amplify your small amount of cleavage. Ok. Now just…. Go about your business. You start grinding crystals into a fine powder using the mortar and pestle, but sexily. This…. This feels stupid. You glance up at Professor Vee, and he looks away right as you do. Is he looking?? Is it working??? You decide to keep at it. It's better than slouching all the time anyways. Fink is also looking at you. Squinting, then drawing, then squinting again.

“Whatcha drawing?” You hum in her direction.

“Not done yet! I'll show you in a minute.” She keeps aggressively coloring, wearing her crayon down at an alarming rate.

You keep grinding, before scraping the powder into a jar for storage. Then, you start work on dissecting and preserving samples. Filling jars up with preservation fluid and injecting samples with formaldehyde. You run a vent over your station for this. It stinks. But it's well worth it, the samples look dope once they're finished. You wonder if Professor Vee has any he wouldn't mind giving to you. They would look great in your bedroom. You work quietly, each person in the lab fixated on their task. Soon, Fink scurries over to Professor Vee, who is buried face first in a piece of equipment that looks difficult to operate. She opts not to bother him, scurrying your way instead.
“I finished.” She holds up her drawing. You lean in to look at it. It's a drawing of herself, but older, done in that crude anime style you used to also draw when you were like, 12. Aw. Awwwee. She's so cute.

“This is really good, Fink!” You smile.

“Her name is Rabiez!” Fink nods. “She would be Galaxy Captain Princess’ worst nightmare.”

Aw. You used to watch the 80s version of Galaxy Captain Princess. You knew there was a reboot recently, but you hadn't seen it.

“Yeah? GCP is a weenie, I bet Rabiez would win.”

Fink’s face lights up. “Right!! She wouldn't spend so much time crying over dumb boys. She’d get stuff done, for realsies!”

Heh. Professor Vee had a budding villainess on his hands here. But that was normal, kids grow out of juvenile villainy in most cases, according to your research. He's pulled out of the machine now, so Fink hurries to show him her artwork.

“Oh, wow, Fink. I think this one belongs on the fridge.” He looks so proud. “Is this from the animes?”

She nods, smiling.

“You're so talented.” He continues. “Naturally, of course.”

He pats her hair before heading over to your work station. You were cleaning up your supplies at this point, having finished your task.

“Ettie. Fast as usual.” He stands behind you. “Were you assaulted by another vampire last night?”

Your face flushes. How did he know?? Oh. Your choker had slid down. You yank it up again to conceal your love bite, practically steaming at the ears. He chuckles. You could die.

“I. I might have been. Don't worry about it.” You squint at him, and he smirks at you. This is excruciating.

“Oh, I'm not one to pass judgement, Ms. Rauchen.”

“Don’t Ms. Rauchen me!” You pout at him. Wow. He's really up in your space today. Gulp.

“We should start on your combat training. Your dummy has been eager to come out. Go suit up. Try not to run into any creatures of the night on your way.”

“Oh, I'll try.” You scoff, heading off to grab your gym bag. You quickly change into the form fitting test suit, donning your athletic shoes as well. You tighten your pony tail and head back out again. Professor Vee is waiting in the training room, sitting in a chair with Fink by his side in her own slightly smaller chair. They're behind the safety of the glass window that peers into the fight box. You're nervous, you've never fought an abomination of nature before.

Professor Vee talks over a microphone to you. “Ready, Ettie? This is to the death. For the beast at least. You're aiming for speed and accuracy.”

“Gotcha.” You nod.
He hits a button, and a door hisses open to reveal a monster twice your size. He's purple, furred and grotesquely muscular, with two metal bulls horns protruding from his head. He's distorted, but his face clearly resembles your darling professor. Gross. You hate this thing. Time to put it out of its misery. The beast locks onto you and begins charging. You dodge, grappling its horns and using them to swing onto his shoulders, wrapping your legs around its thick neck and trying to strangle it to no avail. You heat your hands to singe it where you're grabbing. It gives an enraged bellow, tossing you off it's back and hurling you against the lab wall. You peel off and try again, landing multiple kicks on his face and stomach. If you could break one of the beasts legs, he'd be destabilized. You go for it, sliding in and trying to swipe his ankle hard enough to do damage. Ouch. You forgot this thing has metal bones. Its charging you again, and this time you grab his head as he butts you with it, clinging to his front and blinding him. You blast its eyes with smoke to keep it disoriented, before hopping off and using its running momentum to spin and slam it into a wall. The room shakes as you do.

It takes a moment, but the monster slowly rises to his feet again, grabbing you by the neck and slamming you against the wall repeatedly. Fuck!! You can't break his grip, and you struggle as you kick and writhe under his palm. He tightens his grasp and you start to choke. Where was Professor Vee?? You were floundering in here!!

“H-Help!” You cough.

Professor Vee responds. “Finish him, Ettie. You can do it.”

You're running out of air here. You aim your hands at the beast and blast more smoke. It gives an undignified grunt and squeezes harder. You can't even choke out another plea for assistance. You're starting to panic. You push yourself to blast harder, smoke flooding the room, and as your body starts pumping hormones to fuel your fearful reaction, you feel your hands burn. Are- are you on fire?? Flames lick and engulf the beasts face, and it starts burning away to just metal bones, circuits frying and deactivating. Its grip loosens as it collapses to the ground, dropping you down with it. You cough and huff, struggling to breath surrounded by your own smog. A bell starts ringing and the smoke is hastily ventilated out, you slump forward and continue hacking and heaving for air. A door slides open and Professor Vee steps in, leaving Fink outside before shutting the door and kneeling by you. He has a glass of green juice.

“Here. Sit up.” He places his hand on your back. “Sip this. It will make your throat feel better.”

You obey, gulping it down. It's minty. It does as promised, and soon you're almost able to breathe normally again. Professor Vee rubs your shoulder.

“You did very good today, Ettie. I think we need to reanalyze your power stats soon.”

You nod. That had been stressful. You don't feel too hot. But you can't complain, you're practically snuggling your boss right now. You're so close, you could kiss him. You glance at his lips, and he leans in, taking your chin in his hand. Is he…??

“No signs of permanent damage to your body, or brain. You're in good shape.” He leans back. Oh. Right. Duh. He stands up, and offers you a hand. You take it, and decide to use the situation to your advantage. As you stand, you stumble forward a little, flopping in to lean on his chest. Mmh. It's so soft. He holds you steady before pushing you upright again.

“You got it?”

“Y-yeah.” You nod. You can walk, but you choose to lean on him as he walks you out. Fink is a ball of energy as you exit the lab.
“That was so cool!!! I didn't know you could do flamethrower hands!!” She beams.

“Neither did I.” You reply.

Professor Vee chimes in. “I think you have a lot of untapped power as a fighter, Ettie. You haven’t been formally trained.”

“Mh. I never planned to get into a career that warranted it. Heroism doesn't seem like my racket.”

“Ah. It's a good life skill to have. The school is doing a field trip next week to The Whirlwind’s presentation on different combat techniques. A part of Good Vs Evil Con. You should sign up. I'm going as a faculty advisor.”

“Ehhh…..”

“The hotel has a pool with a water slide and a two included buffet meals a day.”

“Ok. You've convinced me.”

He chuckles. “You can register online. We're done for today, if you want to head home early.”

You nod, stepping away to gather your things. You're pooped. You had a few hours to go home and nap before you had to get ready for your evening plans, and you definitely planned on using them. You say goodbye to Professor Vee and Fink before heading out.

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You barely manage to wake up in time. You could nap all day, it feels so good. But, you had somewhere to be! You get your comfiest sweats on and pack your bag, finishing just in time to hear edgy rap-rock blasting outside your window. You peer out. Amelie! Right on time.

You hurry outside and hop into her car. Her parents are out of town and she has the house to herself. Which means it's the perfect time for a slumber party!! You stocked up on alcohol and illegal plant matter well in advance. You couldn't be more pumped.

“Hey girl!!” Amelie hugs you over the emergency break, before examining your neck. “Wow, did Steve kiss you or suck your blood? You look like you got strangled by a horse.”

“I did actually, sorta. It's unrelated to my date though. Just lab stuff.”

“Getting kinky with the Professor?”

“Pshhh. In my dreams. That man is fine.”

“Ooooh. Ettie’s got a crush on teacher.”

“You've seen him!! Who doesn't?”

“You're not wrong. If I liked men more maybe I'd see your point.” She chuckles.

You sigh. “You're smarter than me, Amz. Men are the worst.”

“I'll turn you one day. Bite you with my lesbian teeth.”
“Please. I don't think my neck could take anymore superficial damage at this point.”

You've arrived at her house. She lets you in, and you hurry up to her room. It's huge! Her bed is so comfy, too. You settle into it and pull your bottle of sweet rosé out. That and your jar of premium solar haze. You've been growing a little patch of it in your backyard, between your bushes. You figure you can always just torch it if you get caught. She brings two glasses up and turns an adult oriented cartoon on for the two of you to watch.

You sip your drink as she settles next to you.

“We should order Chinese food.” She hums.

You nod as you roll a little haze up and light it. Puff puff. You pass it to Amelie.

You don't talk much, enjoying the show. In this episode, the dorky college professor is trying to woo the campus cheerleaders into sleeping with him. He isn't successful. Amelie is snort laughing. She lives for this show. It is pretty funny. Soon your food arrives and you're both slurping noodles as you watch.

“Heh, imagine this had happened when we were on the cheer squad.” She giggles.

You tilt your head. “What? I was never on the cheer squad, dummy.”

“Uh, yeah you were. I was your pyramid support. If I wasn't looking up your skirt, who's skirt was I looking up?”

“You're drunk. I never did cheer.” You assert.

“Yes you did!!” Amelie stands up and begins rifling through her bookshelf. “Junior year. We were on the Applegate cheer squad together, you got top of pyramid because you could do sparkler hands.”

“You went to Applegate??” You had attended Applegate. You could swear you met Amelie freshman year at Avenue Academia.

“Yeah, no doy? Stop fucking with me. I sat next to you in math.” She lays the yearbook out on the spirit section. Lo and behold, there you were. There were several pictures of you performing with Amelie. You were doing fire magic in half of them. Your gut sinks.

“I…. I don't remember doing any of this.” You can remember freshman year of high school, and a few patches of sophomore.

“You don't?” Amelie bleats. “You dropped out that summer. They said you were involved with a lab accident and were gonna switch to homeschooling while you recovered. I tried to call you but your number was disconnected, and you were never home.”

You think back. That would make sense. “Yeah, yeah. I had a traumatic head injury. Uh, maybe I have amnesia? My doctor said I hadn't lost any cognitive ability, but like, it took me a few months to be able to function on my own. I got my diploma through E-School while I was bedridden and skipped senior year.”

“They didn't notice you had amnesia?”

“I guess not…? I wasn't really talkative…”
“Weird. Well. You definitely went to school with me.”

You chew your lip. “I'm sorry I don't remember. It's nothing personal. I can't remember most of junior year.” You flick through the book. Wow. You recognize a few of your early high school friends, and some of the teachers.

“Don't be sorry.” Amelie leans on you.

“Jeez. I feel like an alien in my own body.” You sigh as you look over the pictures of you. “Why would I join cheer squad?”

“Cuz I talked you into it. Your mom liked the idea, too.”

“Oh. Right. She would've.” You nod. Jeez. You're getting sad. You snap the yearbook shut and sip your drink, focusing on the TV again. It isn't long before the doorbell rings and you're both blessed with salty sweet goodness. You keep drinking. You can't be sad if you're crossfaded and eating good! Being snuggled up in a nice warm bed with a nice warm sheep helps too. You both eat way too much before settling into a food coma. You spoon Amelie as you watch the TV screen, soon dozing off without meaning to.

You sleep well that night.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! As always, thanks for the support and kind words! There's new art available on hotvenomfic.tumblr.com!

How would you guys feel about song recommendations with each chapter? For example, this song is a total Ettie anthem. I can't listen while reading but this is what I listen to while drawing.

https://youtu.be/VlGNm7_dvz4

Hope you enjoy!
Chapter Notes

Hey y'all! NSFW warning on this chapter! Also, check out the new art over on Hotvenomfic.tumblr.com!

A week had passed since your last shadowy escapade. You're stationed at your bedroom desk, cat purring in your lap as you sit and wait for your class registration slot to open. You always ended up missing at least one of the classes you want to take, so you're trying really hard to snag them all this semester. Your computer clock counts down the seconds before the clock flips to 7pm and you click through to register. You snag the costume design class you wanted, as well as advanced chemistry. Alas! You missed the window for an advanced history of weaponry. Oh well. You browse through the other classes. A familiar name catches your eye.

**Arching: An Introduction to Professional Hero and Villain Relations**

Professor Vee was teaching it. You click to sign up, securing one of the limited slots. Score! So long as you can…. Stay *focused* in that class. You had to admit, Professor Vee was dangerously handsome. You close your laptop and stand up to make dinner. A tapping sound catches your attention, and you glance around. Tap tap! You pull back the curtain covering the sliding glass door to your garden and lo and behold, your Shadowy Friend is lurking outside. You slide the door open slightly.

“What do you want?” You're still mad about your last encounter.

“Just checking in, Firecracker.” He cooes, wedging his foot in the gap and then fully sliding the door open. You try to stand in his way but he casually dodges you and makes himself at home.

You sigh. “Well, you're not a vampire, just waltzing in here like that.”

“Please. You hardly lock your doors half the time. You can’t blame me.”

Jeez. You've been called out. You're bad about losing your key, though. You've been meaning to get a PIN style lock installed.

You sigh. “Man. I haven't called the police on you yet, why?”

“Because they couldn't catch me. And you know I'm not here to hurt you.”

“Oh yeah, just here to tease and then leave me with an ugly bruise and blood poisoning.” You retort. You start multitasking, packing your bag for the upcoming school trip.

“Oh, come on. I leave more than that. Like sage life advice. You should come out with me tonight, there's less eyes on the plaza than usual.”

You glance up at him. “I'm trying to do less crimes these days, actually.”

“You are?” He smirks, encroaching on your personal space. “How dull. You're good at them.”
“I'm good at lots of things. I'm trying to get into a good tech development lab. Most of them have a no-villains policy.”

“Except those of villains. Often, villains are the first to make scientific breakthroughs due to lack of regulation. Did you know Dr. Hellskull invented the cure for thumping measles?”

You roll your eyes. Stuffing underwear in your bag like you're going to shit yourself every day of this trip. Just in case. You can't see his face but you know he's examining the articles of clothing as you roughly shove them put of sight.

He continues. “Well, if you wont come out with me, maybe I'll have to pick you up and sling you over my shoulder.” He stands behind you, hands resting on your hips as you fold your leggings and lay them into the bag. Your face flushes slightly.

“Like a caveman? You could probably just take me to Pizza Gardin and secure better results.” You turn to face him. Jeez. That hood is really good at its job. He leans in, pressing his lips against yours. You can't help but melt into it, leaning in to kiss him back. Your tongues twine and his sharp teeth graze your lips on occasion. He holds you close and his hand slowly migrates from your hips to your derriere. He nudges you forward, and you fall onto the bed, scooting back to make room as he straddles you, kiss growing more intense. You almost get lost in the heat of the moment, but you remember what happened last time. Shoving him back, you glare up at him.

“Hold on. You can't kiss me when I still don't even know your name.”

“Ah…. Officially it's Shadowy Figure. It's on my POW card and everything.” He huffs, trying to continue the kiss. You dodge him.

“That's your villain name! I mean your real name. And I want the hood off.”

“You're missing the point of the whole secret identity thing, Ettie.”

“You know my identity.” You scoff.

“You made it easy on me.” He kisses your neck, and you sigh breathily. He knows how to shut you up.

“N-no hickeys. I'm going swimming tomorrow.”

He makes a sound of agreement, kissing gently and leaning to press his leg between your thighs. You huff, hips gently rocking against him. He was too good at seducing you, you hated it. But you loved it. You feel sharp teeth grazing against you, and want to run your fingers through his hair, barred by his hood. You try push it back, and he grabs your wrist, holding it over your head.

“Ah ah. Behave yourself, Firecracker.” He murmurs.

“I'll close my eyes if you take it off.” You huff.

“Hm. An interesting proposition. Close them.”

You do, and you hear rustling. Then, you feel a fabric drape itself over your eye. He's blindfolding you. After securing it tight, you hear him move again. You reach forward to feel him. Combing your fingers through his hair, you pull him in and lock lips again. His hair is soft, and feels pretty long. He moans softly as you caress it, grinding his hips against you, sending sparks of pleasure up your spine. He pulls your shirt up to expose your chest. Then, you hear the distinct sound of a camera flashing.
“H-hey!” You reach to untie the blindfold, but he grabs your wrists and holds you steady.

“Hey nothing.” He hums. “If you won’t come out with me on you own accord, I have a little motivation for you now.”

“You slimy son of a bitch!” You writhe under him, his knee still wedged between your legs, but you're not thinking with your horny brain anymore. You fall for his horse shit every time because of your horny brain.

“You're so cute when you're angry.” He hums.

You can't wiggle loose, so you do the next best thing and begin flooding the room with a noxious smoke. You hear your unwanted visitor as he begins to hack and cough, letting you go and getting off of the bed. You yank your blindfold off and glance around the room, unable to see through your own smoke. You hear him though, he's heading for the door. You manage to grab his wrist as he leaves, singeing the fabric of his sleeve before he shoves you off, knocking you into coffee table which promptly breaks as you land on it. You hear the door slam.

“COWARD!!!” You yell out of your door once you get to it. You can see him disappearing into the forest around your house. That creep. You really need to stop fraternizing with him. It takes half an hour of open windows and all fans blowing to clear your home of smoke. Ugh. It's so hard to get that smell out. You light a candle to try and mask it, finishing your packing and going to bed afterwards. Fuck.

What had you gotten yourself into this time?

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You have to wake up at the ass crack of dawn to get on the charter bus to Pineridge. You haul your back pack along, comfortable in a pair of sweats and a sports bra, plus a jacket if you get cold. You brought headphones, and you know you're going to need them. You glance around. There are two buses. You opt for the one Professor Vee is checking in.

“Morning, Professor.” You hum as you approach him. Cob have mercy on you, he's wearing grey sweatpants and a black athletic jacket. Don't look down. Or, don't get caught at least.

“Morning, Ettie.” He checks a mark off his list. “Seating is first come first serve.”

“Thanks.” You nod, stepping onto the bus.

It's filled with the overlapping voices of an excited group of young adults. You look for an open seat and settle by a window near the front. This was a 4 hour drive, so you hope nobody tries to sit next to you. Soon, Professor Vee boards, sitting in the seat by the bus driver as it starts to rattle forward. You put your headphones in, drowning out the cacophony of laughter and conversation happening around you. At least the seats are relatively comfy. Maybe you could take a nap.

You're out cold for about half the bus journey. Thank cob you were a heavy sleeper. You only woke up because Professor Vee shook you awake for the halfway pitstop. You grab a meal from the gas station Fry Hut and settle back in your seat to eat it.
“Mind if I steal a fry?”

You look up, Professor Vee is leaning over the chair next to you. You hold up the container and offer him one. He eats it.

“Mh. They're good.” He cooes.

“Have some more, I never finish them anyways.” That's a lie, but you'd give him all the fries you had, and also a kidney if he asked you to. He sits in the seat next to you, and you're practically shoulder to shoulder. The bus is relatively empty still. He munches another fry.

“You know, Fink really wants to come up to Pineridge next month for… a little cartoons festival. Anim-Con, I believe.” He says softly.

You sip your drink. “Oh? Anim-Con is pricey. My friends took me once. But it's fun.”

“Mh….. well. It isn't my scene. I was wondering if you'd be willing to chaperone her attendance while I tend to business in the area. I'll pay you extra.”

You blink at him. “What, like, a free trip to Anim-Con? I wouldn't mind at all…”

“Excellent. I'll be sure to let her know.” He smiles at you, and more students start clamoring onto the bus. He stands and takes his seat up front. Sigh. So dreamy. You were practically putty in his hands. You wonder if he felt the same way before your thoughts are interrupted by the loud cackling of your classmates. Time to put your headphones back in!

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Eventually, you arrive at The Luxe hotel. Professor Vee briefs you on the schedule for the trip and begins handing out room cards with the other chaperones. You get paired with a random girl from your social studies class. You've never really spoken to her. This was going to suck.

“Heyyy….” You scoot in next to her. “Guess we're roomies….”

She eyes you from head to toe. “Yeah. Eddie, right?”

“Ettie. Um, and you are?”

“Jamie.”

“Cool…. Well, I'll see you around.”

That was awkward. You head up to your room and lay your suitcase out on the bed you wanted. Everyone was going to check out the pool tonight, seeing as the first presentation wasn't until tomorrow. You were looking forward to trying out that water slide. You slip into the bathroom and change into your black bikini, wrapping a beach towel around yourself for the walk down. You let your hair down and head out, claiming one of the better deck chairs by the pool. You soak in the final rays of sun before it sets for the evening, before braving the taller of the two slides. Heh. You wish Amelie were here. Or, anyone you knew, really. But swimming alone is fun too! As the sun sets, those old enough to drink started ordering from the bar. The vibe of the pool is shifting into one a little too chaotic for your liking. You hop out to pat yourself dry, and just in time, because a hoard of jocks was about to descend on the pool like hippos in a watering hole. Time to go back to your room.

You take the elevator to your floor and find your door. Huh. The do not disturb sign is up. Maybe
Jamie is sleeping. You swipe your entrance card and try to open the door, only to find it deadbolted. You can't move it at all. You hear a bed creaking from behind it…. Oh come on! Was this really happening right now??

You don't wanna bang on the door, that would be beyond awkward. You could wait it out, it couldn't be too long, right?

You settle on the floor down the hall from the shaking bed noises and bide your time. You send Amelie a quick text.

[Just got sexiled, go figure …. Thank u for feeding my son]

They really were cranking the AC in this building. Your wet hair and damp skin were freezing, goosebumps were starting to rise on your arms and legs. Your nipples? Rock solid. You didn't like being covered in chlorine either. It made you itchy. Maybe you should go knock. You hear a door open, and hope that it's yours…. oh. Its not. But you recognize the purple figure sauntering down the hallway in his bathrobe. It’s your favorite professor! He's carrying an ice bucket. Ok. Play it cool Ettie. What you're doing is only weird if you make it weird. He walks past where you're sitting and starts digging ice out of the machine.

“So, do you need a new keycard?” He hums.

You frown up at him. “No, I have mine. I don't wanna intrude on my roommates booty call, though.”

He pauses a minute before smirking at you. “So you're freezing your ass off out here? How considerate.”

“Hey, I'm really not gonna be the one to interrupt them. I already have a reputation for being a buzzkill.”

“I find that hard to believe.” He’s awfully smiley today. Has he been drinking? “You could come use my bathroom and dry off.”

Your eyebrows raise at the proposition. “You wouldn't mind?”

“Not at all. I was about to order room service.” He starts walking back to his room. You follow. His room is the same as yours, though he has the TV on the movie channel and has been laying into the minibar. He's had the shot bottle of whiskey. You knew it. He's never this friendly at work.

“Eyeing the other bottle?” He says, looking at where you're examining.

“Was just looking…”

“You can have it. It'll warm you up.”

Hm. You take the bottle and down it in a swig. Yeughh. Liquor. He chuckles at the face you're pulling.

“Hey man, it’s rough stuff!” You cough a little. Jeez. That had some bite to it. “I'm gonna shower before this chlorine gives me a rash.”

“Be my guest.”

You hastily make your way to the tiny bathroom and lock the door behind you. You peel off your
cold bikini before submerging yourself in the stream of hot, steamy water. Your goosebumps melt away and you sigh. Fuck. That feels so much better. That whiskey was settling in you, giving you a pleasant buzz. Thank cob for your mentor. He really was the best. You shampoo your hair, purging yourself of that greasy chlorine feeling. Much much better. You wrap up with conditioner before stepping out again, patting dry with a towel. There's an extra hotel robe hanging on the back of the door. You claim it, bundling up in it before hanging your swimsuit up to air out.

You head into the main room again. Professor Vee is relaxed on the bed, robe leaving just enough to the imagination. His sculpted chest is exposed, and you can't help but stare for a moment.

“Well…. I should go see if my room is open.” You state, and he glances up at you. You feel naked without your eyeliner.

“What's the hurry? Have you eaten yet?”

“No.”

“I'll buy.” He hums.

“You know I can't say no to that.”

You're eyeing your seating options. This room is a single, so there's just the bed and a pokey looking couch. You decide to try your luck and settle on the bed next to him. He doesn't stop you. Your heart is racing a mile a minute.

“Does duck sound good to you?” He's eyeing the room service menu. “They have a platter.”

You lean over to read it. “Yeah, sounds good.”

He dials room service and orders the platter, plus a bottle of moscato. Mmm. Good choice. You know this isn't a date, but if it was, you'd be thoroughly wooed. Professor Vee flicks through the TV channels before settling on a kitschy horror flick. You settle next to him to watch. Not quite snuggling but. He could reach you if he wanted to. You don't wanna scare him off. It isn't long before the food arrives, a delicately arranged platter of duck meat, bread and vegetables. He tips the delivery boy and pours up two glasses of moscato. You take a sip, relishing the sweet flavor. The food is delicious. You try not to gorge yourself on it, though. It's hard to resist. You both pick at it as you watch the movie flash red with cheesy gore, before Professor Vee gives a heaving sigh and pats his belly.

“Geez, take it away before I regret eating any more.” He huffs, and you put the lid back on the platter and set it aside. He sips his wine, focused on the whirring chainsaw slasher on the screen. You're on your second glass, and see this your last chance to get what you want from this unfairly handsome man. Taking Amelie’s boy advice to heart, you scoot in close as a jump scare 'startles' you, now resting your head on Professor Vee’s chest. He looks down at you, before stroking your back. Fuck. He is so tender, you could explode. You're nervous, and your palms are starting to heat as a result. Here's hoping they don't smoke. You run your hand down his chest from where it had been resting, opening his robe a little more. He takes that hand in his, holding it still.

“Ettie.”

You gulp. You hope he's not mad. “Yeah…?”

He sighs. “I….. Professionally, I shouldn't be doing this.”

“You're not doing anything.” You squeeze his hands.
'Its frowned upon under the schools favoritism policy.'

'The school doesn't have to know. I'm an adult, it isn't their business.'

'I'm your boss. It's my business.'

You sit up, frowning a little as you eye him. Maybe he's trying to let you down gently. Maybe he isn't interested. He probably has his fair share of better options. But….he looks flustered. You notice something twitch under his bathrobe. Ha! You refuse to lose hope, now.

'Mh…. I can stop, then.' You tug on your own robe, subtly exposing more of your chest. “Go back out to the pool…. Find some jock willing to take your place.” You make eye contact with him.

He scoffs. “Oh, like you'd let one of those touch you with a ten foot pole.” You see the glimmer of jealousy spark in his eyes. Bingo.

“Well, if I can't be your favorite, I guess I'll have to~” You lean in above him, hand caressing his neck.

He huffs, shuffling in place a little and taking a moment to respond.

“You're a terror, you know that?” He reaches around to rest his hand on the small of your back. “There's only one thing to do with you.”

You arch your back and sigh a little. “Yeah?”

Yeah.

He pulls you in, and the moment you had endlessly fantasized about was finally here. Your lips meet, and you practically melt into the kiss. His stubble brushes against your cheek as your lips part, gently introducing tongue into the equation. You had wanted this since the first day of your internship, you can't believe it was finally happening. You tug his robe open, exposing his chest. You can't help but grope it, though he was definitely not voluptuous like the last person you were intimate with. It didn't matter. He seems to be enjoying it. You rub your thumb around his nipple, and he huffs up at you.

“Take off your robe.”

You comply, stripping it off and depositing it on the floor. He looks you over, as if he can't decide where to touch first.

“Lay back.” He sits up and pushes you carefully, leaning you against the mass of pillows behind him and moving to straddle you. He's discarded his robe as well, and you glance down to see what he's working with--- two??? You blink down to make sure you aren't seeing double.

“Oh, man. I wish I had a camera for that face.” Professor Vee teases.

Your cheeks are flushing red. “Hey, it's not an everyday sight.”

“It is if you're me.” He’s holding one in his hand, the other member hanging freely. Fuck. They're big. He uses his free hand to tease you, groping your thighs first before gently working his thumb on your clit. Waves of pleasure buzz through you and you give a sigh of enjoyment. You're practically gushing already. He leans in to kiss you, starting at your lips and working his way down your neck. He stops at your breast, lapping his tongue against your pert nipple before latching on and sucking firmly. You gasp, an electric sensation ringing through you as he does. He rubs the head of his cock
against you, and you can't help but moan. You hear a crinkling wrapper, and some fidgeting down there before he pulls you onto him, slowly pushing his first length into you. Fuck. It's fucking big, and you struggle to adjust as he leans into you. It doesn't hurt, but it could if he's clumsy with it. He groans as he pushes in, holding once the full length is in. You're biting your lip, and he reaches down to caress your exposed breast again, squeezing it gently.

"You're taking it well." He huffs, fingers digging in a little where he's holding you.

"J-just be gentle..." You nod, arms flung over his neck and holding on for dear life. You clench down on him, and he sighs, before pulling his hips back and pushing into you again. You can't help but whine. Jolts of pleasure shoot up your spine with each jerk of his body. It's rough, but you love it. You wanted more. He starts building up a rhythm, and you reach down to touch yourself as he gradually grows more aggressive in his thrusting. His claws dig into your hips as he pulls you down onto each thrust, your moans and sighs intermingling with the sound of bare skin colliding.

"Mhh... you like that?" He huffs, and you can barely gasp out a yes as he slams into you. He seems less cautious than usual. You wonder how many layers of self restraint he was shedding tonight. It was beyond hot, you knew that much. You take one of his hands and guide it up to your neck, hoping he would do the math. He caresses your throat for a second before he locks eyes with yours, hand tightening. His grip is strong, and you feel the blood rush to your head as you struggle to breathe.

"Yeah, you like that, don't you?" His thrusting grows more aggressive as he chokes you harder. Your eyes roll back a little as you begin to feel light headed, gasping for breath under his grip.

"You like being fucked senseless?"

Oh man. You are so fucking turned on right now. You nod feebly at him, panting for air when his grip loosened enough to allow it. You feel a ball of pleasure pooling in your guts, growing stronger and stronger. You were getting close. You run scratches down your professor's back as he pushes into you, and he hisses in response.

"You dirty girl... You're fucking mine tonight, do you understand?"

You nod again, and cry out as the combination of dirty talk and rough treatment send you crashing over the edge. You tear up his back as your climax rocks through you, and he eases his grip on your throat and slows his thrusting to a halt, not pulling out just yet. You huff beneath him, he strokes your hair as you try to catch your breath.

"Good.... but I'm not finished yet." He slowly starts to push in again. You whine, you're sensitive and he knows it. His second member is grinding against your clit now, and it feels overwhelmingly good.

"Atta girl...." He holds you close as he thrusts intently, gaining speed as you relax into the motion. Fuck. It feels so good. You cling to him for support as he rocks faster, soon at a pace that has you crying out in pleasure again. His pacing becomes a little erratic as he grows close himself, huffing and swearing under his breath as he rails into you. You feel it throb inside you as he finishes, his second head spraying thick ropes of cum onto your stomach. He moans in your ear as you twitch around him, and waits a moment before pulling out. You're struggling to catch your breath as he discards the condom and hands you a hand towel to wipe off with. You go use the restroom and clean up a little better before rejoining him on the bed. Now that the afterglow is settling, you're starting to worry. Was he going to treat you differently after that....? What if it was a problem? He pulls you in as you settle on the bed, cradling you close with your head on his chest. Its quiet for a few minutes as you both catch your breath.
“Do you want a smoke?”

He offers you one, popping another in his mouth. You nod, taking one for yourself and lighting it on your palm. He uses a flick lighter on his. You don't know what to say, so you stay quiet.

“Mh…. You can't go telling people about this.” He warns, exhaling smoke as he does.

Heh. There it was. “I won't. You know I'm good with secrets.”

“I do. I'm afraid this might affect the results of our experiment, though.”

“Screw the experiment. It won't matter either way.” You shrug.

He eyes you. You glance back up. Maybe you need to reassure him.

“I think you're worrying too much. So what if we have a little pleasure mixed in with our business?” You certainly don't mind.

“I…. It doesn't usually end well.” He sighs.

You ponder the situation. It made sense to be cautious. “Well, let's just keep it casual then. No pressure, no strings attached?”

“You're ok with that?”

“I mean, I wasn't expecting you to drop to your knees and propose to me…..”

He pulls you in closer. “You shouldn't be wasting your youth on someone like me.”

You try not to laugh. He's so dramatic. “Come on. You can't be that old. I'd rather it be you than anyone else I know.”

“Yeah?” He combs his fingers through your hair, enjoying the feeling of his cool skin against yours.

“Yeah.” You yawn, nuzzling up against him. He sets an alarm on his phone before pulling you in closer. Fuck. You were definitely going to catch feelings. Even now, you're feeling warm and fuzzy.

Professor Vee was going to be the death of you.
The sunlight filtering through the slits of the hotel blinds was more than enough to rouse you in the morning. You ungracefully snort yourself awake and blink with fuzzy eyes. Oh jeez. You were still in the Professor’s room. Shit! Your mouth is really dry. Where are your glasses? Glancing up at Professor Vee, you see that he is still sleeping soundly. Fuck. You need to get back to your room. People can’t see you coming out of here. You’re pretty sure fucking a professor is grounds for expulsion. Or something like that.

Ugh. You didn’t even have clothes to put back on. Just your damp bathing suit, or that bathrobe you had borrowed last night. You opt for the latter, sighing as you carefully slipped out of the bed. You fumble for your glasses a second, plonking them on your face before donning the robe. As you are grabbing your belongings, Professor Vee shuffles a little bit. You watch him. He starts to snore again. Phew. You wish you could kiss him goodbye. But that would be weird, wouldn’t it? You bite your lip in contemplation before quietly stepping out into the hallway and shuffling to your room.

There isn’t anyone in the hallway to witness you. Thankfully, your room is accessible again, though, to your dismay, your realize Jamie’s booty call had never vacated the premises. She’s still sleeping, but the skinny dude in bed with her shifts slowly, peeking up at you with a tired eye. You hold up your keycard and point to your suitcase. He slowly buries his face in the pillow again. Jeez.

You quietly grab fresh clothes from your suitcase, changing in the bathroom before you head downstairs for the early-morning continental breakfast. The Whirlwind’s presentation started in about 2 hours. You leisurely sip some mediocre coffee and munch on a waffle you had to make yourself. You scroll through your social media feeds as you do, brain flickering back to last night more often than you would like to admit. Last night had been… really fucking hot. Like. Holy shit. You text Amz.

[Girl…… u have no idea what i just did lol]

Siiiiip. Hmm. You weren’t supposed to tell anyone….. But you really wanted to tell Amelie.

[lolol what u do ]

[ ok i can’t actually tell you tell you but like. You can totally guess ]

[ ok…. either ima have 2 pay ur bail or u got dicked ]

[ which one is it ]

[ omg….. dont even joke ofc its dick ]

[ :O ]

[ whomst ?? ]

[ i cant sayyyyyy ]

[ ok so its definitely NOT ur hot boss then ]

[ definitely not ;) ]

[ omggggggg ]
You munch the last bite of your breakfast down, before heading over to the auditorium where people were starting to file in for The Whirlwind Presentation. You show your student pass before heading in and settling down. There’s a quiet hubbub in the room as it fills to the brim with more and more hero enthusiasts. Ew. There’s a lot of mouth-breathers in here. It’s warming up at an alarming rate. The lights dim and the spotlight bursts to life, revealing a swole man in a spandex costume, flexing on stage. The crowd goes wild!

“Good evening, ladies, gentleman, and anyone else!” He bellows into the microphone. “Are you ready to become the best you that you can be???”

More deafening cheers from the audience. Eugh… This guy seems a little gimmicky.

He continues. “Today, we are gonna be talking about the power of positive thinking!!”

You groan internally. This sounded…. Really boring. You can’t help but let your mind wander a little bit. As the Whirlwinds monologue fades into background noise, you wish Professor Vee was here with you. Maybe it would be more entertaining that way. You glance around the audience, unable to spot him. Sigh. You look back to the stage.

“Elementals!! You have got to-- and I mean got to- - make sure that you are clear of any negativity surrounding your powers! You have to be proud of you are! With focus and determination, you can clear any mental block that may be standing in your way!”

Gag. You stand and begin to shuffle your way out into the aisle. You weren’t sticking around to find out what this room smells like in an hour or so. After quietly slipping out, you wander around the other conference panels in search of something to do. Hmm. You see a lot of hero themed ones…. Yawn. They all seemed to be geared at hero wannabes. You couldn’t care less about Sidekick Etiquette. A poster catches your eye.

Bioweaponry, Past to Present, hosted by Professor Venomous.

The poster has an illustrated mad scientist on it, prodding at a lab experiment with his scalpel. Hm. You vaguely remember hearing that name before. Probably at some middle school POW card exchange. You are studying biology, though, so you’re definitely interested. You flash your student pass at the door and settle down in the auditorium. As you scan the audience, you realize a vast majority of them are costumed. Is that Billiam Milliam?? Holy shit. You’re at a villains panel. Ok. Be cool. Your outfit is black, you’ll fit right in. A heavy looking bull man settles beside you. You eye him. The lighting is dim, but he looks kinda like Cowjock. Less ugly, though. He makes eye contact with you and you hastily look away, cheeks reddening. The auditorium grows dim and the crowd hushes. The spotlight kicks in and a purple skinned man saunters onto the stage, greeted by applause. You’re pretty far back in the auditorium, but he really does look…. Familiar. Hm.

Professor Venomous activates his PowerPoint.

“Good afternoon! I’d like to thank you all for coming! We at Voxmore have some exciting updates to share with you!"

He clicks onto the first slide. “But first, I’d like to give you a brief overview of our operation. Our goal at Voxmore is to combine both organic and robotic technology - to create a new wave of superpowered products. Minions, lackeys, and pawns can all be improved via cybernetic, or mutagenic augmentation. Now. As we all know, biochemistry is as much as an art as it is a science. Mishaps can happen.”

He clicks to a slide covered in photos of botched mutations. The crowd laughs.
“But! We have made some major breakthroughs in the last 20 years. I’d personally like to thank a few of my mentors for their contributions.” Click. A lizard man in a nice suit pops up on the screen. “Doctor Raptor, a brilliant mind. He's actually going to be hosting a panel later in the evening. Anyways, his development of the rapid-incubation gel in the 1980’s really sped up the rate at which new bio-hybrids can be created. I owe a lot to him, in retrospect.” The slide show flicks through a couple of Raptors inventions.

“As does most of bio-villainy. I’d also like to thank the late Dr. Henrietta Rauchen, Cob rest her soul.”

Your heart sinks as the slideshow clicks to a portrait of your mom. Jeez. It's an old photo…. She looks really young. She's dressed up in her costume…. You don't remember her looking so…. Crazy. Was she?? You think back to it. You can only remember her at home, cooking breakfast for you and helping you with your homework. You know she used to take you to work with her. Wouldn’t you remember if she were a supervillainess? I mean, you knew she sold weaponry, but you had always assumed it was more of a neutral venture. You wish your head wasn't so scrambled. You loved your mom. You want to remember.

The slide changes. There's a picture of your mom with her arm around a younger looking Venomous. You eye his face again. Where have you seen it before???

“Dr Rauchen made excellent strides in creating a fully organic weapon. Her experiments combined elemental power with bio-chemical augmentation. Her passion for the explosive was inspiring. Unfortunately, she gave her life for this passion, and was unable to complete her research.”

Click. The panel changes to a portrait of your mom's old lab, the day of the accident. Well. What was left of it. Essentially, just the steal armature of the building, surrounded by rubble and ash. The air is thick with smoke and the scene is surrounded by heroes and law enforcement. You feel a lump form in your throat and blink hastily as your eyes start to water. You were there that day. You remember the fire department pulling you out from the ash. Vaguely. A warm hand is placed on your back, and you realize you've been crying.

“Hey…” The bull man next to you murmurs. “Is something the matter?”

Your face goes red and you nod, sucking back your tears forcefully. “No, no… just. She meant a lot to me, Dr. Rauchen.”

“Ah.” He nods as he removes his hand, folding them over his lap again. You examine his outfit. It looks expensive. But, in that stuffy businessman kind of way.


“Now, obviously, we can't reveal our top secrets to you. But, I can update you on one of my favorite projects to date!”

Click. A picture of Fink shredding on a hover-board appears on the projector. You gasp. Oh my Cob. You did know him!! You know exactly how you know him!! You pull up a picture of Professor Venomous on your phone and drag a pair of emoji glasses onto him in your selfie app. OH MY COB. It's Professor Vee!!!! Your jaw is like, on the floor with how shocked you are by this revelation. You look back at the stage.
“You all know Fink by now, one of my greatest accidental successes. Originally, she was supposed to come out as mostly animal-brained, with enough intelligence to comprehend language and operate weaponry. Of course, bioscience isn't always exact. It was quite apparent she had human levels of intelligence from the day I took her out of the gestation pod. Now, prior to Fink, fully bio-generated mutations would be unstable, self-destruction being inevitable and likely to occur within the first year of use. Fink, on the other hand, was generated in a glorb powered bio-incubator. This has led me to believe she will most likely be able to grow and develop just as any naturally gestated organism would.”

There are some oohs and ahhs from the audience.

“This leads me to conclude that glorbs are a crucial element to successful bioengineering. We all know they're crucial to creating efficient robots, so it is unsurprising they can also stabilize what is essentially, an organic robot. Glorb research is still a fairly new science, so, I can't tell you exactly how they work, but I can vouch for their use in professional villainy.”

He flips through some more family pictures with Fink. Aw. Awwww. But what the hell! Why is he lying to you about who he is?? You're mad. And confused. And sad. This panel was a lot to take in. After he finishes gushing about Fink, he moves on to describe his latest products available for purchase to the crowd, garnering a lot of oohs and aahs. Most of them are simple, poisons and antidotes, parasites. Run of the mill beginner villain things. He explains the science behind each item. You can barely focus. You wanna confront him so badly. You're itching with anticipation as the panel winds to a close. Oh. They're opening the floor to questions. Your hand shoots up before you can think to stop it. The spotlight shines your way and they usher a mic over to you. They tell you to introduce yourself. Fuck.

Professor Venomous looks over to you. His face drops just a little as he recognizes you, and you're quiet for a moment. You clear your throat.

“Hey. I'm Ettie. I study biochemistry at Avenue Academia. My question is... Why-”

Why are you lying to me??

“Uh, you…”

You fucking bastard!!

Your hand is gonna burn the mic if you don't calm down. You take a deep breath.

“Could you elaborate more on the role of Dr. Rauchen in your research?” Nailed it.

The audience murmurs in agreement. You haven't embarrassed yourself yet.

He looks relieved.

“Ah. Well, Ettie …” The way he says your name makes your cheeks flush. Fuck you, you horribly charming liar. “I can't divulge too much. I can tell you that prior to her accident, she had been working on a long term project to create the ultimate human weapon. A sentient bomb, if you will.”

You squint at him. You know your mom specialized in explosive demolition. But you don't remember her ever mentioning a human test subject.

“I was a mere assistant to Raptor when I first worked with her as a consultant. She was about five years into the project, we could tell she had something potentially catastrophic on her hands. She really was an artisan. We worked on possible augmentations and supplementary equipment for the
subject, nothing major. But now that Dr. Rauchen isn't with us anymore, we've had a hard time recovering the data and remains of the project. We fear there may have been tampering from POINT.”

The crowd boos and hisses at the mention of POINT. Professor Vee-- Venomous settles them down.

“But hopefully, we will be able to recover enough of her notes and equipment to utilize her life's work. It would be a shame to waste such evil potential.”

The audience claps. You sit through a couple more questions before the audience begins to file out of the conference hall. You wait to see where Professor goes. Backstage. You follow him.

You don't get very far before a bulky security guard stops you.

“Backstage pass?”

“I don't have one. I'm Professor Venomous' intern. He told me to meet him here.”

“And I’m Billiam Milliam. This isn't a meet and greet, sweetie.”

“It’s important!”

“That's what every groupie says!”

“I'm not a fucking groupie !!” You are too emotional to even deal with this guy right now. You try to side step the guard, he grabs your wrist. With your free hand, you grab his arm and light up, and he hisses as you burn him, letting go. You let out a rush of smoke, disorienting him enough for you to trot further backstage and into the resting area for panelists. You see Professor Venomous sitting on the couch, sipping an iced coffee. He glances up at you mere seconds before you bring your hand down to SLAP him.

“Professor Vee?? You take me for a clown ??”

“AGH--” He spills his coffee on the floor. “Ettie !!”

You are about to come down for a second swing when he grabs your wrists. “Ettie, come on!!” He looks pissed.

You try to yank free, but he’s definitely stronger than you. And he knows your hands are your only weapon right now. You spit at him, “Who the hell do you think you are to be playing games with me like that?!”

“Just, stop! For two seconds!!” He hisses at you. “And I can explain!!”

You raise a foot to stomp at him, and he pulls you off balance and onto the couch with him. Practically into his lap, actually. You struggle to pull away.

“If I let go, are you going to hit me again?” He’s talking in a cold voice, looking you in the eye. You scowl at him. You want to hit him again, that’s for sure. “Ettie?”

“.....No.” You don’t know. “Maybe.”

“...Eh. I’ll take a maybe.” He lets go. You pull your wrists back and bury your hands in your hoodie pocket. Without punches to throw your brain starts preparing for the frustrated water works. Your eyes sting.

“Ettie. I understand you’re upset.”
“No shit.”

“But, honestly, I wanted to see how long the disguise would hold up, considering it’s basically the same disguise you use.”

Great. Now he’s making you feel stupid. “You’re an asshole.”

“I’m your boss.”

“Fire me, then.”

He sighs frustratedly. Yeah. That’s fucking right. He ain’t gonna do shit.

“….By policy I can’t present as Professor Venomous at Avenue Academia. I’m not the only villain working there, either.”

“But you could’ve told me sooner.”

“You could’ve looked it up. Besides, would you have started working with me if you had known?”

“I… I don’t know! Besides, I didn’t think you’d be lying to me!” You’re getting heated again. Your palms are starting to sizzle.

“You’re going to singe if you don’t take a moment to calm down.”

“Don’t tell me that! I know!!” You are really about to throw hands again. “Why didn’t you tell me you worked with my mom??”

“I didn’t think you needed to know.”

“Oh, yeah, super irrelevant. Do you know what happened to her??”

“Yes.” He nods.

You frown. You honestly hate him. What kind of dishonest…. Manipulative… villain?? He’s a villain! Of course he’s like this!!

He sighs. “You know, it wasn’t your fault Ettie.”

You don’t respond. He doesn’t know anything. You barely even know anything.

“We really should talk this out somewhere more private.” He says.

You look at him. He glances over at the two security guards peering over at you from behind one of the stage curtains. Ah.

“Let’s go for a walk?” He suggests. You nod, and he offers you a hand up, wincing when he feels how hot your palms are. “You should came with a pair of oven mitts.”

“Yeah? My own classic dumb bitch accessories?”

“You’re not dumb.”

You squint at him. He holds his tongue. At least he knows he’s on thin ice. He leads you out back behind the hotel, through their little garden and pool area and over to the main sidewalk. He dons a pair of sunglasses. It’s busy in this part of the city, and you two blend in nicely with the swarms of
people strutting about. You realize he’s still holding your hand. You tug it away and tuck it back in its pocket.

“Look, I get why you’re upset. I promise I was going to tell you when you were ready to hear it. I thought you’d be at the Whirlwind thing.”

“The Whirlwind sucks.”

“Yeah. He does.” He nods. Then, he rubs his forehead. “In regards to your mother’s accident….”

You glance at him tentatively.

“What happened that night was out of your control. Your mother knew the risks of what she was doing. She was willing to brave the odds. It isn’t your fault.”

“I never said it was my fault. Was it??”

“I… I mean, I wouldn’t say so. Would you?”

You could scream. “Can you just be straight with me?? Please??”

He looks at you. Like, really intensely. Frowning, then leaning in. Grabbing your chin. Is he trying to kiss you?? You wriggle back.

“Calm down. I’m trying to see something. Hold still.”

You begrudgingly oblige, and he tilts your head from side to side. He brushes your bangs aside, and you can feel his breath on you.

“How’d you get this?” He rubs a thumb over a tiny scar you have on your right temple.

“Uh, I don’t remember. I never really thought to ask about it. Who would I even ask?”

“Mh.” He keeps walking. “I’ll worry about it later. Do you remember what happened that night at the lab? With your mother?”

“Not really. My caretaker said I was probably repressing the memory.”

“Of course they said that.” He seems irritated. “Always meddling in business that doesn’t concern them…”

You frown. “Who?”

“Your doctors, your caretakers. Who sent them?”

“They worked for the Evil Mishap Department. They’re a subset of POINT.”

He sighs. “Well, that explains why we couldn’t find your mother’s research.”

“Who’s we?”

“Me, myself, and my associates. I personally was very invested in the research she was conducting. It was inspired.”

Sounds fake. But you’ll allow it. You both walk in silence for a moment.

He continues, “The explosion wasn’t your fault, but you were part of why it happened. Your mother was testing a new augmentation for your powers. Her predictions had been off and the blast was the result. You were a mere component in a situation you couldn’t possibly have prevented.”
You feel kind of dizzy. “So, I blew up my mom?”
“Yes. No. I don’t think you knew what was happening to you.”

“So what happened to me?”

“You exploded.”

You don’t respond. You what?? What does that mean??

“I don’t know the exact mechanics of how it happened. But we did manage to retrieve footage of the incident. POINT probably destroyed the majority of the research your mother did, but they kept what was relevant to your case.”

“Do you have the video?”

“Not on me. It’s hard to tell what’s happening in it, anyways. As far as I know, your mother had you drink something. Shortly after, you started convulsing. Then, a flash of light radiates from your general area and the camera stops working.”

You don’t know how to feel. You feel kind of numb. And guilty. Mostly guilty.

“It’s a lot to take in. Are you ok?”

You nod. But you’re definitely not ok.

“Do you have any questions?”

You shake your head. You don’t want to hear anymore. You’d probably have been better off not knowing any of this. You feel kind of sick. Professor Venomous turns to take you back to the hotel. You walk in silence for most of it. At least it’s cold out here. The snowy weather feels good when you’re overheating. Professor is shivering. He’s quick to help himself to a free hot coffee in the lobby. You grab a cup of cucumber water and sip it as he does.

“I think I’m gonna go lay down.” You sigh.

“You want to come to my room?”

“Are you serious?” Is he coming on to you right now? Of all times?

“Not for… Just. You had that annoying roommate, didn’t you? I can go peruse the other panels while you rest.”

You ponder it. He’s right. You would prefer the privacy.

“Ok.” You nod. He leads you up there, swiping the intro card and holding the door for you. You sit on the bed, trying to pull yourself out of the cloudy headspace you were slipping into. You hate that he felt like stranger to you, now. You wanted Professor Vee back. Your lip trembles a little and your eyes burn as you restrain them from spilling.

Professor Venomous sits down next to you, placing a hand on your back.

“Hey. It’s gonna be ok, kiddo.”

You sniffle. “It’s not. But ok.”

“You’ll feel better after a nap.”

“Mh.” You slump over, and he makes room for you to extend your legs, scooting behind you.
“Should I leave?”

You shake your head. “I’ll be here, then.” He lays next to you, leaving you plenty of room.

You can’t stand the space between you. You scoot in a little closer. “I’m still mad at you.” You say as you cautiously rest your head on the arm he offers you.

“I can tell. You’re wonderfully toasty.”

You’d never really noticed, but Professor Vee… Venomous was freezing cold. Hm. “Are you cold-blooded?”

He takes a second to answer. “Bodywise? Yes. In spirit, not completely. Just a side effect of my modifications.”

“Your double dick?”

“My… Hey! That’s a side effect too! I was aiming for regenerative powers at first. Then, the whole reptile thing grew on me. You know what they say about tattoos and piercings? How you can never get just one? Same goes for genetic augmentations. Especially when nobody else is willing to be a test subject.”

“Yeah, the willing ones blow up their parents in a horrible freak lab accident.”

“Ettie.” He chides. “You shouldn’t dwell on the past. Your future is shining bright waiting for you to come get it.”

“Wow. Maybe you should be the motivational speaker next convention.”

“Maybe I should.” He chuckles. He’s playing with your hair, and you’d be lying if you said you weren’t loving it. Stupid sexy evil villain.

“There’s a VIP dinner tonight over at Sakana. Villains only. I could bring you as my plus one.”

“Need the arm candy?”

“Please. I need someone with an actual brain in their head to talk to.”

“What happened to keeping it on the down-low?”

“We are. Well, Professor Vee is. I personally don’t care.”

You consider it. “I didn’t bring any formal-wear.”

“I’ll take care of it. We have a few hours. You should nap, though.”

“…Fine. I’ll go. But only for the food. You’re still the worst.”

“Positively.” He strokes your hair some more. You’re starting to settle down. You yawn softly, snuggling up.

It isn’t long before you doze off, peaceful at last in your professor’s arms.
“Ettie.”

You hear a soft voice fuzzily echo as your eyes crack open. Ugh. They feel so dry. You feel like a shriveled up prune. Where are you? What year is it??

“Ettie, it’s time to get dressed.”

Your eyes hazily try to focus on the figure shaking you awake carefully. Ah. Professor Vee---Professor Venomous. Jeez. That’s gonna take some getting used to. You sniff as you shuffle upright.

“Mh… What time is it?” You yawn.

“Almost six. Dinner is at eight-thirty.”

You rub your eye. “And the dresses?”

“They’re on the couch.”

You glance over. Several plain boxes litter the couch.

“I wanted you to have options.” Professor Venomous hums.

You open up the largest boxes first, working your way through the pile. It’s like impromptu Christmas. You can hardly believe it as you start plotting your outfit in your head.

“Does it look alright?” He questions.

“Oh, it looks great…!” You’re kinda at a loss for words.

“I’m glad. Try it on.”

You hold up your favorite of the two dresses. It’s a dark, shimmery black gown, almost reptilian in the way its delicate fabric reflects a hint of green. A slit runs up the side of the gown. You start heading to the bathroom to change.

“Since when were you so modest?” The professor chides.

“Since when were you such a pervert?” You retort, smirking. You lock the bathroom door and shimmy your way into the gown. You don the matching pair of shoes you had picked out and-- holy crap, are these red-bottoms?? You're not worthy. Unlocking the door, you step out.

The professor glances up at you casually, not saying a word. You feel sweat start to prickle on your neck.

“Well??”

“Hm. Well? It looks ravishing on you, what did you expect?”

Your cheeks redden slightly. You fidget with where the slit sits.

“You don’t think it’s too revealing?”
“It’s perfect. Bring the fur shawl along. It’s chilly out there.”

“I’m hardly afraid of a little chill.” You love the cool air. Makes you feel less sweaty. “But it is cute.” You drape it across your shoulders, posing before setting it down again. Time to fix your face. You excuse yourself to the bathroom to finish up your look.

It isn’t long before you’re strolling down the main-street, casually locking arms with your escort. Cob. You feel so damn glamorous. You really could get used to this lifestyle… Maybe you should. It wasn’t far off from being a petty thief, anyways. Just bigger targets, more glitz and glamour. You could get yourself a manservant, sit on an elegant throne while you hit *LAUNCH* on your latest doomsday device…..

“…but you shouldn’t worry if you don’t quite fit in with this lot… *Ettie? Ettie, are you listening?*”

You blink back to reality, and then at your Professor. Oops. Busted. He squints at you, and you look as innocent as possible. He sighs.

“I was saying. This might be a bit of a bore for you. Not every villain can be as charming as me.” He nods. “But this is a good networking opportunity. Don’t be shy.”

You gulp. Networking? Guess he expects you to take this whole villain gig seriously now that the cat is out of the bag.

“Gotcha.”

Professor Venomous holds the door to the restaurant open for you, and you two are quickly escorted to the private dining room in the back. He enters first, and is met with a cheerful chorus of hellos as he makes his way to his seat at the head of the table. You quietly follow along, stomach twisting in knots. You weren’t cut out for fancy parties like this. Oh jeez. People are staring at you. You could melt. After you sit, Professor Venomous pushes your chair in before settling in himself. To his right sits a dragoness with luscious hair. Wow. She’s so pretty. You wonder what conditioner she uses.

“Cosma, it’s been too long.” Professor Venomous leans in to half hug her. She obliges, kissing him on the cheek as they part ways. You feel a twang of jealousy ring out through your guts.

“It has, Professor.” She smiles, before glancing in your direction. “And who is the young lady glaring daggers at me?”

Your eyes widen, a mortified blush creeping onto your cheeks.

She cackles. “Ah! Kidding! Your face though, sweetheart…!”

Your professor chuckles as well. “This is Ettie, my new lab assistant. Ettie, meet Cosma. She’s chair of the Board of Directors for villainy.”

“Pleased to meet you…” You nod, smiling nervously. You’re still recovering from her joke.

“Oh, she’s so cute, where’d you find her? Minioncorp?” Cosma cooed, leaning over the table and grabbing your hand. “She’s so warm, too, did you do that?”

Jeez. You kinda felt like a dog at a dog show.
“No, no, she just came like that.” Professor Venomous hums. “You’ve met her before, Cosma, she’s Case-file R207.”

You’re what?? Cosma blinks confusedly for a second before a spark of recognition flashes through her eyes. “Henrietta’s girl!”

“Precisely.” He smirks.

“Wow!” She’s standing now, leaning over you and examining you up close. Her chest is uncomfortably close to your face. “She’s a spitting image, you know.”

“Would you expect any less from Dr. Rauchen?”

“Oh, wow. She’s grown so much.” Cosma pinches your cheek, before going quiet for a moment. Then, she squints at Professor Venomous. “What’s she doing at dinner with an old man like you?”

Your professor frowns. “Hey! What sort of lech do you take me for?? She’s old enough!”

Cosma looks back at you. “Is that so?”

“Uh, I’m 20!” You hold your hands up. Hey. You’re legal!

“Hmm.” She rubs your cheek, before sitting back down. “You always beat me to the cute ones.”

You’re like, overwhelmed by this attention, so you gulp your water. The cool water fizzes and steams as it makes contacts with your lips. Fuck! Calm down!

“Well, I had priority this time around, can’t help that.” He hums.

You wish they would talk about something other than you. Or the weird mystery circumstances that seem to surround your existence. It’s kind of a bummer.

Professor Venomous looks at you, stroking your thigh under the table.

“She’s more interesting in person than she is on paper.” He hums. The waitstaff serves the table a glass of sake.

“Cheers.” Professor Venomous raises his glass, clinking it against yours and a few other patrons. You sip the drink. Hm. Better than rainbow vodka, you could say that much.

The hibachi chef steps up to his grill, central to your table.

“Ladies, gentleman, we would like to thank you for dining with Sakana tonight…!”

He squirts his cooking fluid on the grill, and fiery hot flames dance upwards, barely stopping in time to not burn the ceiling. The group of villains surrounding you ’oohs’ and ’ahhs’. As it burns, you find yourself entranced by the flame. Hot… destructive… powerful. Your ears start to ring slightly, and the sound of the diners around you is slowly drowned out, leaving only the crackle and fizz of the flame. Your stomach starts to twist, you feel a longing for something you can’t quite name.

You snap back to reality as the flames forcibly part, guided by a heavy rectangular blade. Soon, the blade is joined by a second, both working in unison to dice the meat and vegetables as they cook. They drum out a rhythm, and you lean back in your chair to enjoy the show. Food is flying
gracefully, soon landing on each patron's plate, garnering a light round of applause. You look down at your plate. Dinner is served.

Mhh. The chicken is delicious, you will say. You keep your mouth occupied, carefully chewing and picking at your food with your chopsticks. You listen in on the nearby conversation, most of it is happening in scientific jargon you couldn't even dream of comprehending. Your attention is soon demanded by Cosma again.

“So, Ettie, was it? How long have you been interested in pursuing the evil lifestyle?”

Professor Venomous begins; “She’s been--”

“I asked her. Not you.” Cosma holds a finger up to his lips, and he frowns.

You gulp. “Uh, well, actually, I…” How can you not sound like an idiot in this situation. You didn’t even know you worked for an evil laboratory until literally this morning. “I’ve been independently practicing villainy at home for a while now, and thought now would be the right time to gain some professional experience.” Nailed it!

“Ah! So enthusiastic. Your mother would be proud.” She hums.

“She’s really talented, you know. She’s light years ahead of where I was at her age.” Professor Venomous adds.

“Is that so?” Cosma smirks, looking at you. “If you ever get sick of working for Mr. Snakebite here, you give me a call, ok?” She grabs your wrist, clinking your smartwatch to hers and initiating a contact transfer.

“Oh..!” The sudden movement had startled you. “Of course..!”

They drift off into their own conversation again, and your eyes drift across the room. You always did like people watching. The villains seemed rather close knit. You notice little cliques and groups throughout the room. You wonder what it was like to be a member of the villain’s elite. It’s probably great. You ponder where your mom would’ve sat, had she still been around for this. Would she have brought you to these once you were old enough? You wish she was here to tell you.

“Ettie. Your drink is on fire. Mind your hair.” Professor Venomous hums.

You glance down, and he’s right. The surface of your liquor is burning gently. You must’ve been running hotter than you thought.

“You must be boring her to death if she’s trying to burn the place down, Professor.” Cosma snorts.

“No, no, this just. It happens.” You don’t know what to do, so you just chug the rest of the drink, fire and all. You cough a little smoke out as you clank your cup down.

“Oh!” Cosma cheers. She’s definitely tipsy. “You have to give her to me, Ven, Wouldn’t she be so cute in a little dragon outfit? She doesn’t even match your whole mutant bit.”

“She’s not a fashion accessory, she’s a competent lab assistant. Besides. She’s thematically appropriate for my lab.”

“Hm. I suppose that's true.”

You wonder what the hell they’re on about now. People are starting to head out. It isn’t long before
Professor Venomous is donning his coat again.

“Pleasure seeing you in person, Cosma. We should do this more often.” He hugs her, and they each kiss each-other on the cheek. What is this, Europe?? You’re glad to be escaping the pressures of social conversation, at least.

She hums, before embracing you tightly. “Goodnight, Ettie~” Mmm. She’s warm. And tall. Her bosom presses against you and you practically die then and there.

“B-Bye, Ms. Cosma.” Cob. Could you be any lamer??

You’re escorted back to the hotel by your Professor, who naturally ushers you up to his bedroom again. How could you refuse? He could be threatening to harvest your organs and you’d still haplessly follow him into a dark room.

As the door clicks shut he begins unbuttoning his shirt with a sigh of relief.

“Glad that’s over with.” He hums. “Can’t wait to go home and sleep in my own bed.”

Oh. Yeah. The bus home left tomorrow.

“Yeah… I bet my cat really misses me.” You unbuckle your shoes, kicking them off. Professor Venomous heads into the bathroom, and you hear the water begin to run.

“I’m sure he does. I would miss you.” He replies. You blush, letting your hair down in the other room. Professor Venomous exits and enters the bathroom a few more times, bringing with him some drinks from the mini fridge, his blue tooth speaker, and some of his own shampoo and body wash. Ah. Treating himself.

“Won’t you join me, Ettie?” He asks as he traipses past you.

“Oh, uh, yeah?” Smooth. You nod at him, starting to undo your dress as well. You wait until he settles in the water himself to cautiously step in. It smells heavenly, you wonder what he’s added to the water.

He lets out a soft sigh as you settle down on top of him. You’re scared of squishing him. He pulls you in until you’re submerged, only your face resting above the surface level, comfortable nuzzled against his shoulder. Mmmh. This is nice. You hadn’t realized how much tension you had been holding in your back. You’re both quiet for a while, soaking in the ambiance. His little speaker is playing instrumental music. It’s rather dark.

“Is this your evil brooding playlist?” You joke.

“Mmm. It is, occasionally.” He hums in response. His hand rubs your back softly. “It’s relaxing, if you ask me.”

“If not a little melancholy.”

“What can I say? I’m a regular prince of darkness.”

You snort. He isn’t wrong.

“And what am I? Your damsel in distress?”
“My court jester.” He smacks you on the ass, water splashing as he does.

“Hey!” You glare down at him.

“I’m kidding! You’re no damsel, though. More like a thief, or a rouge. Maybe one day you’ll earn the role of queen.”

“I’ll have to kill the competition, first.”

“Heh. That’s the spirit.” He strokes your back again. “You know what I like most about you?”

“What?”

“You keep the bath at a precise 90 degrees.”

“.....” Wow. “You’re so romantic.”

“It’s true! It’s like being at a day spa.” He squeezes you.

“You’re only using me for my hot, hot body.” You sigh.

“Alas. It’s true.”

“Don’t tell your bunsen burner.”

He chuckles, going quiet again soon after. You do the same, enjoying the music as you soak. Yawn. This is beyond relaxing. You could fall asleep like this. It isn’t long before the two of you are drying off and crawling into the welcoming embrace of the hotel linen. You sleep easy that night.

The bus ride home is long and uneventful. Your legs are aching by the time you step off and head back to your humble abode. As you turn the key, you can already hear the discordant mewls of your cat, who was convinced he would never see you again. You swing your suitcase into the house before scooping him up and burying your face in his fluffy black fur.

“Smokey!” You hum, and he goes limp to your embrace. “Did you miss meeee??”

You definitely missed him. You nuzzle him until he presses his paws into your face and wriggles for freedom. You set him down, and lug your suitcase to your bedroom. You had missed the smell of home. Huh.

There’s a medium sized black box on your bed. Had Amelie left this here? As you approach it, your phone begins to ring. You look at it. An unknown number was calling. You hang up. It calls back immediately. Fucking spam bots! You hang up. It calls a third time. Ugh! You pick up.

“Hello?”

A familiar voice comes to life on the other end; “Finally. You’re killing my whole dramatic reveal, kid.”

“...Do I know you? Who is this?”
“Only your favorite mysterious shadowy figure. You remember me, don’t you?”

You frown. The last time you had fraternized with this clown you had definitely regretted it. “…How could I forget?”

“Good. I’m glad. I have a job for you, princess.”

You scoff. ‘Princess?? Fuck you!”

“Ah, ah, come now. You keep talking to me like that and you’ll regret it. There’s a billboard on the plaza highway just begging for your photos to be plastered on it.”

“You..” You remember the photos he took. You would literally jump off a bridge if they went public. “You’re the worst, you know that?”

“Positively. But you love it, don’t you?”

You don’t reply. He chuckles, voice tinny through the tiny phone speakers.

“Anyways, my job for you. I’ve provided you with equipment. Put it on and I’ll explain your objective.”

He hangs up. You frown frustratedly at the phone. You were tired. You didn’t wanna play games right now. But you knew better than to call a bluff like that. Running your hand over the edge of the mystery box, you resolve to open it.

Inside, you see a net, a jar, and a bluetooth headset. You plug the headset into your ear, and it blinks to life.

“Good girl.” Your shadowy boss’ voice rings through your ear. “Now we can stay in communication. I need you to go to the Lakewood Plaza ditch.”

You roll your eyes. “This better not be stupid.”

“It’s not. I would do it myself but I don’t fit through the side entrance.”

“Maybe you should diet.”

“Maybe you should watch your mouth before I rent out a billboard.”

“….Touche.”

You begin to change into your Evil Activities™ outfit. You strip your sweats and top off, left only in your undergarments.

“Mh. Do me a favor, turn about 40 degrees counterclockwise.”

You frown, obliging out of curiosity.

“Now, bend over.”

“What??” You spin around again, examining the area behind you. “Are you watching me??”

“I might be. What does it matter to you? You’re as good as mine, now.”

That made you feel some type of way. “I’m not yours.” You warn.
“You’re very argumentative for a blackmailing victim. I’m not going to ask you again. Bend over, Ettie.”

You frown. This sucks. What sucks more is that you’re totally turned on by it. You turn and bend, leaning yourself on the bed. Maybe if you kept this up you could figure out where the camera was.

“Good girl. God, you should see what I see. You could be famous with an ass like that.”

“Tch. It’d have to be plastic for me to be famous.”

“And ruin such supple natural beauty? I think not.”

You start to sit up again.

“Ah- ah- ah. Who told you to move?”

You bend over again. “I’m trying to get dressed, here.”

“Let me savor the moment. Look back at it.”

Is he joking?? He has to be joking. You look over your shoulder, skin heating up beyond burning point at the humiliation. Your bed sheets are starting to smolder.

“Now say, ‘Ooh, Shadowy Figure, you’re so big!’” He mocks, voice jumping up an octave as he does a caricature of your voice. You snap upwards, turning to sit on the bed and glare in the general direction of the camera.

“Fuck you!” You object, and he cackles.

“Ok, ok, you’re right. We have work to do. Get dressed.”

You hastily don the rest of your costume, nervous to see where this night would take you.

Once you arrive at the ditch, your mysterious blackmailer guides you to a small manhole in the forest nearby. Ew. It looks musty as hell. You push your equipment bag into the hole, and it disappears.

“You want me to squeeze through here? I’m gonna barf.”

“What can I say, I never said this would be glamorous.”

You start to pry the grated cover loose. It pops free with a squelch. You’re gagging.

“Please tell me this isn’t a sewer.”

“It’s not.”

“Promise?”

“On my life.”

You sit on the edge. It’s gonna be a tight squeeze. Gently, you shimmy your way down the winding pipe. It smells like old bath towels and dirt in here. It’s really dark.

“I’m gonna get stuck and die in here.” You huff. You’re ok with vents, but this was a new level of claustrophobic space you were dealing with here. Vents never took more than a few minutes to
navigate, and they certainly weren’t this stuffy. The light from the surface is starting to fade as the sun sets, and you can’t see past your legs to the end of the tunnel, either. Time is passing too slow.

“You’ll be fine, Ettie. You’re halfway down, already.”

“How can you tell?”

“I’ve got my eye on you. I’d never throw a pawn into needless danger.”

Your heart continues thumping. The tunnel is tapering, now uncomfortably pressing against your hips as you continue wriggling through. You’re moving at a snail’s pace now, working against the increasing resistance. You feel like you’re being swallowed whole by some behemoth beast. Stomach twisting, your neck prickles with anxiety. You can’t see anything. You try to readjust, to see if you could climb up again, but your arms are locked by your sides. You freeze, petrified to continue.

“Ettie. Is everything ok? You aren’t moving.”

Your lip shakes. You don’t want to cry, but you feel the tears prickling into existence under your eyelids.

“Ettie?”

Your breathing grows quicker.

“Ettie, calm down. Everything is fine.” You don’t know how he can tell what’s happening, but your heart is racing harder than ever now.

“Can you move your legs?”

You take a deep breath, wriggling them slightly. “...I can.”

“Good. Keep shifting your weight downwards. You’re almost there, I promise.”

You do as you’re told. After what feels like an eternity, you feel the tunnel cut off around your legs. You can swing them freely.

“Ok. There’s a bit of a drop. You’ll be ok though.”

“How high is the drop?”

“Don’t worry about it. You’ll be fine.”

“Can you just tell me??”

“Can’t you just trust me?”

“How am I supposed to trust you???”

“Just drop!” He snaps. You gulp, shimmying the rest of the way free and oh my god this is a ridiculously high drop you’re plummeting from. You whoosh down through the air, helplessly trying to find something to grasp before you land with a hearty SPLASH into freezing cold water. You shriek, dragging yourself out on the nearest ledge like a drowned cat.

“You ASSHOLE--” You sputter, shuddering as the cold soaks you to the bone momentarily.
He chuckles.

“See? You’re fine. And the water washed the tunnel sludge off of you. You’re good.”

“I hate you.”

“How cute. Grab your equipment.” It was floating near the shore of the artificial pond you had landed in. You scoop it up, admiring your surroundings. Dozens of little glowing orbs danced around the room, spiraling around a giant tree.

“Wow…. It’s beautiful in here.” You sigh, taken in by the natural beauty.

“It is. Now, do me a favor. I need you to fill your jar with those little white guys.”

“What?”

“You heard me. They’re valuable.”

“Are they sentient?”

“Uh…”

“Am I kidnapping helpless magical beings in the name of evil science?”

“Well, yeah, kind of. But you’re being blackmailed, if you’re having a moral crisis over it.”

“Ugh. You’re really a bad influence on me, you know.”

“Am I?”

“Yeah.” You start swinging your net, deftly swooping up the slow little orbs.

“I can’t be the only one. You’re so good at being bad.”

“Oh, am I?” You smirk. “Would you be jealous if I said you weren’t my one and only villain?”

“Oh?”

“No. I know someone much more dastardly than you. And he’s rich, too.”

“How do you know I’m not rich?”

“You’re blackmailing me instead of paying me.”

“Fair point. And what if I was jealous of your new boy toy? I guess I would have to get rid of the competition.”


“Why not? Then I could have you all to myself!”

“I’m serious! You’re not funny.”

“Maybe I’m not joking.”
You frown, resting your net momentarily before the clatter of a pebble behind you catches your attention.

Shadowy Figure chuckles into your earpiece. “Pay attention princess. Security is here.” You spin around, spotting a... teenage boy at the top of the stairs? He can’t be much older than 16.

“And who are you supposed to be?” You sneer, glaring up at him.

“Ah, I should’ve warned you. The kid is nuts for the whole good versus evil thing. Distract him with some banter and continue with your objective.” Shadowy instructs.

“I’m K.O! And I’m here to kick your evil butt!” He launches at you with a flying kick, and you’re quick to side step him.

“Really? You think you can handle it?” You jump into the air, swooping up more glorbs and depositing them in your jar. The little man runs at you, fists blazing.

“I know I can! That’s why Mr. Gar put me on the night patrol!”

You dodge his punch, and he skids into the ground, shaking a few tiles loose.

“Yeah? So you could punch holes in the floor?” This was too easy.

“Yeah! ..I mean, no!! So I could protect the glorbs!” He stands, facing you again.

“No offense kid, but maybe you need some more practice.” You hold up your full jar, smirking.

“Why are you bad guys always so mean? Those glorbs never did anything to you.”

“Look, kid, I just work here. Call the bossman if you wanna raise your ethical concerns.”

“Maybe I will! What’s his number?”

You open your mouth, Shadowy interrupts you. “Don’t give him that. Seriously.” You shut your mouth.

“That’s a secret.”

“Well. You wanna know my secret? You can trick any dumb villain into sticking around like a sitting duck if you get them talking. Now, Mr. Gar!!”

“Ettie!! Dodge!!” Your earpiece shouts, and you hear a whoosh behind you, then a heavy foot barraging into your back. FUCK!! You skid and roll along the ground, leaving a trail of debris in your wake as you smack face first against the temple wall. Fuck! Your glorbs!! You cling to your jar for dear life. You quickly scramble to your feet, narrowly avoiding a punch from the greasy sunglassed guardian swinging at you. He dents the wall, and you hastily duck out from under him and make a break for it. The younger crime fighter latches onto your ankle, and you start kicking him in the ribs.

“Let! Go! You! Little! Brat!” Kick! Kick, kick!

“N-N- OW-- Never!!”

The big one is coming at you again. You slip your foot out of the boot KO is holding and blast smoke hastily from both palms.
“Ettie. The water. It’s the way out.” Your earpiece rings. You step back with a splash, opening your eyes under the water. You sink down, hearing a heavier splash behind you. Mr. Gar is in hot pursuit!

“The middle tunnel. Squeeze through the bars and kick like hell.”

You do as you’re told, swimming towards the drainage tunnels. As you squeeze through, Mr. Gar grabs your ankle. You lose the other boot, kicking free, and he’s unable to pursue you any further. You swim for dear life, wondering where the tunnel lets out. You’re already running out of air.

“There’s a pocket to the left here. Take a breath, then continue. You should hit the outlet soon.”

You gasp for air as you emerge into the pocket.

“You’re fucking crazy. This is crazy. Where the hell am I?”

“That’s not important.”

“Why won’t you tell me?”

“Because it’s confidential. Hurry up. I’m tired of waiting for you.”

You sigh, taking a deep breath before continuing onward. Eventually, the tunnel slopes up into a walkable path. You follow it, reaching a dead end.

“What now, genius?”

“Give a firm kick to that wall.”

You do as you’re told, and the end of the tunnel pops out beneath the force of your kick, revealing a secret outlet onto a river-shore.

“Go twenty paces northwest. No. Your other northwest. Yes.”

You walk, careful of your bare feet in the forest. You soon come across a roadway, with a sleek black car parked on the curb. Its headlights kick on and the passenger door opens. You stoop in to look, spotting your Shadowy Blackmailer in the front seat. There’s a towel laid out on your seat. You squint at him and get in. He locks the door behind you and starts to drive.

“You did a great job, Ettie.” He hums.

“....Fuck you.” You scoff. You’re cold, wet, and grubby.

“Oh, come on. Wasn’t this good field experience?”

“For what? Almost getting my ass handed to me? Drowning?”

“Neither of those things happened. You did better than expected! Look at all those juicy glorbs!”

You don’t respond.

“You’re not upset about the whole blackmail thing still, are you?”

You glare at him.

“I’ll make it up to you~”
“Oh, you will?” Ha! As if!

“Mhmm.” He’s driving back to your place. As you pull into the driveway, he speaks.

“Go take a shower.”

You oblige, happy to warm up and scrub clean of tonight's adventure. You’re surprised he doesn’t try slink into the shower with you. Guess he would have to take his disguise off for that. That stupid costume offended you at this point. You were dying to see what lurked under the hood. As you re-enter the bedroom, wrapped in a fluffy bathrobe, you notice he’s lit a few candles.

“What is this, evil stalker date night?” You laugh.

“Maybe. Just a little something to let you know how much I appreciate you.” He settles on the bed next to you, offering you a drink. It’s a weird hot pink color, definitely not the apple juice you left in the fridge.

“What’s this?” You inquire.

“A special punch. You’ll like it.”

“Oh, yeah, lemme just drink my roofie smoothie real quick.”

“It’s not roofies. It’s harmless, I promise you. I made it just for you.”

You squint, sniffing it. It smells good. You take a cautious sip. Mm. Sweet, but tangy. It tastes like an exotic lemonade. “Mm…. What is it?”

“Eros fruit juice mixed with a little solar extract.”

“Sure sounds like roofie juice.”

“It’s nothing more than a gentle stimulant. It’ll relax you. If I wanted you unconscious I would’ve just darted you.”

“Good to know.”

He chuckles. You feel your skin begun to grow warm as you down the drink.

“There’s more in the fridge if you want it.”

You nod, and he fetches you another glass, setting it on the bedside table. “You can have it in a moment. Come here, will you?” He pets his lap.

You roll your eyes at him. “It is a date night! You’re brain-dead if you think I’m sleeping with you after the shit you put me through.” The audacity!

“Oh, am I not allowed to dote on my minions, now?”

“Minion?” You snort.

“Come here, Ettie.” His tone is more serious now. You can’t help but love the authority in his voice.

“…Fine.” You carefully shuffle over, holding your robe shut, and he pulls you in to straddle his lap.
“Mmm. Evil or not, that body is heaven-sent.” He hums, rubbing his hands on your hips. “Lose the robe.”

You blush. If you fuck two evil guys in one week you’re definitely some sort of slut. But. It’s your right to be a slut if you want! Did you want this? You glance down at the Shadowy man in your bed. He’s not ugly… You assume. He’s charming, you could say that much. Maybe you should just stop overthinking it and go with the flow. I mean. He’s throwing himself at you.

You untie your robe. He pulls it off you, admiring your still damp skin.

“Mmmh… Atta girl.” He leans in to kiss you, and you almost get a peek at his face before he’s too close, lips pressed to yours. You melt into the kiss, and you slowly start to feel overwhelmed by your desire.

“Are you sure you didn’t roofie me?” You huff as he moves to suck on your neck.

“Positive. I’ve only enhanced the sensation you’re feeling on your own.” He huffs, teeth grazing your delicate skin softly. “Besides. I would hate for you to forget this.”

You moan softly as he cups one of your breasts, sucking intently until a hickey begins to blossom on your neck. You huff, and a surge of arousal shoots through you. Shadowy Figure retracts, pulling his scarf off his neck and moving to tie it around your eyes. You offer no resistance, you know better than to argue at this point.

“Still hiding from me?” You scoff, and he sets you on the middle of the bed. You feel him kneel behind you, taking your arms and restraining them behind your back.

“I am. Maybe one day I won’t have to.” He hums, tightening his knot. You huff. “You’ve been so good for me, today, Ettie. You deserve a reward.”

He sits next to you, pressing the cool glass of mystery drink to your lips again. “Open up.”

You oblige, sipping carefully, the last few drops spilling off your lips and dripping onto your thigh.

“Oh, you made a mess. That won’t do.” He hums. You hear shuffling, and flinch in surprise as a cool tongue begins to work it’s way up your inner thigh. You’re practically throbbing at that.

“A-ah!” You huff, wriggling in your seat as he pushes you back and parts your legs. You wonder if he plans on biting you again. He’s planting kisses along your inner thigh, and you can’t help but squirm and bite your lip in anticipation as you feel him draw closer to your wetness. You don’t dare say a word, heart racing as your hips tremble. Come on…

You let out a breathy gasp of relief as he presses his lips against you, tongue teasing ever so slightly as it drags from bottom to top. He leans in to focus on your clit, tongue lapping in gentle circles as he warms you up... It feels fucking amazing. Whatever that drink was, you wanted a swimming pool full of it. Moaning quietly, you lean back into your cushions, mind blissfully flashing with erotic imagery as your mysterious lover goes to town. You picture the professor momentarily… then Cosma… your mind flashes through a whole roster of people who’ve aroused you before zoning out again, utterly distracted by the expert maneuver of your lover’s tongue. It was inhuman how good he was at this. Your toes curl as he begins sucking carefully on your clit, tongue spiralling and working you in ways you have only dreamed of before. You feel your ecstasy pooling at your core, hands heating up and leaving scorch marks on the bed sheets you were gripping behind you. You practically explode as he finishes you off, a guttural moan bursting out of you as you curl forward in climax. Fuck! Fuck!! Where have you been all my life?
You huff for breath, and he chuckles. “Somebody enjoyed herself.” He hums, stroking your hair.

“Man, forget blackmailing me. If you can do that, I’m yours.” You joke, still catching your breath.

“Ah, almost forgot.” He gets up, and you hear the unmistakable sound of the camera flashing. Of course.

“Why do you do that? Make the really obvious camera noise. Aren’t they hidden?”

“This one’s a Polaroid. For my personal collection.”

“Freak.”

“You love it. And now, dear Ettie, I must bid you adieu.” He positions himself between your thighs again.

Crap. Here it comes. “Wait—” Too late!

He sinks his teeth into you, and it isn’t long before your consciousness fades to nothing.

That bastard.
You’re late to class today. Whatever. You made it in time for attendance, that’s what counts. Sitting at your desk, you sigh quietly as you try not to die from boredom. You covered this concept last class period, and to make things worse you had already read ahead and finished your quizzes for the week. Man. Must be rough for dumbasses like Cowjock who actually need the repetition.

Staring out of the window, you absentmindedly scratch your face. Huh. Now that the Professor had pointed it out, you were acutely aware of the little scar hidden on your forehead, nestled under your bangs. You run your fingers over it gently, trying to remember how you got it. Nada. Go figure. You can never remember anything important. You’re soon distracted by the heavy, wet breathing coming from behind you. You don’t have to look to know which sweaty jock is doing it. Disgusting.

You whip out your phone, texting quietly under the table. The professor of this class never pays attention to you anyways.

[amelieee]

[ ethics class is so boring i might actually kms :( ]

It takes her a hot minute to reply.

[ lol, at least ur not in MATH ]

[ at least math is fun ]

[ in what fucking world is math fun ]

[ the world where im really good at math ]

[ aka this one ]

[ cant relate ]

[ cowjock is breathing like a fucking horse ]

[ lololol what else is new ]

[ how wuz your trip ]

[ uhhh really good actually i got laid and also somebody bought me like a whole ass designer outfit ]

[ who?? ]

[ prof v?? ]

[ who else lol ]

[ gurl ]

[ pics plz ]
You shoot a selfie you had taken in your new clothes to her. Because you knew you were gonna be bragging about them eventually. Too bad they were too formal to wear to class. Maybe you’d have to take your mentor shopping one of these days. People begin shuffling and organizing their belongings, drowning out the ramble of your exceedingly uninteresting ethics professor. Class must be ending. You tuck your phone away and gather your pencils, haphazardly stuffing them in your purse and heading towards the door. As you exit, you catch Cowjock staring at you out of the corner of your eye. What the hell was that face? You didn’t like it, that’s for sure. You don’t want to confront him, anyways. You’re quick making your way down the hallway away from him, heading towards where Amelie’s class was simultaneously getting out.

Parking yourself by her classroom, you see she’s engaged in a discussion with her desk partner. No biggie. Looking around, you see a particularly handsome man walking out of the advanced biology lab. Professor Venomous! You hastily cross the hall to greet him.

“Hey, Professor V.” You hum, waving at him. He’s so stinking cute in his good guy disguise. You can hardly stand it.

“Ah, Ms. Rauchen.” He smiles at you. “Are you doing alright today?”

You could melt. You need to tone back on the smitten schoolgirl act.

“I’m doing pretty good, Professor. Were you teaching just now?”

“Mhm. Advanced genealogy. It’s fascinating, if not a little rudimentary.”

“Ah, I took that with Dr. Thundunner about a year ago. It’s tricky if you don’t pay enough attention.”

“A good professor will captivate your attention, regardless of what he’s teaching. That’s my opinion, anyways.”

“Well, not everyone can be as… captivating as you, can they?”

He squints his eyes at you a little.

“I suppose not, Ms. Rauchen. I saw you were enrolled in my Arching course next semester.”

“I am.”

“I think you’ll find it quite… fascinating.” He hums at you, before his smart watch beeps at him. He glances at it; “Ah, look at the time. I must be on my way.”

“Oh, uh, ok! Bye Professor!” You wave as he hurries down the hallway. Turning back to the math lab, you see Amelie waiting by the doorway, smirking.

“Wow. You two aren’t subtle.” She teases.

“Seriously?” You go a little red in the cheeks.

“Nah. But you’re cute standing next to each other.” She hums, taking the lead as you head to the parking lot.

“Glad you think so. Can we get some food? I’m like, dying.”

She nods. “Oh, duh. We’re going to my place, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“And you’re gonna lay that juicy reptilian gossip on me?”
“Of course.” You can’t help but smile at that one. “But seriously, you can’t fucking tell anyone.”

"Got it."

It isn't long before you've loaded up on sloppily made tacos and your favorite soda, Bahama Bomb. Once you're settled in on Amelie's bed, she glances at you with bated breath. You blink at her.

"Well?" She huffs, before taking a long slurp of her drink.

"Right. Ok. So." You whip out your phone. "Seriously, this is a secret. Like, could put you in danger maybe secret. Do you wanna know?"

"That only makes me wanna know more, you know."

"Fair." You pull up a picture of Professor Venomous in his villain regalia. "Look."

"That's Professor Venomous. Teen Hero monthly named him villain heartthrob number one 3 years in a row."

"Now imagine him with glasses."

You swear you hear jeopardy music playing from somewhere as Amelie squints at your phone. Come on. You can do it, Amelie! Her eyes flash with realization and she throws her head back with a gasp.

"You're fucking Professor Venomous??"

"Shhh! Not so loud!" You hiss, covering her mouth. "But yes."

"Oh my COB." She mumbles from under your palm. You remove it. "That's insane! Isn't he married?"

You blink at her. "Uhhhhh." For all you know, he could be. "I… I don't think so?"

"Wedding De Luxe covered it like 4 years ago."

"Why do you know that?"

"Uh, cause reading is fun?"

You roll your eyes. "I'm pretty sure he's single, dude. I've been to his house." You make this statement with a pit of utter uncertainty in your stomach. You'll have to investigate this further.

You continue; "Well, anyways, that's not the important part. Ever since I found out he's evil, he's been taking me to villain meetings. Says I should start networking."

"Networking?"

"You know. Like, professional villainy?"

"That's fucking crazy. My dad would kill me if I even considered something like that. Are you gonna?"

"I don't know yet. Turns out my mom was really big on the evil scene before our accident."
"No way. Your mom was so nice."

"Uh, to you maybe! I loved that woman but she was crazy as all hell."

"....I mean, it kinda does make sense. The latex outfits and maniacal laughing. I always just assumed she was into BDSM or something."

"Gross. Can you not bring BDSM into a conversation about my dead mom."

"Sorry. Your mom was pretty hot though."

"STOP."

She giggles, laying back. "Ok, ok. But seriously, if you wanna go into villainy you've probably landed the best internship on the whole planet."

"Yeah. I dunno. I never really pictured myself that way."

"Sure you did. You were always playing the bad guy when we were younger. You loved them on TV, too."

"Yeah?"

"God. What's really crazy is how little you know about... well, you?"

"Well, maybe you should fill me in a little better, Ms. Expert."

"I don't know where to start." She shrugs.

You ponder it. "Well, how did we meet?"

"Middle school math, 8th grade. You caught me cheating off you and confronted me in the girls bathroom. You wanted to fight but I was too cute, so you let it slide."

"Jeez. Sounds very middle school."

"Oh yeah. You were a total drama queen. You stayed that way way into high school. I mean, you know I live for drama. But chill Ettie is more fun to be around."

You stare at the ceiling. You hate feeling like an alien in your own body. "Yeah?"

"Yeah. You really don't remember anything?"

"I have some childhood memories from when I was way younger. Middle school is really blurry. I just remember going to class and stuff, but not faces. Highschool is just missing entirely. They say the head trauma and PTSD from the accident probably locked those up for good."

"Have you tried therapy?"

"I got some counseling from the POINT team taking care of me. But it didn't help much."

"That sucks."

"Tell me about it."

"You don't remember the Spring Fling freshman year then."
"Nope. What about it?"

"Oh. It was silly, really. You and Cowjock were kissing behind the bleachers."

"What?? Ew."

"Yeah. You got caught, and I was really upset. I yelled at you acting like you were trying to steal my crush or whatever, but I really didn't like him either. I was just jealous that some guy was messing with my best friend. We didn't talk for like a week after that. Which is about as long as your thing with Cowjock lasted."

"Gross. I hope we didn't do it."

"I don't think you did. You said you didn't, anyways."

"We can only pray."

"Amen, sister."

You feel your gut twisting. You really hate this whole situation. You close your eyes, straining to remember anything, just one minute detail about your life before the incident. A sharp stabbing pain rings out through your temple, you grit your teeth and give up. Jeez. Frustrated tears well up in your eyes and begin to hiss and sizzle on your face.

"Oh Ettie, that didn't upset you, did it?" Amelie leans over, checking your face before reaching for a tissue.

"No. I mean, yeah, but I'm glad you told me." You sniffle. "I'm just mad I can't remember for myself. It's not like you tell me things and I get the pictures back in my head and properly remember them. I just have the thought of you telling me, and that's it."

"Well. Most people would pay good money to forget high school. Maybe you're the lucky one." She nudges you until you sit up and lean on her, pulling you into a hug. Mh. You never get sick of how soft she is.

"Yeah. Thanks, Amz."

"Anytime."

You sit quietly for a few minutes before she speaks again.

"There's a New Years Eve party at the Kappa Frat coming up. I know you wanted to spend Christmas at home but you should totally come to that."

"Half of kappa frat hates me and the other half are like, super handsy, dude."

"That's why you should go. You keep them in check."

"So I'm unpaid security?"

"Ettieeeee. Come on. Free booze."

"Hm. I'll think about it."

"I'll be your best friend if you come."
You snort, rolling your eyes.

"Well, I can't argue with that. Gimme a ride there and I'll go."

"Yes! You're amazing and I promise we're gonna have so much fun, ok??"

"If you say so."

She puts the TV on, snuggling up to you under the blanket. You sigh. You really can't say no to her when she looks at you with those big brown eyes.

Every villain has their weakness, you suppose.
Christmas break had snuck up on you. You didn’t mind the time off, it gave you time to relax at home. Besides, Professor Venomous is keeping you plenty busy at the laboratory. You’re walking into your morning shift, carrying a holder full of everyone’s favorite coffee precariously as you unlock the main door. You make your way to the lab. Huh. Empty.

“Hello? Anyone home?” You call out, the only reply being the echo of your voice sounding out through the spacious lab. You check the reptile room. Nada. Maybe he’s in the office?

You make your way down the hall, yawning slightly before opening the door to Professor Venomous’ office and--- holy shit.

Professor Venomous has some guy up on his table, and they are both deeply invested in a heated game of tonsil hockey. The shorter man is copping a major feel of your bosses ass. It only takes them a split second to notice you and separate, Professor Venomous scrambling to his feet and his mysterious partner hastily buttoning his shirt. Jeez. He’s pretty shredded. You stand there, cheeks flushing, unsure of what exactly to say in this situation. You admit you’re a little jealous. But. No strings attached means he’s not technically doing anything wrong?

Professor Venomous breaks the silence. “Well. This is awkward.”

You open your mouth to respond, but he cuts you off.

“Ettie. This is my husband, Lord Boxman. I’m sure you’re familiar with his work.”

“...Husband?” You’re speechless. Professor Venomous takes his coffee from you.

“Ah. Well. I meant to introduce you two when he came back from his business trip. He arrived early. What can I say?” He sips his coffee.

The only person who doesn’t seem mortified right now is Lord Boxman himself. He’s actually grinning at you like some sort of cheshire-cat ass motherfucker.

“You really do live up to expectations.” He hums, stepping forward and examining you. You pull your not-so-modest pencil skirt down, feeling scrutinized. He extends a chickeny hand at you. You halfheartedly shake it. You are beyond confused. “I can’t wait to activate yo--”

“YOUR full potential as an intern here at Voxmore!” Professor Venomous interjects, nudging his husband with a harsh elbow.

“I-” You begin. Professor Venomous interrupts again.

“I can see you’re surprised. I wasn’t sure if you already knew.”
You blink at him. “That you’re gay??”

He blinks back at you. “Uh. I was going to say married. The technical term would be bisexual, for future reference.”

“You know what I meant.”

Lord Boxman glances you over again, before murmuring at your Boss. "I thought this one was supposed to be smart."

Professor Venomous shushes him aggressively.

Your head hurts. “Can one of you just. Explain this to me. Does he know we’ve been-”

“Doing it?” Lord Boxman finishes. “I’m well aware.” He shrugs. “It’s pretty common in the villain scene, sweetheart. An ass like his is a marketing strategy.” He slaps the Professor on the cheeks. Venomous blushes in response. You’ve literally never seen him like this before. He’s always so macho and intimidating around you. He looks like a total bottom right now. You’re beyond confused.

“Could you have told me a little sooner maybe??” You glare at Professor Venomous.

“Oh, Ettie. Sometimes I forget your research skills apply to science and science alone. You really live in your own little world otherwise, you know that?” Professor Venomous approaches you. You scowl at him. Your palms are burning the cardboard drink holder.

“Well, you’re a scaly secretive weirdo, you know that?? You don’t exactly make it easy on me.”

“Ettie.” He tries to stroke your hair. You duck away.

“Don’t Ettie me! You lied to me about your identity, you didn’t tell me about this, and, and Fink isn’t even your real niece--”

Lord Boxman laughs.

“Boxy, sweetie, don’t exasperate the situation.”

“What else are you hiding??”

Boxman breathes in to speak, and Venomous hastily shushes him, sounding very reptilian in that moment. He then sighs, and pulls up a hover-screen window, equipped with a power-point. When did he have time to make this, even?

“Five years ago, Venom Industries purchased Boxmore. Ever since becoming business partners, well. Things just grew from there.” He seems rather mushy about the whole thing, gazing over at his man. “Fink is my minion. Boxman has several of his own, many of which are now operating their own branches of Voxmore internationally.” He clicks through the slides, displaying a picture of Fink and a couple more images of robots that look vaguely familiar. “Of course, we love visiting them whenever we can. I stay here most often to manage the home branch, while Boxy visits his robots.”

“And I would hate for my snakey-wakey to get cold and lonely without me.” Boxman coos as he nuzzle noses with Professor Venomous, both of them holding hands. You could barf.

“I. Ok.” God damn. Your life just gets more and more complicated.
Boxman continues; “And besides, I’ve barely been able to keep up with him since he sprouted that second d--”

The office door slides open. Fink is standing in the doorway, looking disgruntled. She stares up at you.

“Did you get my mocha frappuccino??”

You blink at her. Jeez. She’s completely unphased by her hectic family life. “I did. Here you go, sweetie.” You hand it to her.

“Thanks, toots.” She slurps it. “I need help with my math homework.”

“Well, I’ll come help you then.” You squint at your mentor. You’re done with this conversation.

“Good talk, Ettie.” He blurts out as the door slides shut behind you. You sigh. What a morning.

As you’re assisting Fink with her long division, you feel your smartwatch buzz. Yowza! Someone just transferred a fat heap of technos into your account. You open the notification.

[ Ettie. As dividends for the awkward introduction earlier. Would hate to have upset my favorite intern. ]

Well. You can’t argue with that. It did make you feel a little better, at the very least.

“You good, Ettie?” Fink asks.

“I’m fine, Fink. Just. A little frazzled. I didn’t know our boss was seeing someone.”

“You didn’t? Don’t you watch the news? Or read?”

Jeez. You just got owned by an eleven year old.

“Look Fink. I’m stupid and I have amnesia. Don’t be mean to me.”

She giggles. “Ok, stupid.” She slurps her drink. “Are you gonna come skiing with us for Christmas??”

“Oh, uh, I didn’t know you were going. I told the boss I didn’t celebrate.”

“You don’t? Why not?”

“It just isn’t my thing.”

“Booo. I wanted you to come shred with me.”

“Maybe some other time, kiddo. I have some stuff to take care of that day.”

“That’s so lame.”

“It’s not all bad.”

She shrugs. “You should still get me a present though.”

“I’ll think about it, you brat.” You smile, ruffling her hair.
“You’re the brat!” She pushes your hand, grinning. If the bank deposit didn’t fix your mood, she sure did. You really appreciated having a little person around. It made you feel responsible. You had never liked kids too much in the past, but this one had grown on you. You just hope she has an easier time growing up in this world than you did. Cob knows what you would do to anyone that messed with her.

One thing is certain. It would be ugly.

Christmas morning is always a little difficult for you. Despite Amelie’s best attempts to drag you along to service and lunch with her extended family, you were adamant about staying home for it like you’ve done the last three years. You would feel bad going off and having fun without your mom. Or, what was left of her anyways. You had compromised by spending Christmas Eve with Amelie, exchanging gifts and watching corny stop-motion movies. You’re wearing the silky black pajama set she gave you, along with a pair of fresh fuzzy slides. She really knew you. You pick Smokey up and give him a kiss, before unwrapping his present for him. It’s a little cat house that slides into your shelf, complete with a dangly mouse at the door way. He sniffs it, before settling in the discarded packaging adjacent to the expensive ass present you had gotten. Go figure. Oh well. It would keep him entertained, at least.

The kitchen begins to smell homey as you fry some onions and peppers for your omelette. You remember your mom would always try and make a grand brunch for you both on Christmas morning. She would burn at least half of it, but it was good nonetheless. You didn’t have the heart to blast the carols she would have been playing, you figured that out the first winter you spent alone. You eat your breakfast hastily, dousing your eggs in Taco Hut sauce to spice them up a little. Once you’re done scraping your plate, you deposit it in the sink and make your way to your moms bedroom.

Standing in front of the door, you make sure Smokey isn’t at your ankles before quickly slipping in and locking the door behind you. You kick the towel you use to block the gap under the door back into place, and take a deep breath. Phew. It still smells like her room. You’re always scared the rest of the house is going to creep in and erase the little things you have left to remember her by. You avoid coming in here unless it’s a special occasion for that very reason. Jeez. It’s gotten dusty in here since her birthday. You grab the microfiber towel you keep in her en-suite bathroom and quickly give the surfaces a wipe down, careful not to disturb her urn. It’s sitting pretty on the fireplace mantle. There. Much better. You put her decorations back in place around her and lean over to light the fire for her, pressing your hand into the wood and sparking up. She had insisted that every bedroom in the house had one of these built in, and of course the living room had one as well. Once there was a steady crackle going, you open her table drawer and look for the spicy cinnamon candle that really give this room its essence. Man. You only had three left. You were gonna have to go looking for more, but you’re pretty sure these were artisan candles, not something you could just buy at Bathtime and Beyond. You light it up by her ashes. Or. What you hope is her ashes. Pretty much everything in the general vicinity of the accident was ashes. But you did find her gold tooth! You peek into the urn, checking it. The tooth glints at you atop the ash, and you feel relieved it hadn’t grown legs and disappeared. You grab a little box from out of your shirt pocket.

“Merry Christmas, Mom. I got this for you.”

You dangle a delicate gold necklace around the urn. Attached to it is a little flame charm, an enchanted one that animates with a simple flicker. It looks just like a real flame. You hope she likes
it. You light the candle carefully, setting it near her and sighing as the smell hits you. You remember it would always be a special occasion when your mom let you come spend the night in her with her as a little girl. She would buy you candy and snacks and treat it like a slumber party, you would watch a movie together and stay up way past your bedtime. When you got older, you took it for granted, fidgeting through the movie because you wanted to go text your friends or something else asinine. You wish you could go back in time and tell yourself to be less stupid. You know you and your mom started arguing a lot when you were a teen. You regret that every time you happen to think about it. Those are memories you’re glad are foggy.

You lay on her bed, flicking through an old fashion magazine your mom had left on the bedside table. There’s an outfit in here that really inspired your costume. You love coming back in here to look at it. The little candle is only going to last about 30 minutes or so before it burns out. It’s already a quarter inch smaller than it was. You’re turning the page when you hear a ground shaking thunk from outside the window. Startled, you peek out to see a giant metal shipping crate outside, in your backyard. Holy shit. You blow out the candle and carefully douse the fireplace before heading out there.

The box is marked with the letters VM in a vibrant font. As you approach it, the box hisses open, collapsing outwards into the snow. Inside stands a little red robot with one eye, dressed up in what seems to be a delivery boy outfit.

“Delivery Darrell, at your service!” He announces, tipping his little hat at you.

“Oh. Uh, hi?”

“Are you Ettie Rauchen?”

“I am.”

“I have a telegram for you! Ahem; ‘Dearest Ettie, I hope you are having a wonderful Christmas. I regret that I am unable to drop by and visit. These are for you to enjoy. Sincerely, Professor Venomous. Also, Fink wishes you Merry Christmas. Her present is the green one. Also, Lord Boxman says hello. Ok. End message. No, don’t record that-- Darrell!’ End Message! This Delivery Darrell will now self-destruct.”

Darrell shoots into the air and bursts like a firework, leaving a sparkly picture of his face glimmering in the sky above. It takes you a minute to snap back to reality. Glancing at the pile of presents in front of you, you take the smaller ones inside. The biggest one is longer than you are tall, and definitely too heavy for you to move.

The smallest box is crudely wrapped in sparkly green paper, with an envelope on the outside. You delicately open the card, finding a hand-drawn image of what appears to be you and Fink hanging out at the lab. Your heart just grew three sizes. This is the cutest damn thing you’ve ever seen in your life. After you hang her card on the fridge, you open the gift. It’s… a costume? It's one of the Sailor Sentry uniforms from that anime Fink watches. Uh. It’s not exactly your style, but it’s the thought that counts. Wrapped in the cloth, you find a few packets of sour fizzing candy, and a pair of earrings that both look like tiny knives. Aw. These were cute. You’d definitely be wearing them the next time you dressed up.

The second box feels heftier. You tear off the paper, finding a box with a pair of clawed gloves inside. You try one on, as as you clench your fist, a large set of blades extends from the knuckles. These were fucking brutal. You loved them. You toss some wrapping paper in the air, swiping at it, grinning as it shredded into delicate strips and fell to the ground. These were gonna come in handy for sure.
The third box is filled with a variety of expensive looking things. Dresses, jewelry, chocolate, wine. The works. You really feel spoiled looking at all this. Your heart kinda plunks into your stomach when you realize you didn’t even get Professor Venomous a gift. Guess you were going shopping soon.

All you had left to open now was the huge box in the yard. You find it has a tab for you to pull on, and as you do, it unfolds outward to reveal… Holy shit! It’s a bike. It’s similar to your old motorcycle in size, but tricked out with sharp, carefully sculpted silver flame elements up the sides, with a skull ornament mounted above the top wheel. It has several exhaust pipes extending out of it and up the back. You’re practically drooling as you inspect it up close, finding the keys to it and grinning. It even comes with a sexy looking helmet. You rev her up, settling onto the seat before tearing out of the yard and taking her on a test drive down your driveway. You clear it in record time, screeching onto the parkway your property connects to and zooming down the road. After about five minutes, you pop a u-ey and head back home. This bike was fucking sick. You notice it has a button marked OFFROAD. You smack it, and you feel the bike shift a little. It feels like the suspension has changed. You swerve off the driveway and test it on the dirt. It handles like a dream. You want to make sweet love to this bike. You’ll have to save that thought for the guy who sent it to you. As you reach the house, you grind to a halt and hop off, dialing him on your watch.

It dials for a moment before he picks up. He’s in a ski lift with Fink. You can see Lord Boxman and some of his robotic minions in the lift behind them.

“Hello? Oh, hey, Ettie!” He smiles into his watch.

“Hey, Professor.” You smile back.

“Ettie!!” Fink leans into view, and you see Venomous wince as she elbows him to get in frame.

“Easy kid, you’re not as tiny as you used to be. Everything ok, Ettie?”

“Yeah, I’m doing good. I got your box.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. It’s really awesome. I just wanted to call and say thanks.”

“No problem Ettie. I can’t take all the credit. Boxy did most of the work on the bike.”

“It’s flipping awesome, dude. Tell him I said thanks.”

“Will do.”

“And Fink! Thank you too!”

“You’re welcome!” She chirps.

“Seriously you guys. It means a lot to me.” Ew. You hate being this sappy.

Professor Venomous looks up from the screen. “Oop! There’s our stop. We gotta go, but I’ll call back later, ok?”

“Oh, ok!”

“Bye!”
The screen disappears and you can’t help but feel a little watery eyed. This was like, literally the nicest thing anyone has ever done for you. You wheel your new bike into the garage before texting Amelie. She was gonna die when she heard this. This really was the best Christmas you’d had in a while.

It was good, feeling like someone was looking out for you again.

Jeez. This New Year's party had come too quickly. You're running late with your makeup, and you can hear Amelie pulling up your driveway, windows down and music blasting. Shit. Shit. Ok. You slap on a coat of lipgloss and a dab of mascara and consider yourself lucky that you didn’t fuck either up. You put the earrings you had gotten from Fink in and head towards the front door. Phone? Check. Keys? Check. Chapstick…. Fuck. Ok, forget the chapstick. You say goodbye to Smokey before heading out.

“Hey, slut.” You hum as you get into the passenger seat.

“You’re the slut. Is that Guisache?” Amelie replies, glancing at your dress.

“It’s Vuatellini. The shoes are Guisache.”

Amelie looks so jealous. “No fair! You need to introduce me to your man.”

“He’s not my man. Besides. He’s kinda exhausting sometimes.”

Amelie had been made aware of the whole swinging villains situation. That had earned you a total ‘I told you so!’

“Uh, who cares. You’re living like Milan Milton.”

“True.” You shrug. “I’m not complaining.”

“Better keep your eye on that fancy bag or someone is definitely gonna steal it.”

“I dare them to try. You know I’m the queen of thieves around here.”

“We stan a shoplifting queen.”

You snort. “I haven’t been into it since I got my internship. It’s kinda fun to just go in and drop bank on things. Now that I’ve got bank to drop.”

“Well, some of us are still baaa-roke bitches.” She teases.

It isn’t long before you pull up to the frat house. It looks like a zoo in there.

“Well. Here I go. Partying with the locals.”

“Oh, shut up, Ettie! You’re gonna have fun.”

Amelie drags you in by your arm, clinging to you like a needy girlfriend. At least it isn’t sweaty inside. Not yet, anyways. You greet the people you happen to recognize from school, but for the most part, you haven’t got a fucking clue who any of these people are. Oh well. Amelie is quick to locate the drugs and alcohol, and it isn’t long before the two of you have a drink in hand while you chill in a circle with the other hazers. You puff and pass and puff and pass for a while, working on
the buzz you need to make this night tolerable. Glug glug glug. Ok. Maybe this isn’t too bad. You have to admit it’s always fun to see Amelie get blasted off her face. But ugh. You notice Cowjock is here. And he’s looking at you funny again. Great. You hate it. Amelie notices you’re getting irritated.

“Hey, wanna go dance?”

“Huh?” You look at her. Oh. Right. That’s what people do at parties. “Sure.”

She steps up, pulling you along with her into the middle of the ‘dancefloor’. You relax a little now that that bovine creep is out of sight, shaking your hips to the music and getting into the swing of things. A couple of shots and a few songs later, you’re really in the swing of things. You’re not worse than Amelie though. She’s bumping, grinding, shaking and moving in all directions. You love gassing her up.

“Eyyyy! Eyyyy!” You cheer as she drops it low. That’s your motherfuckin’ best friend!!

You feel a slight pinch on your neck, and swat at it. Mosquitoes at this time of year? What kind of nasty frat house was this?

Amelie busts it down into a full on split, garnering cheers from the crowd forming around her. As the music keeps pumping, you start to feel a little nauseated. Shit. Where’s the bathroom? You head towards the hall, losing track of Amelie. You tug on the doorknob, but it doesn’t budge. You hear a rhythmic thunk coming from inside, and silently curse whoever decided the bathroom was their personal motel tonight. Bitches! Your stomach wretches and you hastily make your way out into the back yard. Thank god no one was out here. You head as far out into the woods behind the house as you can before depositing the contents of your stomach into the snow. Fuck. Every damn time. Why do you do this to yourself?

You kick some more snow on top of it, annoyed that the woozy sensation wasn’t easing up now that you had emptied out. If anything, it was getting worse. You were really cold out here, for some reason. You look at your hands, and notice they’re a little… wavy? You feel like you’re at a 3D movie without the special glasses on. You blink, trying to focus. Ugh. You don’t wanna go back inside like this. You spot a stump nearby. Sweet. New chair. You plunk onto it, leaning forward onto your knees. Fuck. When did you get so heavy? And since when was your skin rainbow colored? Where the hell are you? You feel a warm set of hands place themselves on your shoulders, kneading gently.

“Ughhh. Not you again.” You groan, attempting to glance up at the shadowy asshole you’re sure is here to bother you.

An unexpectedly gruff voice responds. “Again? Someone been bothering you, Rauchen?”

You look back, mildly startled. Oh man. You’re not sure if this is better or worse. It’s Cowjock. “O-Oh. I didn’t.. No. I just.” You don’t like this. “Just thought you were someone I knew.”

“You know me.” He coos at you, hands still working at your shoulders. You hate to admit it, but they feel pretty nice. “You’re so cold~”

“I shouldn’t be….” Usually the snow fizzes right off of you. You haven’t felt this chilly in your life. “I feel like shit.”
He drapes his Letterman onto you. “Here.”

You don’t like how nice he’s being. He settles on the ground next to you. Gross. Just go away.

“Thanks.” You respond quietly.

“I wanted to say sorry. That we’re always fighting and shit.”

Well, that’s something you hadn’t expected to hear.

“...Ok?” You feel weird about this. “Why?”

“I just miss when you and I got along, is all.”

You squint at the ground. You don’t wanna look at him. His face pisses you off.

“Look, Cowjock--”

“Call me Kurtis.”

“...Kurtis. I don’t know what to say to that. I think it’s hunky dory you wanna be a better person or whatever, but I’m really just. You’ve done some really, fucking, some weird shit to people.”

“Well that’s in the past! You’re not perfect either, you know. I know you get up to shady shit.”

You snort. “Please. You’re fucking full of it.”

“We used to be friends you know. And then you went away and came back all weird and bitchy.”

That really struck a nerve with you. “Oh, I’m bitchy? My fucking life got blown up, and everything got fucked up, and I forgot nearly everything that was important to me, Kurtis! I woke up not knowing anyone on the entire fucking planet, and surprise surprise, it turns out most of them are rude and annoying! I’m sorry if that makes me bitchy.” You’re over this conversation. You get up to go back inside.

“Where are you going?”

You ignore him.

He grabs your wrist. You try to yank away, but his grip is firm. He back you into a tree trunk, and you start to feel antsy. You press your hand onto his, ready to sizzle some steak. Any second now. Come on! Why isn’t it working??

“You can’t leave just yet, we’re talking!” He hums, leaning over you. You feel your stomach sinking.

“I don’t wanna talk anymore.” You say as you glare up at him. He looks more like a demon than a bull in this light.

“We don’t have to talk then.” He runs a thumb up your neck, brushing over the irritated skin where you had been bitten earlier. You’re starting to think it wasn’t a mosquito after all.

“Kurtis-” He takes your other hand and holds them both above your head, and it doesn’t take much imagination to figure out where he’s going with this. You haven’t felt this scared since your first real tussle with Shadowy Figure. What is it with you and attracting guys who are clearly sick in the
head?? You thrash and kick, but you’re definitely not your usual level of coordinated. You’re at a
disadvantage, he’s huge compared to you. He hoists you off the ground and pins you to the tree with
his leg.

“Kurtis, I’m serious—” He’s feeling you up now, meaty hand trailing its way up your waist. “Stop!”
You really can’t believe this.

His hand presses against your chest, and as the sensation jolts through you, you swear in that
moment you were going to murder him. You stop struggling when you see a shadowy blur come up
behind him. A hand clad in a black leather glove wraps itself around Cowjock’s left horn.

A familiar voice spills out of the darkness. “I believe she told you to stop.”

With that, you drop to the ground as Kurtis is heaved off of you, and your eyes go wide as a violent
wave of bright blue electricity engulfs his body, causing him to shake and seize. You scramble
backwards through the snow to avoid being caught in the altercation, heart racing so violently you
swear it could jump out your chest. Kurtis tosses Shadowy Figure over his shoulder like he was
made of cloth, and he tumbles onto the ground, quick to regain his footing. He’s armed with what
appears to be a high-tech cattle prod, sharply spiked on the electrified end.

“And just who the hell are you??” Cowjock snarls, swinging his fist at Shadowy Figure, who dodges
before leaning forward again to zap him. The contact is brief, Kurtis quickly learns to stay away from
the prongs when he can help it.

“Just someone who happened to be passing by. You put your hands on her again and you’ll go from
bull to steer. I suggest you go back inside.” You’ve never heard him sound so angry before.

Cowjock snorts at him, cracking his knuckles. “You gonna make me, little man? You better tell your
little goth friend to step the fuck off, Ettie.”

You don’t say anything. Shadowy Figure isn’t your friend.

Shadowy Figure laughs. “If that’s how you wanna play, then come at me.”

Kurtis charges him, and Shadowy Figure is quick to grapple him by the horns and headbutt him. It
stuns him momentarily, but he manages to shove Shadowy off and land a solid right hook to his face.
You see a tooth go flying. Holy shit. You start to scramble back towards the house, hoping to get
help.

“Ettie. Stay.” Shadowy Figure instructs, and you stop in your tracks, out of habit at this point. You
hate to admit it, but you trust his judgement. He kicks Cowjock in the side, and the larger man backs
off momentarily before launching into a charge. This time, Shadowy Figure dodges and then throws
himself against Kurtis as he runs, redirecting his momentum. He lodges his horn into the tree trunk in
front of you, becoming thoroughly stuck. He thrashes, trying to get free. Shadowy Figure prods him
again with the cattle prong, and he bellows out in discomfort as the electricity surges through him.
Your dark savior leans in to speak in Kurtis’ ear, voice low and ominous.

“Let this be a lesson in why you shouldn’t pick on little girls.” He hisses, before bringing his leg
down forcefully onto the small of Cowjock’s back. You hear a sickening snap before Kurtis’ scream
envelops your ears, and you can hardly look up to see what had happened. Blood is spurting out of
the jagged nub that was once his right horn. He grabs onto it, before promptly emptying his guts.
Holy fucking shit. You see Shadowy grab the second horn, clearly intending on breaking that one as
well. You grab a pebble off the ground and toss it at him, nailing him in the chest.
“Enough.” You warn, and he growls at you, still holding on. “I want to go home.”

He hesitates for a moment before letting Kurtis go, and his flops forward. You see Shadowy figure yank the horn out from the tree trunk and pocket it.

“You’re soft.” He hisses at you.

A firework explodes above you, and Shadowy Figure glances up. It’s not going to be long before people come out and see this.

“Just fucking take me home!!” You spit back, and he helps you to your feet. Frustrated with your intoxicated pace, he scoops you up and carries you over his shoulder, leaping the back fence and hurrying you to his car. You speed away from the scene. Fuck. This was going to bite you in the ass, you just knew it. You feel awful. You can’t help but cry as he passes through the neighborhood and turns onto the freeway. It’s silent for a few minutes aside from your sniffling. You feel so stupid and useless and you knew you didn’t want to go to another fucking party in this cobforsaken town. You knew it was a bad idea and look what happened.

You rescuer speaks up in a quiet tone, breaking the silence that was allowing you to wallow. “You know what happened to you tonight?”

“I don’t need a lecture.” You sniff.

“I’m not lecturing. You got hit with a neutralizing dart. They’re what POINT uses on supervillains when they can’t bring them down by force. You’re going to feel pretty bad until it wears off tomorrow.”

“Great. Aren’t I lucky.”

“They’re not street legal. I can only imagine he got them from his father. The Bovinian’s are one of POINTS leading drug suppliers. An overdose of the stuff can be really damaging. You should talk to your doctor about it.” He pulls onto your driveway.

“I don’t see my doctor anymore.”

“Maybe your boss, then.”

You hate that he knows everything about your life. You don’t answer.

“You shouldn’t blame yourself for not being able to fight. That sick fuck made sure of that. You couldn’t have known.”

You can’t help but scoff at that.

You see him begin to sneer. “What’s so funny?”

“You don’t see the irony?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re not any fucking better than him. You think blackmailing me into doing things for you is any better than doping me?”

He’s quiet for a moment. “You better watch your tone.”
You’re over this. “Or what? You’ll publically humiliate me? Beat me?”

“Ettie.” He growls.

Oh, he doesn’t like hearing it. All the more reason for you to continue. “You’re both *assholes* trying to take advantage of me.”

He stops the car with a sudden brake in front of your house. “STOP!”

“You don’t like it??”

“It’s not the same!!”

“How??”

“I’m doing this for you--!!”

“No! You’re doing it because you get some *sick* little power trip out of pushing me around! I never asked for you to, to *stalk* and harass me!! You have *cameras* in my *house*!! You knock me out and take me places and force me to do things I don’t wanna do! How is that any better than what he just did to me??”

He goes quiet for a moment, before leaning back. Then, he cracks a smile, sharp teeth glinting in the moonlight before he breaks into a full on laugh.

“You know what? *You’re right.* I’m just an evil man here to take advantage of you, because you’re young, easy to manipulate, *desperate* for attention, and I don’t have *any* good intentions while doing it, because I’m *evil!* Do you hear me?? I’m a *bad guy,* you stupid--”

SMACK. You bring your hand down on him with the wrath of a thousand burning suns. How *dare* he talk to you like that. He better consider himself lucky you can’t get warmer than the average angry woman right now.

“You wanna keep going??” You spit at him, coming at him again over the center panel. He’s got nowhere to go now, nowhere to slink off to, no way of dodging you as you bring your hand down again. He grabs your wrist before it can make contact, but you’re not trying to slap him. With your other hand, you grab onto his hood and yank it back before he has time to stop you. The moonlight illuminates his features, and you blink down at him, finally the victor. When you realize who you’re looking at, your heart sinks and a fresh batch of tears begin to sting at your eyes.

Professor Venomous blinks back up at you, eyes watery, looking like a sad deer in the headlights.

“.....*I can explain.*”
The Underground

Ugh. Your head is throbbing in ways you didn't know were possible. As you open your eyes and fumble around for your glasses, you feel a sharp wave of nausea hit. You rush to the bathroom before you fuck up your carpeting. Jeez. The combination of alcohol and whatever else you had shot into you is really unbearable. You wish you had a sports drink. You settle for water and a tiny sip of pickle juice to replace your electrolytes. You reach for your phone to check the time. It's dead. Your head throbs again. You find a Tylenol to take before plugging your phone in. You get back into bed and sleep a little more.

When you wake up again, you see your phone has booted. It's like 2pm. Not that you have anywhere to be.

[12 Missed Calls]

[A Whole Lotta Messages]

Jeez. Amelie was a multi texter, but that was a bit much, even for her. You check the call log first.

The first four were from Amelie at the party last night. You guess your phone had died a while before midnight. Then, two were from Professor Venomous. They were a little after you had a complete melt down in the car. Your head throbs again. You don't like thinking about it.

"I don't want a fucking explanation!!" You seethe, unbuckling your seat belt. You have never felt this betrayed before. A million different emotions are barraging you all at once as you process the facts at hand.

Professor Venomous tries to take your arm, you shove him back. He protests; "Ettie, please-!"

"Just shut up!! I don't want your bullshit excuses for why you think this was an acceptable thing to do to me!! You let me put my trust in you!!" You know you're shrieking like an absolute banshee right now. If you weren't sedated, you would set this car interior on fire out of spite. You hate how ugly you sound when you're upset and it's only upsetting you more.

"I-" He starts.

"No!! I don't care!! The only thing I care about is getting the hell away from you and whatever, whatever BULLSHIT mind games you've been playing!! You're, you're really just downright manipulative and, and sociopathic, and I, I fucking hate you!!!"

You had stormed out of the car last night. Professor V followed you up the porch, but you had slammed the door in his face and put the house on nuclear lock-down after that. You look around. The windows are all barricaded by a thick sheet of lead and metal. Huh. should probably disable that
after your pounding head allows you to enjoy the sunlight again. Back to your phone. The calls are all a mix of Amelie's and that bastard professor's. You move on to check messages, opening Amelie's first.

[Hey gurl whered u go]

[Ew these people are fuckin in the bathroom]

Missed call.

[Call me when u see this I cant find youuu ]

[You're gonna miss the fireworks 🎇🎆 ettieee ]

Missed call.

Missed call.

[ettie are u ok?? They found cowjock all fucked up in the woods ]

Missed call.

[I wont snich if that wuz u please call me ]

[ ettie ]

Missed call.

Missed call.

[ ettie please lmk if u got home safe ]

[ I'm going home now I love u please call when u get this ]

You feel awful. You shoot her a text back.

[ I'm ok. Stuff did go down and my phone died but I cant call rn but I'm ok ]

[Come by my house later we can talk ]

Sigh. Now to deal with the rest of the texts. They're from your professor. They look really wordy. You delete the entire message history with him. You know hes probably spun up some woeful apology that would make you feel sorry for ever doubting him. The last thing you want is to be fooled again by his sensitive soft guy act. You text him.

[ Consider this my official resignation from my position at Voxmore. Do not contact me again. ]

Mere moments after you hit send, your phone springs to life. Ugh. What had once been an endearing photo of your mentor now stands as a sickening reminder of everything that had happened last night. You hit decline on his phone call, and then block the number. That was step one of cleaning up this mess. You still needed a job though. Your savings would only last so long without one. You go dig
through your purses until you find the business card Cosma had given you weeks prior. This would work nicely, you hope. Hesitantly dialing the numbers, you feel mildly anxious as the dial tone rings.

"Cosmatech Inc. This is Cosma's office." An unfamiliar voice answers.

"Hi. I need to speak with Cosma."

"Name?"

"Ettie Rauchen."

"Please hold."

You listen to a solid minute of jazzy hold music before the phone clicks alive again.

“You’ve reached Cosma.”

Gulp. You’re suddenly unsure of yourself. “Hey! Uh, it’s Ettie. From dinner.”

“Ah, Miss Rauchen! Pleasure to hear from you.”

“Thanks. Uh, I was calling to let you know I’m in the market for a new internship.”

“Oh?” She sounds interested. “Did things not work out with you and Venny?”

“I’d rather not talk about it. I’m looking for a more professional work environment.”

“They run things like a zoo over there. It baffles me they make any money at all.”

“Mh.” You wish she would change the subject.

“Well, if you’d like a tour of the lab, I can bring it your way.”

“Pardon?”

“The lab. We’re currently hovering near the Danger Zone, but we can relocate to Lakewood for a weekend.”

“Oh, I wasn’t aware it was mobile.”

“Good. Don’t go flapping your lips to people.”

“They’re sealed, Dr. Cosma.”

“Perfect. I’ll see you at 9 tomorrow morning. Don’t dilly dally.” She’s very… Businessy.

“Of course not. Thank you for the opportunity.”

“Anytime, Ettie. Happy New Year.” Click. She hangs up on you. You sigh a breath of relief. Things are going to be ok. Right?

You get ready to start your day. As your breakfast burrito is microwaving, your phone buzzes to life again. Crap. It’s Fink. Or is it? You know it could just be her dad acting like a complete sad sack. You let it go to voicemail before blocking her number as well. You feel awful. But this wasn’t your fault. You have to take care of yourself. Speaking of self care, that was your last breakfast burrito.
You need to hit the store.

You feel like crap, so you don’t put much effort into dressing. Abibas leggings and a crop top will do. Scraping your sloppy morning after hair into a ponytail, you head out the door. You look at your new bike. You bet that its chipped. You wheel it into the garage and call a Ryde.

Things are bustling at the Plaza, as usual, with everyone jovial at the thought of the new year. Must be nice. Their happiness is almost nauseating. They all seem so plum and pleased that their new year didn’t start off with a double portion of betrayal with a side of sexual harassment. Must be fucking excellent for them! You chew on your cheek subconsciously, stopping only when a metallic tinge warns you you’re overdoing it. Ow. You shove junk food into your cart. Only pizza can drown your sorrows right now.

Cart filled, you head to the checkout. Fuck. It’s that kid you beat up while fishing for glorbs. You hope your glasses hold up as a disguise. While you’re casually placing your items on the counter, he squints at you. Sweat prickles on the back of your neck. You have a headache creeping in from behind your left eyeball. Then, he breaks into a smile.

“Hello miss! Find everything ok today?”

“Uh. Yeah.”

“Enjoying the New Year?”

This kid is insufferable. “Yeah. Woop woop. Lotsa fun.” You couldn’t sound more agitated if you tried.

“Aw, you seem down. You wanna talk about it?”

Tch. “Can you just ring me out, please.”

His face falls, and he hastily finishes bagging your Hot Pouches.

“Didn’t mean to offend, miss.”

“It’s fine. I. I’m sick.” You feign a little cough cough. “Sorry.”

He perks up a little bit. “Did you wanna get some syrup--” BOOM.

The alarms in the store start blaring, and the noise sends your headache into full flare. It feels like someone is stabbing you in the brain repeatedly.

“Oh no! I’ll be right back miss!” The kid (KO, according to his nametag) springs into action, running out the front door. You peek out to investigate. Oh. It’s one of Voxmore’s delivery crates. Great, just what you needed! What could possibly make your day better? Head throbbing, you unsheathe your extendable mallet from your purse and head outside. You just want your fucking food. But no! Professor Ego has to make your life difficult again! Wonderful! Amazing!

A Darrell is locked in witty villainous banter with KO.

“You’ll never defeat the Plaza, Darrell!” KO shouts. You sigh deeply. You don’t have time for this.

Darrell cackles. “Oh, yeah? Watch me, twerp--” He is interrupted by you walking up to him. “Oh? Who are y--?” CRACK. You smash his head clean off like a golfer trying to beat his personal best,
sending it flying back to the Voxmore lab across the street. This is for messing with your cobdamn emotions!! It explodes on landing, the body fumbles for its head before coming at you. CRUNCH. This is for lying! SMASH. That’s for manipulating you--! You disable the body entirely before launching it into the air for its inevitable self-destruction. KABOOM. KO is staring at you with his jaw practically on the floor. You put your mallet away. A crowd forms around you.

“Miss! That was, how did you do that??”

“Wow, so cool! What’s your name??”

“That was a one hit knockout!!”

Your head throbs. You turn to address the mob forming. “Yeah. And I’ll do it again to anyone who decides they’re ballsy enough to fuck with me, or this plaza! You got that??” You’re glaring at the lab across the road.

Oop. They’re intimidated now, backing off. You turn to KO.

“You. I’m tired. Can you finish checking me out?”

“Of course, but--” He follows you into the store. “Are you a hero? I’ve never heard of you.”

“No. I just don’t like people who play games at the expense of other people. Voxmore is a public menace.” You’re dying inside. Please Cob. You wanna go home.

“Well, yeah! They’re evil!”

Sigh. “Yup.”

“Yes.” Jeez. This kid must have some pent up issues or something. You can relate.

He hands you your bag. “Thanks for your help today, uh…?”

“Ettie.”

“You should apply for a job here. We’re short staffed right now.”

“I’m good kid. But thanks.”

“Well, bye…!”

You’re already halfway out the door. You squint across the road at Voxmore. You hope they got the message.

You’re laying on a cold table somewhere unfamiliar. Jerking at your restraints, you feel your heart racing as a group of people circle around you, leaning in to block the harsh light that is shining into your eyes. You can hear your own heartbeat, but you can’t make out what they’re saying or see their faces. You definitely feel it when they start cutting into your torso, prodding around with metallic instruments that might as well be made of ice, they’re so cold. You try to speak, but your mouth is gagged. You feel another slice, and lurch as your stomach empties, blocked by your restraints. You
choke awake.

Gasping for air, you shake as you scramble to look at the time on your phone. It’s 5:38 in the morning. You don’t wanna go back to sleep after that. Peeling off your sweat soaked pajamas, you run yourself a warm bath. You scrutinize yourself in the mirror, examining for marks where you dreamed of being harmed. Nothing. You sigh. You’re getting chubby with all the stress eating you’ve been doing. You squint at the mirror. Who is that bitch. You don’t know her. The tub is full. You light up your rolled haze and descend into the water with a sizzle, relieved when your head starts to cloud and your body melts into the warmth. Gotta relax. Got a big day today. You’re gonna look cute and forget all about your horrible traumas.

Getting ready was a chore. You couldn’t find an outfit you liked, and your hair was being completely disagreeable. At least your makeup turned out ok. You wanna make a good impression. You’re sitting by the front door, and as the clock approaches 9, you hear a whooshing sound from above you. You head outside, and a aircraft the size of a fucking sports stadium is hovering over you. A ladder descends. You grab onto it and it begins to pull you in.

“Good Morning, Miss Rauchen! I’m Rachel!” A peppy human girl smiles at you, dressed up in business casual attire. “Cosma is in a meeting right now. I’ll be giving you a tour of the facilities.”

“Morning, Rachel.” You shake her hand. Her grip is very firm. She must drink a lot of coffee.

“Follow me.” She struts ahead. Jeez. This place is huge.

“Sign this confidentiality waiver, please. If you breach it, you’re dead.” She announces with a giggle.

“Of course.” You scribble your name down.

“As you can see, Cosmatech has a grip on most branches of the market. Weapons are more of a personal hobby for Cosma. Our main industry is oligopoly. We own about 72 percent of consumer product companies globally. Of course, people would flip if they realized all their money was going towards evil, so we market under a series of false identities.”

Jeez. Sounds about right. “Sounds intense.”

“It is! Our corporate managers are all trained in cutthroat business techniques, identity maintenance, and equipped with state of the art POW score protection proxies to prevent any slips to the media. Like I said, if you breach your confidentiality waiver, you’re dead!”

“I got that part.”

“Here’s our office division.”

You gaze out at a sea of offices and cubicles, each staffed with a positively chipper office drone ready to do their bidding.

“We boost the coffee with mood stimulants. You’re not allergic to N-methyl-1-phenylpropan-2-amine, are you?”

“Uh…. I’m not sure. I’ll just stick with water.”

“Carbonated?”
“Regular.”

She is quick to acquire a little plastic cup of water for you. You pretend to drink it.

“Here’s our social media department. We mine data from the consumers and use it to make them consume more!”

“How riveting.” You’re bored to tears.

“Ah! Here’s Cosma, now.” She looks up at a door. The door slides open, revealing Cosma in all her hot dragon glory. You really do have a thing for scales.

“Morning Rachel. Ettie. How is debriefing going?”

“Great, Dr. Cosma!” Rachel beams. You nod.

“Pleasure to finally have a Rauchen on my ship, sans fire drill.”

“Oh?” You’d have to ask about that later. “Pleasure to be here, Doctor.”

“Now, of course, interns start at the bottom of the promotions ladder. You’d be doing mostly organizational tasks, compiling data, fetching refreshments.”


“If you make it to the month mark, you’ll go from unpaid intern to part time, meaning you’ll make 7.25 an hour. I can offer you 20 hours a week, give or take.”

Jeez. Evil sure loves a minimum wage. Anyways. You don’t know if you can fit this into your class schedule. “Oh, uh, that sounds great!”

“I just need you to fill this out and fax it to me by Monday.” She hums, handing you a fat folder of paperwork.

“Of course.”

“In the meantime, Rachel and I are going out tonight. I’m sure you’ve heard of The Underground.” Cosma hums.

Huh? “I haven’t actually.”

“Oh? Your mother was a regular. You should join us. I can provide an outfit if you’d like to get dolled up.”

“I’m not twenty one yet.”

Cosma scoffs, and Rachel giggles at you. “That doesn’t matter in The Underground.”

“Oh?”

Cosma smirks. “You’ll see for yourself.”

Your curiosity is piqued, “....I’ll come then.”
Excellent! Rachel, take her to the textiles department and get her in something appropriate. Whip her up a Cosmatech Pass while you’re at it, she’ll need it to get in.”

“Right away, Doctor!”

The car ride there is swanky. Cosma, Rachel, yourself, and a few more Cosmatech employees are being shuttled by flying limousine. You look out the window. Huh. You’re crossing the Danger Zone. Champagne is being passed around, and you happily indulge. You need the liquid confidence, that’s for sure. The outfit Rachel had provided you hardly covered anything. You know if something is sluttier than your costume, it’s really slutty. You’re at risk of a nipslip or assflash at any given moment. Jeez. At least most of the women on board are dressed similarly. You notice there aren’t any men accompanying you. Good. Men are worthless, you just learned that for about the hundredth time or so. You cross your fingers and hope it’s a girls event. The limo swoops towards a mountain, and you swear you’re all gonna crash and die until a lavafall parts and makes way for the vehicle. Passing through the mountain, neon lights depicting evil atrocities flash on both sides, garnering ooh’s and ahh’s from your fellow partygoers.

“Ooh, look! Dr. Megatooths blood rain!” Rachel cheers, pointing out the window. “That one’s my favorite. So touching.”

You examine. Some of these look familiar. Especially the one depicting a maniacal woman, arms raised to cackle as flames engulf a city-scape behind her.

“I was always fond of your mother, Ettie.” Cosma chimes in. “It takes a lot to be recognized in the Hall of Atrocity.”

You blink at her. “Was that who that was?” You wish the car wasn't driving so fast.

“Honestly, did you mother teach you nothing?” Cosma scoffs. “She blew me off while she was training you. In 17 years, you think she’d have done a better job.”

You gulp. “I’m sure she did her best. My brain got knocked outta my skull or something. When she…Uh.” You don’t finish your sentence. “But, it’s growing back!” You knock on your head. “Ready to learn and all that.”

Cosma laughs. “You have a better sense of humor than her. She was very hot tempered.”

“I know that, for sure.”

“You really do keep her spirit alive, Ettie.”

You feel weird. Kinda warm and fuzzy, kinda miserable at the same time. “…Thanks, Doctor.”

“Call me Cosma, Ettie.” She scoots in closer to you. You feel her place an arm around your shoulder.

“Cosma.”

The limousine lands. You can already feel the bass shaking the floor around you as you teeter out of
the car in shoes you'll probably regret wearing. You look up, stalactites cover the ceiling of an immense cave above you. A gateway illuminated in red looms ahead of you, guiding you down a stairwell. It flickers with a mechanic buzz.

WELCOME TO THE UNDERGROUND
The Devil is a DJ

Chapter Notes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcbZUmLlNEo Have some dirty club music! This is what they're bumping in The Underground.

The music grows louder with each step forward you take. You’re guided by Cosma and her entourage, and the further down you go, the more excited you get. You’re a little nervous, but you’re sure that can be remedied with a drink or two. You follow Rachel’s example and flash your Cosmapass to get in, and once you’re inside, the ambiance is almost overwhelming.

The halls are illuminated in red, with multiple dance-floors on different levels connected by glowing staircases. You’re shocked at how many people are barely dressed at all, there’s no shortage of tits and ass to stare at. Villains are sliding technos into the bikini of one of the exposed dancers. Maybe they’re paid to be naked? You’re a little intimidated by the whole situation. Cosma plonks her arm around your shoulder.

With a grin, she speaks; “Wild, huh? I remember my first night out here. Watch out for the candies. They’re real thigh-openers.”

Oh. Hm. She says that like it’s a bad thing. “Thanks for the heads up.”

You’re escorted to a VIP table, and it isn’t long before fancy mixed drinks pepper the table, courtesy of your new potential boss. You sip yours. Eugh. It’s so sweet. You should’ve ordered a shot instead. You finish it quickly before ordering a shot of vodka. The brand they serve is too fancy for you to pronounce. Gulp. You’re buzzed enough for this party now. Thank Cob. Rachel is dragging you onto the dance-floor.

“I’m so glad you came! Dr. Cosma isn’t really into dancing.” Rachel beams at you, cheeks flushed. She’s definitely tipsy.

“What makes you think I am?”

“With an ass like that? Hard to go wrong.”

You go red in the face. “Oh. Thanks.” Gosh. I mean. She isn’t wrong. About your dancing, not your ass. A lot of these villains seem to be picking apples, or have adopted the two step side shuffle. To be fair, a lot of them are older. You can’t help that your generation was raised to twerk. You don’t remember ever learning to dance, but muscle memory proves you wrong when you doubt your ability. You were on cheer-squad. Maybe. That requires rhythm, doesn’t it? Oop. Who’s this? Someone is grinding up behind you as you shake your hips to the beat, causing you to tense. You glance over your shoulder, and a tall, green skinned alien chick is dancing behind you, grinning down at you seductively. Hm. I mean. She’s pretty cute. You can’t be that mad. You resume dancing, ego boost kicking in now that someone is paying attention to you. Maybe you were actually sexy enough to get laid tonight. That would teach Professor Venomous a lesson--

You can’t believe you just thought that. This night is about you, not him. Come on. Focus on
You turn to face your impromptu partner, and she runs her hand down the small of your back, sending a shiver up your spine. You feel like people are staring. You need another drink.

“Excuse me…” You huff at the alien woman, before shimmying your way through the crowd and up to the bar.

A vampiric looking bartender eyes you. “What’ll it be?”

“Lightning Schnapps, please.”

“Card or cash?”

“I’m on the Cosmatech tab.”

“Ah.”

He serves you your drink, and you sip it nervously, perched up on a bar-stool. You have a nice view of the crowd here. Jeez. You’re seeing a lot of super-famous super-villains in the crowd. You feel out of place. The bartender slides a little wrapped candy your way.

“You look like you need this.” He hums.

Hm. Maybe you do. “Thanks.” You unwrap it, placing it on your tongue and sucking away at it intently. It’s delicious, tart but sweet with notes of an exotic flavor you’ve never tasted before.

A foreign voice distracts you from your staring. “Rauchen, right?”

You look over. Holy fuck. It’s Billiam Milliam. And, he’s talking to you?


“I am.” He cooes. “Oooh, I’ve heard exciting things about you.”

Uh. Ok. “You have? From who?”

“Just through the grapevine, sweetie. I wouldn’t kiss and tell.”

What the hell is he talking about? “…I see.”

“Well, I’m glad to have finally met you, darling.” He purrs, before snapping his fingers. “But the dancefloor calls!” Two buff silvery minions carry him away as he poses at you. You’re a little flabber-ghasted. What…. What a douche. You look back into the crowd and see someone even worse than Billiam Milliam. The familiar face looks away as your eyes meet him and you’re quick to do the same, suddenly feeling more a bajillion times more self-conscious about your entire existence. Fucking Professor Venomous is here.

You down the rest of your drink and quickly slip away to the ladies room, hurrying in and breathing a sigh of relief at the solace. You hope it’s solace. You really hope he doesn’t have eyes in here. You scope things out. There’s a gaggle of drunk villains and henchwomen giggling by the sinks, distributing white powder on the counter. Oh. Geez. It was that kind of party, huh? One of them is the alien girl you had flaked on earlier.

“Ah! Orange girl!” She waves at you! “Oh. You’re not an orange at all. Just really orange.”
Her friends cackle at her. “You’re fucking *drunk*, leave the poor thing alone!”

“What! She’s hot!”

You go red again. “Ahaha… Thanks.”

“You need to piss?” She steps out of the way of the stalls.

“Just needed a breather.” You shake your head.

“Yeah? Come breathe some of this.” She grins at you.

You ponder it for a moment. I mean. Fuck it. What’s the worst that could happen? Tonight is already going down hill, might as well crash and burn with dignity.

“…Ok.” You join them, and she offers you a little bump off her keys. *SNIFF.*

A little sizzle of smoke dissipates from your nostrils, and a few seconds later, you feel fuckin’ *great*.

“Ahh! She likes it~” Your alien friend hums, pulling you into a close embrace. Wow. She has… really kissable lips… You lean in, but the main door swings open, and Cosma trots in. You quickly part from the alien girl to greet your soon to be boss. You’re careful to block any traces of what you’re doing in here. Act cool. Act cool.

“Cosma.”

She smiles at you. “Ettie.” Click. Locks herself in a stall. You let out a deep sigh. The alien chick seems suspicious.

“Is that your old lady?”

“My boss.”

“Ah.” The confined quarters of the bathroom are starting to make you anxious.

“I need to go.” You excuse yourself again and hurry out. Fuck. This was getting stressful. You wonder how you’re going to get home. Maybe you could find Rachel and ask her. You keep your head ducked low as you charge forward.

“Ettie.” An unwelcome voice rings through your ear as you duck past the person you’re avoiding most. You’re going to freak out.

He sounds so calm; “Can we just talk?” A cool hand grabs your wrist from behind. You are officially freaking out. You spin around, spare hand flying into the face of the man that dared to grab you. SMACK.

“Don’t *fucking* touch me!!” You hiss. The crowd around you goes silent, before erupting into murmurs. Two spotlights shine down from the ceiling onto you and your—*the* Professor. He’s rubbing at his cheek. You left a burn on it.

Bellowing out from the speakers, the horned DJ looming over the club is pointing at you.

“*Well, lookie here, folks! Is that a power battle I see brewing??*”
Professor Venomous frowns at you. “I wish you wouldn’t have done that here, Ettie. Now I have to make an example of you.” He growls. Crap.

A wrestling bell rings out through the thumping bass of the music, and the crowd starts to back up, creating a circle around you two. Your heart is going to beat out of your chest. You can’t stand all these people staring at you. They’re cacophonous, goading the two of you on. Fight! Fight! Fight! You look up, your POW card is being displayed alongside PV’s on two giant holo-screens floating above the room.

“In this corner, you know him, you love him, weighing in with a solid negative seven, the King of Toxicity, the Guru of Grotesque, Professor Venomous!” The crowd goes wild. Shit. They’re looking at you now.

“And….. Uh, in this corner, his challenger, Ettie Rauchen! Weighing in at a negative one! Oh folks, I think someone may be a little out of her league.”

The audience bursts into laughter, and you feel your face flush with humiliation as you realize they’re probably right. You’re gonna get your ass kicked. By, by that asshole! You look at him as he starts to approach you. His stupid smug face as he rolls his sleeves up. How dare he show up in dashing formal-wear just to harass you! You hate him!

“It’s nothing personal this time, Ettie. Just business.” He asserts, before coming at you with a right hook. You dodge, leaping into the air and aiming a kick to the back of his neck. He catches your ankle, spinning you around and sending you flying into the bar. You shatter into the liquor shelf, various liquors splashing onto you with a sizzle.

“Oh! That may be a new record, folks, someone check her!”

The bartender leans over, examining you. You hate him. You hate all these stupid villains laughing at your expense right now. You hate yourself for showing up to another stupid party just to get your ass kicked. You hate—FWOOSH. The alcohol soaking into your skin ignites, catching your hair which goes up in a blaze of glory. Fuck. Fuck!! This was- this. This feels good. You can’t help but crack a smile as you shakily regain your footing. The crowd gasps as they look at you.

“SOMEONE is serving RAUCHEN-Realness tonight!” The DJ booms, and the crowd practically goes feral. You lock eyes with your assailant before leaping into the air again, spinning as you land on top of him, smashing him into the ground like a flaming wrecking ball.

“Oof--!!” He rolls to avoid your next impact, patting a small flame on his cuff out. “Jeez, Ettie!” He looks a little nervous. He should be. You’re really about to put him out of his misery. You come at him, fists blazing with each power punch he dodges, he's losing composure as you push his stamina. Despite the thudding music, the sweaty screech of onlookers, and the DJ narrating the whole fight, the only thing you hear clearly is your heartbeat as you fight for your right to enjoy yourself. You land a kick to his face, and his nose begins to bleed. Then, a punch to the gut. You pull him in for more, practically spitting in his face;

“I told you not to bother me!” You headbutt him, embers sparking off from the point of impact. He crumples to the ground, and you move to finish him off when you feel something twist up your leg and swing you into a nearby pillar. WHAM. Your nose is definitely bleeding too. You struggle against, against his tail? Where did this come from?? You can’t wrench your leg free. He reels you in, tail tightly constricting your body. You swear he wrapped it between your legs on purpose. You huff, squirming as you feel his breath on your neck.
“Here it comes, folks!”

The crowd cheers. “SNAKE BITE! SNAKE BITE! SNAKE BITE!”

Fuck. You should’ve seen this one coming. Think fast, think fast-- ouch!! He sinks his teeth into you, and in a stroke of genius you decide to fight fire with fire. CHOMP. You sink your teeth into his tail, and the audience cackles as Professor Venomous hisses and releases you. You swing around to sock him in the jaw before fully launching yourself on him. You barely manage to pin him down, straddling his chest and stomping on his wrists with your heels. You really don’t give a fuck, your hands are flying out of control and you are more than happy to let them.

“I’m gonna fucking kill you, do you understand me??” You spit in his face as he tries to pull away from the onslaught that your fists are providing. You’re starting to burn out. There’s no more booze to keep your flames roaring.

“Ettie--” He huffs, and you can’t bear to hear him speak. You wrap your hands around his neck and begin to squeeze, thumbs pushing into his esophagus. He coughs; “E-Ettie!”

He’s starting to look wobbly. Everything is starting to look wobbly. Fuck. You are not immune to snake venom. You squeeze with all your might before everything fades to black and you slump forward with a sad sizzle.

You come to again shortly. You’re being moved. The music is still thudding, voices are buzzing all around you as someone picks you up and tosses you over their shoulder.

“Mph.” You groan in protest, fully unable to move your limbs.

A gravelly voice comforts you. “Shhh. We’re going home now.”

You look down. You know that ass. You’re being kidnapped by your stupid ex-boss.

“Put me down before I really… really kill you…” You can’t even get your legs to kick.

“Oh, yes, leave my intern paralyzed and high in the middle of club filled with the world's worst criminals. What could possibly go wrong?”

“I’m not..” You’re struggling to catch your breath, “Your intern.”

He ignores you.

You huff. “Take me to Cosma.”

“Cosma can go fuck herself.”

“I’m serious--” You hate this. You hate this so much.

“Ettie, can you be quiet for two minutes? Please?” You hear him fumbling for his keys.

“Put me down if I’m so annoying!”

“Fine.” He tosses you into the backseat of his very expensive looking car, before climbing in next to you. “Auto-pilot, engage. Destination, Rauchen house.”
You ragdoll into the seat. You’re seething. The second you can move your fingers again you’re going to claw his fucking eyes out. You’re really gonna do it. The car starts moving.

Professor Venomous lights a cigarette. “Your tolerance has gone up. A full dose like that used to floor you for at least a few hours.” He inhales.

“You say that like I should be proud of it.” You huff. He blows smoke in your face. He smells like alcohol.

“Now that I have your undivided attention, I’d like to talk.”

You don’t answer. At least you can move your face enough to scowl at him.

“You ignored my texts, so I’ll summarize. I’ll be honest Ettie, I knew you’d catch on to the whole Shadowy Figure act. I knew it would hurt your feelings. That’s part of what made it so exciting.” He takes a long drag. “When you’ve been as successful as I have, nothing is thrilling anymore. The wealth, the power. It’s meaningless. You don’t have anything to aspire to.” Exhale.

You don’t make eye contact. “You poor thing.” What a conceited piece of shit.

He continues. “Anyways. When you find something that sparks your interest, you can’t help but chase it.” He looks at you, leaning in to brush your hair out of your face. “And kid, you better believe you’re one hell of a spark.”

You hate that that gave you a little twinge of endearment somewhere in your guts. “Fuck you. You’re full of shit.”

“I’m serious! Nobody in that club has the balls to come at me swinging like that! And you choked me? You’re a loose cannon and I’m into it.”

“So what, I’m hot or whatever, that doesn’t justify the way you’ve treated--”

A finger presses up to your lips. “Shhhh. I’m not done.” He cups your cheek in his hand.

“My point is, Ettie, is that I’m a bad guy. I do bad things. I hurt people for fun and I deeply, deeply enjoy it. And you can sit there talking down on me all you like but I can see it in your eyes that you’re just like me.”

Ouch. That stung a little. “I--”

“And you can deny it all you want, but I know you. I know you better than you know yourself, Ettie. That’s scientific fact. And you were built for pure, unadulterated chaos.”

Your cheeks flush. He doesn’t know shit. Does he?

“And if you go back to living your life as some sad little girl toeing the line between good and evil, years of work and potential will be washed down the drain. Forgive me if I’m not willing to let that happen.”

“You’re a monster.” You huff. He pulls you in closer, settling you on his lap.

“I’m a scientist.” His hand rolls down your waist before resting on your hip. You frown.

He continues; “Like it or not Ettie, I’m not letting you slip away so easily. I’m never going to be
honest with you, I’m never going to be some heroic prince charming, and quite frankly, I’m glad my good guy act fell through. It was exhausting. And, you’re a lot more fun when you’re angry.”

You can feel something prodding your leg. He’s getting hard. You should’ve seen that one coming.

“So you get off on treating me like a lab experiment?” You’re starting to feel your toes again.

“More or less. You can play the hero or be the bad guy. Either way, I’ll take what’s mine.” His hand squeezes your ass, and you would be lying if you said the way he was talking didn’t have you feeling some type of way.

“I hate you--” You growl, breath growing heavy.

“Tell me to stop.”

You freeze. You know you should. You know this is a terrible idea.

Professor Venomous kneads at your thigh, parting your legs slightly, and your breath hitches.

“I’m waiting.” He coos, before pressing a palm between your legs, grinding it deftly.

You gasp a little, and he laughs breathily. “Good girl. You’re going to behave for me, ok?”

Remaining silent, you let him pull you in and hold you. You hear him fidgeting around, pressing something against your heat. It clicks to life, a buzzing noise ring out through the car and pulsating up against you. Holy fuck. The sensation catches you off guard and you can’t help but moan.

“--Ah--” You huff, face buried against his chest. His pecs… Are so hot. You hate how hot he is. His little toy is driving you wild and there’s nothing you can do about it. You hate him so much, but you can’t help but adore it when he works his magic on you.

“We have a long ride home, you know. I intend on using that to my full advantage.” He strokes your hair, kissing the top of your head. “I’ve been so miserable these last few days, with you ignoring me and all.”

“W-who’s fault is that?”

“Mine. But you know I don’t do all this just to spite you, Ettie. There are bigger forces at play.”

“Mmh…” Fuck. You can’t argue with this thing between your legs. “Y-you’re still a prick.”

“Such a mouth on you. Maybe we should wash it out.” You hear his zipper unzipping. “You bite me and I’ll make you regret it, understood?” He tucks the vibrator into your panties, turning it up a notch. You practically melt as he pushes you down, hastily shoving his upper cock into your mouth.

“Atta girl.” He croons, and you do your best not to gag as he pushes forward, hands gripping at your hair. You do your best to breathe when you can, but he’s not going easy on you. As he reaches the back of your throat, your eyes start to water. Don’t gag. Don’t gag. HLEK.

He pulls away to allow you to cough, and thankfully you don’t throw up. You can barely cough anyways, your body is still weighed down by his poison coursing through your veins. He’s quick to press the tip in again, and you suck it carefully, tongue working expertly. You love it when he moans. It gives you a little of your power back. The intense vibrations ringing out below you have you close. You can’t help but moan a little more yourself.
His second member prods up against your cheek, and you shift a little to focus on it instead. He huffs. You can move your fingers again. If you weren’t so horny, maybe you’d throttle him. You can’t ignore the buzzing in your pants much longer, and it isn’t long before your climax rattles through you, eliciting a violent moan from you.

“Ah… So soon?” Professor Venomous teases. The over-stimulation is killing you.

“T-turn it off--” You huff, fumbling to try pull it out of your underwear. Arms aren’t quite on yet. “S-sensitive--!”

“Oh, I can tell.” He purrs, pulling you up into his lap again. “I’m not done."

“P-please!!” You can’t stand it. Its too much.

“Shhhh. You’ll be fine.” He leans in to kiss at your neck, hand groping at your chest as you helplessly twitch and whine. You hear something crinkle. Oh. He’s putting a condom on-- hold on!

“I--” You don’t finish your sentence. Professor Venomous pushes into you, and the sudden sensation warrants a cry of surprise. “A-ah!!”

“Don’t act like you don’t love it. You’re dripping , Ettie.” He murmurs in your ear, grunting softly as he starts to thrust. His top cock rubs against the vibe as the bottom one works into you, and your eyes roll back in absolute ecstasy at the dual sensation bombarding you.

“F-fuck---" You hiss, hands now clinging to the back of his shirt as you weakly pull him in for more. He lays you against the seat behind you, climbing on top to thrust into you harder, hitting all the right spots at once. You’re going to lose your mind.

“You’re so--ah-- cute when you’re like this, you know--” He punctuates with a particularly deep thrust, and you can hardly keep your mouth shut to contain all the embarrassingly horny noises you’re making. He holds your thighs up and picks up the pace, and you- you’re going to--!

He grunts as you spasm around him, utterly ruining the upholstery with your second orgasm. A few more thrusts and he lets out a moan himself, tension shattering as he finishes inside you. Thank Cob for condoms. The last thing you need is an evil baby daddy. It takes a few seconds of squirming and huffing for him to remove the toy. A few more thrusts and he lets out a moan himself, tension shattering as he finishes inside you. Thank Cob for condoms. The last thing you need is an evil baby daddy. It takes a few seconds of squirming and huffing for him to remove the toy. He pulls out, reaching into the back back of the car to grab a little microfiber towel. He dabs at you first before cleaning his own mess. It reeks of sex in here. He rolls down a window before pulling you back into his lap. He lights a cigarette. Now that the heat had died out, a wave of guilt crashes through you faster than you can say hatefuck. You’re stupid. How could you let him touch you like that? After what he did!

“Mh. I missed that.” He hums, before puffing at his smoke.

You sniffle. He glances at you. That alone is enough to start the tears pouring.

“Whoah, whoah, Ettie…” He looks slightly panicked. “Don’t, don’t cry…!”

He pulls you in, holding you close to him, rubbing circles into your back. You can’t resist clinging to him, anything to make you feel better as the tidal wave of emotion hits you all at once.

“I didn’t hurt you, did I…?” He strokes your hair, and you don’t respond. You choke a sob or two out, trying to reign in your feelings, and he carefully dabs at your cheeks with his jacket sleeve.

“I.. I’m sorry if I was too rough. It’s one thing to make you mad but, I really can’t stand to see you
cry like this…” He mutters. You wonder if he realized how batshit crazy that sounded out loud. You shake your head at him, hiding your face in his chest. Maybe if you focus really hard you can just pretend that this was normal, that everything was ok between you two. He keeps stroking your hair, and soon the ambient noise of the car in motion combined with your sheer exhaustion is enough to let you slip into the sweet embrace of slumber.

Cob knows you needed it.
Another day another hangover. As Smokey paws at your face, demanding his breakfast, you lay and ponder how really need to get your life together. It’s the first day of classes. You’re lucky you only have to be on campus by 5pm. As you munch a bowl of Radical Shreddies, you flick the TV on and begin perusing the channels. Boring. Boring. Lame. Commercial. Lame. Oh? Cowjock is on TV.

“We’re here with Avenue Academia Athlete ‘Kurtis Bovinian’, giving us the inside scoop of a brutal attack that occurred on New Year’s Eve. Kurtis, care to give us the story?”
Dynamite Watkins points the mic at him.

“Well, I was just at a party, hanging out, having a good time, ya know. Me and this girl went outside to get some air, and then, like, outta nowhere this ninja looking dude appears and tries to grab her! So, of course I start trying to stop him, and he gets mad, zaps me with this crazy taser looking thing and then snaps my freakin’ horn off!”

Well. That’s not how it happened at all. But you kind of expected worse. At least he’s not incriminating you. He now seems to be adorned with a cybernetic replacement. It glistens, light shining off it and causing a lens glare in the footage.

Dynamite Watkins shakes her head. “How awful. Can you describe the attacker?”

Cowjock nods. “A little shorter than me, like, this tall. Skinny looking dude, all black, looked real creepy and sinister.”

“I see. Is your friend alright?”

“Uh, I dunno. I don’t really know her that well. I haven’t heard from her since then.”

“Ah. Well, here's hoping nobody else was hurt that night. Thank you for sharing your story.”

The screen cuts to a police identification sketch.

“The police extracted DNA evidence from a tooth found at the crime scene, and composited this image. If you have any information regarding this attack, contact Lakewood Authorities immediately!”

You scoff. The sketch looks like a spider… lizard… thing. Definitely not like Professor Venomous. You wonder how much foreign DNA he has stitched into his own genome. Time to slurp the milk outta your bowl. Ping! You’ve received a message from Amelie.

[ettie!]

She sends you a link to a video. You click it, and it pulls up LAKESTAR-HIPHOP.com. Ugh. This is like the news if all you care about is catfights and wipeout videos. Holy shit. This is from last night. The original poster is commentating over your battle with Professor Venomous. The video starts with an ear piercing airhorn sound.

“BRAWL TRAWL! Trouble in paradise for one of the worlds hottest villains on top right now! Footage leaked from exclusive evil club shows a fist fight between biochemical guru Professor Venomous, and what appears to be a low level villain in training!”
The shaky footage zooms in as a blow is struck, before the impact is replayed repeatedly with an exaggerated punching sound and then a blast of air horn.

“Not much is known about the girl in question! Some are calling her Shortfuse, others Hellfire! Her Pow-Card however, simply refers to her as Ettie Rauchen! Now isn’t that a familiar name?”

Oh man. Do these people have nothing better to do? You really didn’t need them putting your business out there like this.

“Lovers quarrel or business dispute? Some are claiming she’s just found out she’s the other woman coming between power-couple VOXLORD. Others claim Professor V is the one that offed the Infamous Dr. Rauchen a few years back. Only time will tell, but one things for sure, she sure is PISSED!”

You close the video. Amelie’s texted more.

[ gorl where the hell was this ]

[ ur fuckin wild ]

[ do u like need to talk about it or smthing ]

[ im good thanks for asking ]

[ cant tell u top secret also ]

[ but seriously where do u find this garabge ]

[ uh its informative and entertaining ]

[ l m a o ]

It’s almost time to get ready. Sigh. You are not ready to be stuck in a room with the man you hate most right now. But you’ve looked into it. If you wanna graduate on time you need to power through this last batch of courses. No problem. You’ve stomached sharing a classroom with Cowjock for almost 4 years now. More if you count high school. Which you don’t. But anyways. You’re putting a lot of effort into looking hot today. You can’t afford to look sloppy on the first day. Not when you know it’s gonna be a weird fucking day. Too bad about the wicked shiner on your left eye. No amount of concealer can cover the purple blossoming up against your orangey skin. It just turns a gross splotchy brown as you press another layer on with your beauty blender. You sigh. You feel like crap. But hey! Bruises aside, your eyeliner looks good. You decide to take a puff of haze or two before heading out the door. Good for the nerves, right? Let’s get this shit show started.

You’re one of the first people in the classroom. You choose a seat towards the back of the class, but still close enough that you can see with your bad eyes. You just don’t want Professor Douchebag up in your grill. You know he’s going to be trying to wind you up. Manipulative fuck. You chew the inside of your cheek, scrolling through your data feed in an attempt to calm down. Your stomach is twisting and your sense of dread grows stronger by the second. Seats around you are filling up. Tch. So many boys in here. There’s a cute girl you don’t recognize sitting towards the front. You’ll probably never talk to her. But you appreciate her presence. You look down as you glimpse a familiar face walking into the room. Christ. It’s Kurtis. You immediately see flashes of New Year’s Eve in your head. Your nerves are already shot but this is just the icing on the ‘worst mandatory class ever’ cake. Fuck. Your palms are starting to heat up. You take a sip of your water and hold the cool bottle in your hands, letting the condensation fizzle against them. Calm down. It’s ok.
You check the time. Class should’ve started a minute ago. Typical. He can’t even respect your time. The fluorescent lights flicker above you, and you click your pen for a moment. Sigh. Professor ‘Vee’ saunters into the room about three minutes late, cup of coffee and laptop in hand. Ugh. You forgot how sweet and friendly he could look in those damn glasses. You try to avoid direct eye contact, opening your laptop to take notes.

He clears his throat, before launching into a deadpan intro; “Good morning class. Sorry I’m late. Don’t copy my example.”

He uncaps his marker.

“I’m Professor Vee.” He writes on the board. “I specialize in biochemical engineering. Today, and for the next fifteen weeks, I’ll be your guide through the infinitely vague and complex field that is Super-Ethics. Now, I’ve worked for both heroes and villains over the course of my career, so I would say I’m uniquely qualified to give you a perspective on how both sides deal with certain issues. Take your syllabuses out, or pull them up. Whatever you have it on.” He waves his hand.

You click to the course tab and skim it.

“As you can see, we have a lot to cover. I typically like to spend two classes on each chapter, with the first half being dedicated to the heroes interpretation of an issue, and the next, the villains. Then, once we’ve gotten through the topic, we will hold in class debates and discussions on said issue. Whether you personally identify as a hero or villain is irrelevant in this class. Roles will be assigned for each debate and you will be expected to accurately explain an informed opinion for the side that you are on.”

He clears his throat.

“Ethics is a very… broad and debatable subject. As such you’ll find that there are rarely right or wrong answers in this class. Keep an open mind and don’t be afraid to voice your opinions. Discussion counts for 30 percent of your grade, so don’t be a wallflower.”

He sips his coffee. “Let’s get introductions out of the way. I see we have a smaller class, that’s good. Uh, so let’s do Name, Major, and a fun fact. I’m Professor Vee, I majored in practical heroism, with a Master’s in bio-engineering. My fun fact is that I like to collect cars.” He’s really good at sounding mundane. If you didn’t know any better you’d think he was a real bore.

As the introductions continue, you feel your brain cells dying. Who cares about any of these people? They’re just a bunch of dumb-- oh, cute girl is talking. You pay attention.

She stands, black and green streaked hair cascading down her back as she does. Oh wow. She’s really cute.

“Hi! My name is Cheryl Nobelle. I’m a chemical engineering major and, uh, my fun fact is that I’ve been a competitive dancer since 4th grade!”

Maybe you should talk to her. But. She’s probably got better things to do than hang out with someone like you. Maybe? You chew your lip. You’re zoning out again as people say their part, but your ears prick when Kurtis does his. What’s your fun fact Kurtis? That you’re a sexual predator? That you like long walks on the beach so long as roofies are involved? Your palms itch.

“Hey! I’m Kurt Bovinian, but most people call me Cowjock. I’m a business major, minoring in practical heroism. Fun fact: I’ve won the last 6 Sportsball games here at AA.”

You almost barf in your mouth as people clap for him. You’re deflating onto your desk. Fuck. There’s still another hour and a half of this bullshit to go. Your turn is up. Ok. Let’s get it over with.
Gulp. You don’t know why you’re so nervous.

“Hey. Uh, I’m Ettie Rauchen. I’m a biochemistry major with a minor in field design. Fun fact about me….”

My mom is dead.

I can’t remember 80% percent of my own damn life.

I’ve fucked the professor. Multiple times.

You wring your hands together. Come on. Say something. “Uh… I have a cat who knows how to sit. Sometimes. If I have a treat for him.” Your face flushes. What? Why would you say that?? You sound like a loser! Your palms are about to smoke. You plunk your ass back in your seat and grab your water, ducking behind your laptop. You don’t wanna look, but you’re certain the Professor is smirking at you. Fucking dick. The last person goes and you really, really, really wish this class would end already.

Professor Vee spends the rest of the time lecturing. You do your best to stay focused on the content and not the presenter. He’s not making it easy on you. You keep thinking about how toned he is under that sweater. You kind of hate that he’s treating you like every other bozo in this classroom right now. You had expected more. I mean. It’s a good thing he isn’t bothering you, right?

“Whilst we’re typically going to be focused on neutral zone laws, we will also touch on danger zone ethics when applicable. As you can see, most continents have a higher danger to neutral ratio. This is due to heros generally being raised in neutral zones and spreading outwards. Because resources can be scarce and difficult to acquire in danger zones, many of their natural born occupants tend to resort to ‘evil’ just to make do. Of course, evil is a subjective term. We will be utilizing the POW aggression scale in this class, I trust you’re all familiar with it. This class is also going to be mostly focused on North Canerican ethics, as different countries are going to have different codes of conduct.”

You type notes as he continues. Sigh. He’s really smart. And handsome. Why’d he have to be a bastard? He’s making your life so hard.

The hour passes slowly.

“...And, that’s all we have time for today.” He puts his marker away. “Please do the reading posted online and post one discussion question by next class. Thanks.”

You pack your bag and get ready to slide out of the door. Professor Vee is chatting to a group of his new students by the exit, and as you attempt to pass by, he reaches out and extends an arm in front of you.

“Excuse me, Ms. Rauchen, was it? I got your email and would like to discuss it with you. If you could meet me at my office upstairs, that would be great.”

Email? Lying bastard. What email? You try to restrain your scowl. “I--”

“Room 302A. See you in a few.” He affirms. That sounded… vaguely threatening. You gulp. He goes right back to chatting up the students in front of him.

You head down the hall, wondering what he would do if you didn’t show up. I mean. What could he do? He did have those pictures of you, still. But, would he use them? You could retaliate. Or, maybe
he’d just come bother you later if you didn’t drop by. You might as well get it out of the way now.
You go upstairs, hovering by the doorway momentarily, before Professor Prick joins you.
“Ah, you came. I’m glad.” He unlocks the office. You step inside, he follows. The door clicks
locked behind him. You think the school should enact an open-door policy. At least there’s a
window. The blinds are drawn shut, though.

You frown at him. He’s in your personal space, and you definitely don’t like it. Even if it is kinda
riling you up. You know better.

“I’m glad you didn’t withdraw from my class.” He begins, leaning against his desk. There’s a chair
you could sit in behind you, but you’d rather stay on your feet, and keep this quick. You eye the
jarred specimen on his desk. It looks like a rat fetus. A failed Fink, maybe?

“Don’t be flattered. I didn’t have another option.”

“There’s always another option.”

“Yeah, missing my graduation date? No thanks.”

“So driven. You know I love that about you.” He pauses. “You’re so cute in the classroom, I don’t
think I’ve ever seen you so nervous.”

Your ears are turning red. You knew he was gonna do something like this. “Cut the crap. What do
you want?”

He smirks, sharp canines catching a glint of the light from the window as he does. “Ah, there’s my
Ettie. I had an urgent matter to discuss with you.”

“If it’s about my internship, I already told you I quit.”

“It isn’t. Though, I do wish you would reconsider your absence. The reptiles miss you.”

Tch. Maybe his reptilian self does. But the lab reptiles don’t have the emotional capacity to ‘miss’
someone. That’s scientific fact.

“You know that’s not true.”

“Mm. It’s debatable. But, more importantly, Fink has been working herself into an absolute tizzy over
your absence. She really likes having a girl around the lab, and since Shannon took over the Neo
Riot branch you’ve really been the only person I could find that she’s connected with.”

“I’m a grown woman, not a girl. She’s not my kid. I’m your-- I was an intern! How is she my
problem?”

“I promised her you’d take her to Anim-Con in Pineridge. For her birthday. I suggested Darrell take
her and she cried for two hours straight. She’s turning twelve, Ettie. Are you really going to ruin her
birthday?”

That struck a nerve. You did feel bad. You hate to hear she’s been crying over it. “Did you tell her I
can’t take because Daddy is a lying, selfish, egotistical bastard? You’re the one ruining it.”

“Oh, come on. If you’re gonna call me Daddy, don’t do it while we’re arguing.”

“I’m not arguing. Tell Fink I’m sorry, but I’ve made up my mind.”
“I’ll pay you.”

“No thanks.”

“You want a new car? I’ll get you one.”

You start maneuvering to the door. “No, I’m good.”

“Vacation tickets for you and your little goat friend?”

“She’s a sheep, and no.” You twist the knob. He props a leg up on the door and holds it shut. You’re tempted to throw hands.

“Are you holding me hostage, now? I’ll scream if you don’t get out of my way.”

“Don’t scream. Just let me finish.” He seems aggravated, glaring intently at you. He growls; “I understand you’re mad at me. I’ve given you every reason to be. I’m not asking forgiveness, I’m not asking you to get along with me. I’m asking you to babysit my child, who I would give anything for. What would it take to convince you?”

Jeez. He’s really laying on the tragic father act right now. You feel a twinge in your cold, dead heart. You wish you had a dad. FUCK! You’re falling right into it! You chew your lip, letting go of the door handle.

“......I want a convertible. And twenty-thousand technos.”

He breathes a sigh of relief. “Done.”

“And I better have my own hotel room in Pineridge. Five star. None of that sharing a bed crap.”

“Of course. Only the finest for you, dear.” Is he smirking? Sneering? Whatever he’s doing it’s pissing you off.

You frown. “And you better wipe that fucking look off your face before I change my mind.”

He waves a hand over his face, expression going blank as it passes over. “Done.”

Ugh. Stupid funny handsome bastard. You wish you didn’t have to be mad at him.

“Anything else, Ettie?” He hums.

“......” You ponder it. You can smell him, he’s leaning in so close. It’s a rich, earthy smell, some fancy boy sandalwood cologne mixed in with a hint of something vaguely chemical. Motor oil, maybe? It’s driving you crazy. His stupid smug face and his five o’ clock shadow and those adorable glasses, and, and. FUCK! You’ve never been this damn horned in your life. You look away. “That’s it.”

He’s smiling slyly. “You let me know if there’s anything else I can do for you, Ms. Rauchen.”

He opens the door for you. You step outside into the cool air of the hallway, taking a deep breath of refreshing air as you try to regain your composure. You begin your journey home, praying to cob that the batteries in your vibrator were charged. After today’s ordeal, you were going to need it.
You’re in the backseat of the Professor’s minivan with Fink. You can’t say this is the sexiest car he owns, but he insists your custom-order convertible isn’t ready to drive yet, and like hell are you biking all the way to Pineridge. You’re watching anime on the backseat screen with Fink.

She’s practically bouncing in her seat as she talks; “This is the episode where Sailor Solar realises she has powers. She’s the one you’re gonna be.”

“Oh, got it.” You look at the characters as they flash on screen. Sailor Solar does suit you. She’s got flame powers, has dark hair, wears black. Her outfit would suit you just fine. You feel nostalgic watching the show. You wonder if you’ve seen it before.

The episode is fairly predictable. Sailor Electra meets a new girl. Makes friends with her. Gets attacked by the suave masked villain. You can’t help but think of a certain asshole when the villain launches into his evil monologue about how he’s going to destroy humanity. Sailor Electra gets shot down in battle, and Fink cheers.

“I like the Sailor Sentry, but the villains are so much cooler.” She hums. “Wait until The Masked Anomaly gets his sidekick. She’s the coolest…!”

You can’t argue with that. You always like the villain characters more when you watch TV. After Sailor Electra gets blasted, The Masked Anomaly takes aim at Sailor Solar. She takes the damage, lying helplessly to the side as The Masked Anomaly aims to finish off Sailor Electra. Cue dramatic monologue number two, this time from Sailor Solar.

[ My friend-- my planet-- Is this how I die? ]

Fink is on the edge of her seat. You kind of are, too. The villain gives an evil laugh.

[ My whole life I’ve been nothing but a burden…. On my family, on my friends--]

Wow, relatable.

[ But, Sailor Electra-- I can’t let her down, not like this-- How could I be so cowardly in the face of someone who showed me compassion--]

The Masked Anomaly grins; [“Any last words, Sailor Electra?”]

[ I must-- I MUST ACT--!]

The camera cuts from the closeup of Sailor Solar to The Masked Anomaly, and just as abruptly, an explosion rings out from screen left, engulfing the villainous figure.

“BOOM!” Fink cheers, pumping her fist in the air.

Professor Venomous tenses, glancing back in the rear view.

“Not so loud, Fink. Boss man is driving.”

“Sorry, Boss!” She tones it down a little. Your eyes are fixed on the screen. Sailor Solar has gotten up, hair engulfed in flames and school uniform burning off to reveal her cute Sentry Sailor outfit.
underneath.

[ Wh-what is this feeling…. I feel-- I feel more alive than I have in years. Is this…? ]

She doesn't finish. The Masked Anomaly comes flying at her with his spear, and she narrowly dodges, before blasting another cascade of flame in his direction. She isn’t in control of her ability, sliding back and stumbling as she fires, but she hits nonetheless. Sailor Electra is in shock at the occurrence, stumbling to her feet. It isn’t long before Solar has chased the villain off, blasting him into the sky with a signature twinkle. But once she does, she remains lit, gasping and panting, flames growing larger around her.

Electra looks concerned; [ She’s out of control…! At this rate, she’ll burn the city down…! ]

Sailor Solar lets out a pained roar, gripping at her own face, thrashing back before hunching over, flames shooting out of her at an alarming rate.

Electra sweats. [I must help her..!] 

She runs at the red-hot sailor, launching herself at her and pulling her into a tight embrace. The audio sizzles and you see Electra burning at the touch.

[ " Hisako! Calm down! Please!"

Hisako, Sailor Solar screams and struggles in the embrace, before slowly burning out, huffing and panting before returning to her non-powered state and collapsing into Electra’s arms. She gasps for air, and Sailor Electra smiles calmly at her.

[“You're ok now, Hisako… You saved me today. I'll always be there for you when you need me.”]

Your eyes start to sizzle a bit as they water, steam fogging up your glasses. You glance at Fink. She’s glassy eyed too. You quickly wipe your eyes as the credits roll in. Fink practically bursts at the seams as she turns to fangirl at you. “Wasn’t that awesome?!”

“ Volume , Fink.” Professor Venomous chides.

She switches to a stage whisper. “Sailor Solar is my second favorite to Sailor Radium. They’re both totally BRUTAL in battle…!”

“You’re telling me.” You quietly agree, nodding your head.

“You should watch the rest, when she actually figures her powers out she becomes a total tank. She’s awesome. She should totally switch sides and hook up with the Anomaly if you ask me.”

“I doubt that'll happen. Isn’t this show for kids?”

“Yeah. It’s totally evil-phobic. But what can you do?” Fink shrugs. “Are we almost there??”

“Ten more minutes, Fink.” Hah. Professor Venomous has the overworked dad look on his face right now. You’re glad you’re not driving.

Once you arrive at the hotel, you filter your way through crowds of costumed nerds and up into your luxury suites. You have one to yourself, whilst Professor Venomous and Fink have a two-bedroom
suite with a connecting door between their individual rooms. Fink soon comes knocking at your door, half dressed in her Sailor Radium outfit. You could cry, she looks so adorable.

“Help me with my buns. Boss-man is useless. He called my hair a rat’s nest.”

“Wow, you’d think he’d know better considering all that eyeliner he wears.”

“He’s a disappointment to the gay community.”

“You’re telling me.” You smirk. Oh Fink. When did preteens get so good at roasting people? She’s funny beyond her years.

She sits down on the bed, pulling up the reference picture. You carefully brush her hair. It’s unruly and slightly tangled, but not much worse than yours in the morning, and it doesn’t take you long to work it into two little buns with trailing pigtails. You clasp in her hair clips and give her a final spritz of hairspray.

“There. No biggie.”

She looks in the mirror, beaming. “It looks perfect!! You’re the best, Ettie.”

“I know.” You shrug. You start fixing your eyeliner, trying to copy the dramatic wing Sailor Solar has in the anime.

“Can you do my eyeliner too? I can do the blush and eyeshadow, but Boss said he’s not buying me eyeliner until I turn 14.”

“Hm. I guess that’s fair. Gotta earn your makeup rights like everyone else. But it’s a special occasion, I’m sure he won’t mind.” You finish yours up. “Come here.”

You carefully wing her eyes, giving her the signature bottom flick her character has. Her eyelids are twitchy, she’s clearly not used to being poked and prodded like this. Ah. To be twelve. You don’t envy her. “There.”

She looks at herself again. “Sick!!”

“You look great, kiddo. Let me get my costume on.” You slip into the cheaply-produced costume you were given. It’s not the most luxurious thing you’ve worn, but it fits nicely and makes your legs look great.

Fink is beaming. “Wow!! You look just like her. Put your clips in.”

You do as you’re told, preening yourself in the mirror and taking a quick selfie.

“Do I look hot?”


Ugh. You don’t wanna push your relationship drama on Fink. Even if you hate bossman right now. “Ok!” You smile, grabbing your con-pass and smart watch, heading over to their suite. Fink swipes you in to where Professor Venomous is getting dressed for his business meeting, straightening his tie. He looks over at you two out of the corner of his eye, expression changing to one of surprise.

“Fink! Ettie. Wow, you guys look crazy.”
Fink frowns a little.

“Crazy, crazy in a good way. Crazy good. Fink, are you wearing eyeliner??”

You don’t want her getting told off. “I put it on her. It completed the look.”


“Thanks.” You don’t want his compliments, but Fink is obviously thrilled.

“Let me get a picture.” He pulls out his phone, and Fink jumps into a peace-sign power-stance. You follow her example, smiling at the camera.

“Say Anime…!” He hums, before the flash goes off several times. “Perfect. I’ll be heading out soon, Ettie, call me if you need anything. Fink, stay with Ettie.”

“Yes, Boss!” She nods. “I’m gonna grab my pass. Be right back.” She scurries into her suite.

Professor Venomous leans in at you.

“Here.” He hands you a small device with a screen on it. “Her tracker. She’s chipped. If you lose her, find her. And don’t let anything bad happen to her.”

You feel a chill run down your spine. That’s a threat if you ever did hear one.

“Gotcha, bossman.” You murmur, pocketing the device.

“I’m trusting you, Ettie.” He pats you on the shoulder. “See you later.” He grabs his briefcase, saying a quick goodbye to Fink and heading out the door.

“You ready to go, Fink?” You glance at her, and she nods, following you out into the hall. You head down the elevator, and into the sea of costumed weirdos. Geez. Ok. This is a lot. You hold Fink’s hand as she beams in all directions, obviously struggling to decide where to go first. You head to the merch booths, practically dragged along by Fink as she darts. Today is gonna be a long day. Oh Cob. There are so many booby pillows, everywhere. You wonder if this is even an appropriate venue for a twelve year old.

“Bossman gave me 700 technos to spend today~” Fink hums. “I hope they have prime merch.”

“You should do a loop before spending, make sure you’re getting the best of the best.”

“Smart move.” She nods, scurrying from booth to booth. Aw. Some of this stuff is really cute. You buy a little cutesy sheep plushie for Amelie, and one in the shape of a fluffy black cat for yourself. You spend an obscene amount of money on novelty snacks from Neo-Riot City. Fink buys a pillow with The Masked Anomaly printed on it in a mildly suggestive position.

“Are you sure you want that?” You don’t wanna explain it to her boss. But it is her birthday. I mean, he’s clothed. Mostly. The other side has him shirtless. It’s harmless enough, right?

“Positive.”

“Alright.” You shrug. You’ll deal with it if it’s a problem. She picks up a few key-chains, some presents for her fellow minions, some snacks. You both indulge in a cup of boba tea. It’s delicious, that’s for sure.
You’re stopped for photos multiple times, and each time you diligently strike a pose with Fink. This is exhausting. You don’t like the way all this sweaty neckbearded nerds are leering at you, and worse, leering at Fink. It’s making your stomach churn ever-so-slightly. You bite your cheek. Why do men have to ruin everything?

“Let’s check out the artist alley.” Fink hums, dragging you in that direction. Oh, wow. This room is more interesting than the merch room. You don’t recognize a lot of the characters, but you’ll admit that a lot of these people are wildly talented. Fink buys up posters of her faves, as well as buttons and pins. Heh. You supposed this would be paradise if you actually watched any of the shows they’re promoting. A smaller booth catches your eyes. You walk Fink over there. The booth is decked out in posters depicting real life villains. Holy shit. They have a yaoi poster of Professor Venomous and Boxman hanging front and center. It’s mildly suggestive, both of them with ripped abs and open shirts, gazing lustfully in each-other’s eyes. Your jaw is on the floor.

“Oh, GROSS!~” Fink grimaces, looking away. “I hate it!!”

“How much??” You point at the poster, locking eyes with the artist.

“Ettie, noooo!” Fink squeals.

“Fink. I gotta.”

“You don’t gotta!”

“I’m gonna.”

Fink cackles.

The artist blinks down at your tiny ward.

“Hey!! You’re Fink, right?? The Fink??” They scramble to pull out another poster, a smaller print of Fink in her lab attire, posing cutely with a big sharp-toothed grin and her middle finger up in the air.

“Free of charge, but, could you sign this one for me??” They slide a copy of the print her way, with a sharpie.

She scrawls her name on it, before sliding it back. “Always good to meet someone with taste.” She hums. You notice another poster that you couldn’t leave without. It’s a portrait of your mom, posing powerfully, flames rising up behind her. It really captures her essence.

The artist is still enamored with Fink. “Is Professor Venomous here?” She’s blushing.

“Nope. He’s at work.” Fink replies. The artist glances at you. She must not recognize you at all. Why would she?

“Hi. I’ll take the Voxman, large, and the medium Rauchen.” You point. The artist bags them up and hands them to you, blinking.

You do the math. The posters are worth 60 if you include Fink’s. You clink your watch to their pay panel, and upload 100 technos into it. They glance up at you, shook. “You really don’t have to..!!”

“No, no, I insist. You deserve it.” You smile. “Keep up the good work. Come on, Fink.” You walk away.
“I can’t believe you got that horrible poster.”

“It’s beautiful. You just don’t like it because your boss is in it.”


You glance at your phone a second. Professor Venomous had sent you those photos. Nice. You look hot. Amelie is texting you, too. You forward the photos to her. You pocket your phone again.

“Come on, Fink. Let’s check out the panels.” ...No response. “Fink?” You look around. Fuck. FUCK. Where the hell is Fink?? Your heart drops into your ass and immediately starts pounding at full force. You pull out the tracker, glancing down at it. The blip isn’t far, it’s just up the hall. You push your way through the congested choke points, cob-dammit, why can’t people chat literally anywhere else??

“Move!!” You shove through, bursting out into the hallway, following the blip. She’s on the move. Ah. She stopped. You dip into the hallway, turning to see two taller, heavy set cosplayers in some woodsy fantasy armor, leaning over Fink, who looks irate. They’re pulling at her pigtails slightly, holding them above her head as they speak to her. You listen in as you quietly approach.

“Aw, come on. You should come to the Sailor Sentry panel with us, it’ll be fun!” The taller, piggish man cooes at her. “We could go to the maid cafe afterwards.”

“I just wanna find my friend.” She growls at them.

The second guy speaks, a human with shitty sprayed hair color saturating his greasy locks. “Your Sailor Solar? I told you she went into the adults only panel. We can wait for her. I’ll buy you a cake.”

She fidgets. “I think I’ll just wait here.”

“All alone?”

“Yes.”

“We can’t have that!” He grabs her hand. She bites his arm. He drops it, the second guy slamming a hand into her and pinning her to the wall. You start running.

“Hey! Didn’t anyone teach your bratty ass manners??” The blue haired human hisses. You slide up behind them, gripping each of them on the shoulder, anger broiling up inside you like you’ve never felt before. It goes straight to your hand, you feel their skin sizzling beneath your palms as you latch in with your nails.

“Hey. That’s my fucking kid you’re touching-” You growl, and they wince and try to spin and see you. They drop Fink and she scurries back. The men wrench free of your grip, and you adopt a defensive stance.

“Oh, Sailor Solar finally shows up? This is your brat?? You must get around.” They scoff, squaring up. “Do you even watch Sailor Sentry or are you dressed like that for attention?”

“I don’t watch it. I don’t have to. All I know is that in the name of the sun, I will SLAUGHTER you!” You duck down as they swing at you, and you quickly launch yourself up into the stomach of
the lankier one, knocking the wind out of him. His friend grabs your shirt, lining up for a punch, you thrust your hand into his face and burn at full force. He yowls as you do, and you break his hold before driving your boot directly into his crotch, keeling him over for good. Blue hair comes at you again, and you grab him by the neck, pinning him to the wall and choking with a red-hot grip.

“You fucking touch another little girl in this building and I’ll be there. And mark my words, I will rip your fucking dick off.” You drop him, and grab both greaseballs by the hair.

“Fink, help me find security.”

Fink looks gobsmacked. “R-right!”

You drag both sacks of shit to the nearest guard, relaying the story to them with Fink nodding along in the background. You’re guaranteed they’ll be escorted out. They thank you for helping to keep the con safe.

You feel nauseated. “Fink. Can we grab some food and take it upstairs? For a breather.”

She nods. You want to kill those guys. It’s her fucking birthday.

Back at the room, the mood is heavy.

You sigh. You feel awful. “Fink. I’m sorry I lost you. And I’m sorry you had to deal with those guys.”

“No.. I ran off to see a new booth and didn’t take you with me. I lost you.”

“It’s not your fault. I’m the one here to take care of you.”

She frowns.

“Those guys said they’d take me to you.”

“I bet. I don’t blame you for trusting them. But, Fink. There are bad guys, like you and your boss. And then there are bad guys. And they don’t always come in costume monologuing like the movies. They can be average joes, or dressed as heroes, and believe me when I say there’s more of them out there than you’d like to believe.”

She nods.

“You did exactly what you should’ve. Don’t ever take shit like that quietly. Bite, kick, scream. Make them regret the day they chose to mess with you.” You take her hand, squeezing. “Are you gonna be ok? They didn’t hurt you too bad, did they?”

“Nah. They weren’t too tough, not compared to the Plaza nerds. They just caught me off guard.”

“Right.”

“Don’t tell Boss. I don’t want him to not let me come to the Con again.”

“I won’t.” You’d be in deep shit if you did. “Our little secret.” You hold out your pinkie.

She hooks it with hers. “Deal. Ettie?”
“Yeah?”

“Thanks for helping me back there.”

“Anytime, Fink. You know I’ll always have your back.”

She launches into a hug, squeezing you. You squeeze her back. Don’t cry. Don’t fucking cry. You’ll ruin your makeup. You sniffle just a little, taking a deep breath and pulling yourself together. You finish your slice of pizza.

Fink seems to be perking up. It’s late now.

“The rave is starting soon.” She hums.

“Rave?”

“Yeah, the cosplay rave. I wanna go.”

You don’t see why not.

“Sure. We can go.” You put your boots back on. You’re a little antsy from earlier, but no sense in moping around for the rest of the con.

Fink drags you downstairs into the dance hall, and the thumping 8bit music certainly is getting you into a party mood. You notice there’s a bar, but you decide to pass while you’re supervising Fink’s adventure. You get onto the crowded dance floor, nerds and cosplay hotties alike shaking it to the beat. It’s hot as fuck in here, but the energy is good. Fink is beaming. The blacklight makes you both look neon. You hold her hands and start spinning, jumping up and down to the beat. Fink clearly doesn’t know anything other than MOSHING. You don’t wanna bust out your twerk here, so you follow her example. After 30 minutes or so, you’re thoroughly breathless.

“Mind if I cut in?” A dark, gravelly voice cooes at you, and you look up.

_The Masked Anomaly??_ You squint through the darkness, examining the suave man in the suit, Fink doing the same at the intruder. Wait a minute…

“BOSS!” Fink exclaims, launching into a hug and squeezing the disguised Professor tightly. “You didn’t tell me you bought a costume!!”

“I wanted to surprise you, kiddo. You having fun?”

“Yes!!” She smiles, and he spins her around. He then looks up at you. “Thanks for watching her, Ettie.”

You smile back. You feel a little uneasy. But he doesn’t need to know that. “No problem.”

“You can take a break. I’ll keep her company.” He hums. You nod, stepping through the crowd to buy a drink. You needed one after today. You feel like you had run a marathon. You take a shot. Then another. You need that buzz. When it finally hits, you can finally relax and enjoy yourself. You dance with a few randos before making your way back to Fink and Professor V. You look at them from afar, He’s so good with his kid. He’s got her standing on his feet, teaching her some moves that you certainly don’t know. You sigh. It’s getting you emotional, seeing them bonding like that. Damn you and your good parenting, Professor Venomous. Why can’t he treat you with that same level of
respect and love? You bite your lip. They notice and wave at you.

It isn’t long before Fink tuckers herself out.

“My feet hurt…” She whines, and Professor Venomous scoops her up and slings her over his shoulder.

“Come on Kiddo.” He hums. “Bed time.”

She whines again, but doesn’t wriggle loose. You follow them back up to the hotel room. You say goodnight to Fink as Venomous tucks her in, kissing her on the forehead and dimming the lights for her. You exit to your own room. As you fumble for the key-card, you feel a presence creep up behind you.

A familiar voice rumbles behind you, breath hitting the shell of your ear. “Not so tough without your fellow Sailors, huh, Sailor Solar?” You huff, tingles running down your back as you glance back to see a suave man in a costume tux behind you. Ah. It’s Professor--- It’s The Masked Anomaly.

You restrain a drunken chuckle. He’s being ridiculous.

“Eh--? You think just because I’m alone that you can beat me in a fight?” You unlock your door, stepping in. He follows, invading your space, face held close to yours. You’re reminded of the first few times Shadowy Figure messed with you, but with none of the actual threat looming over you. It was just sexy. Hm. You’re mad at Professor Venomous, but not The Masked Anomaly.

“I’m not here to fight you…” He cooes. You smell liquor on his breath. You wonder if he hit the mini bar or had a drink before the rave.

“Ah.” You blink up at him, and his gently pushes you back onto the bed, before pinning your wrists above your head. Fuck. He knows how to get you riled up, that’s for sure.

“H-hey!” You ‘protest’, weakly wriggling under his grip as he climbs onto the bed, knee wedging between your thighs. “Y-you think I would give in so easily to a **villain** like you..!”

He gives a soft chuckle. “Oh, Sailor Solar, I do believe I’ve already won this battle.” You are so fucking wet. The sly bastard. He pulls you in by your hips to grind up against you, and you can’t help but gasp as he does.

“O-Oh...! You fiend...!” You huff, pulling him in for more. Your lips crash, lipstick smearing onto his face as his stubble scratches your chin. He practically rips your cheap costume off you in his haste to remove it, leaving your boots and accessories on. He tosses the dress on the floor, pulling your panties down before nose diving, and you’d be lying if you said the way he worked that tongue didn’t have your eyes rolling back into your skull. FUCK! This wasn’t fair...! You’re gripping the sheets as he goes to town.

“Oh-- COB--” You huff. He’s going to make short work of you if he keeps this up. He grips your hips, holding you steady as you squirm in absolute ecstasy beneath him.

“D-don’t stop-- fuck-- FUCK---” You’re going to--- He pulls off, leaving you squirming and gasping. You’re about to open your mouth to tell him off for stopping when he pushes his length into you. You yelp in surprise as he does. It doesn’t hurt, well, not much, not enough to be unpleasant. He knows how rough you like it. He is unceremonious as he pushes in, building up to a quick thrust in no time, leaving you unable to do much other than moan and curse under your breath. The headboard is thunking against the wall. You hope the room next door doesn’t mind too much. He knows just what angle to hit it at, and soon you feel a warm pressure building in your abdomen. You feel like you could explode. You’re definitely burning the sheets where you’re gripping them. As
you almost reach your peak, you throw you head back, and-- He pulls out. NO!! You gasp up at him, eyes pleading.

“What’s the matter, Sailor Solar? I thought you hated being used by a villain like me?” He cooes.

You squirm. “I-I do. But you can’t stop now. Not like this.”

“Or?”

“O-or, or I’ll kill you, old man!” You pull him back in, and he scoffs at you, grinning.

“So dramatic.” He teases, positioning his second length against you. Ah. Taking turns. He pushes in again, and you groan. This one feels slightly bigger. He begins working you again, finger gently teasing your clit. He kisses at your neck, leaving bruises as he does. You hope you packed your turtleneck. Fuck. Fuck. You could do this all night.

“O-ohh, Cob--” You moan, and he chuckles against your skin.

“You think you can take both?”

“H-Huh??” You’re not sure about that.

“You heard me.” He starts lining them up.

“J-Just be careful.” You huff. He starts to ease in again, and holy fuck, if you weren’t thoroughly warmed up this would not have been a good idea. But it’s not too bad. It hurts ever so slightly as you adjust to the thickness, but as he pushes in further and holds it, the pain gives way to your burning desire to finally cum. He moves his hips slowly, holding yours tight and pulling you in, not giving you any leeway to wiggle or squirm away.

“Atta girl…” He moans, and you don’t think you’ve ever heard him make a noise quite like that before. It’s hot. He must be enjoying this. “You’re a real talented slut to be handling all this.”

“S- Shut up --” You huff, and his arm shoots up, hand gripping at your throat. You cough weakly, and he picks up the pace, the harsh sensation driving you absolutely nuts. Your eyes roll back.

“What was that?” He huffs.

You don’t answer. Not in english, anyways.

“Thought so.” He continues, roughly driving into you, soon reaching his regular pace. You can feel him trembling against you, he’s restraining his own noises almost as tightly as he’s restraining you right now. You wish he would moan for you. You wrap your legs around his body and pull him in deeper, and he lets one slip. Music to your ears. It isn’t long before you’re shaking in ecstasy, climax building-- You see a flash of white and it’s all over. He keeps driving into you after your scream of delight and you can hardly stand the sensation. You grip at his arm, begging for him to take it easy, but he doesn’t stop until he’s good and ready, pulling out and taking aim at you. You feel a warm splash coating your chest and stomach, and look down to see and absolute mess on your bed. Holy fuck. That was insane. Your sheets are soaked-- did you do this?? What the hell?

He gasps for air, before chuckling down at you. “Heh. You’ve never done that before.” He hums, touching the wet patch.
“I know--” You huff. Fuck. “M-my bed is fucked--!” Shit!!

“It’s ok. You can sleep in mine.” He hums, getting up to fetch you a paper towel.

“You fucking asshole. I’m still mad at you.”

“Stay mad. You’re a good fuck when you’re angry.”

You scowl. “I’ll strangle you in you sleep, tonight.”

“I look forward to it.” He cooes. Bastard. Stupid, rotten, sexy bastard. You follow him to his hotel room for a quick shower. He washes you down and conditions your hair for you. You can’t help but love it. Fuck. You hate it. You’re completely at the mercy of this rich fucker’s charm. But you can’t resist it. As you climb into bed together, you share a cigarette before laying down. Your head rests on his chest as you settle into slumber. You can’t help but feel a swelling in your chest. Why does he have to make everything so damn complicated?
“Hey! Ettie! Can I see your hands for a minute?”

Sigh. It was day 5 of your internship with Cosma and you were pretty… well, bored. The most exciting part of this job was picking what you were gonna pack for lunch each morning. As you walk over to the desk-grunt calling for you, you ponder if you’re ever gonna be allowed into an actual lab.

“Heat this up for me, will you?” The young woman blinks up at you, plastic smile stretched across her face.

“Of course!” You smile back at her, though your eyes narrow ever so slightly. You wrap your palms around the mug and begin to heat gently, until steam rises from the previously luke-warm coffee inside. You hand it back.

“Careful! It’s hot!” You hum, before heading back to the photocopier to finish making those prints Donna in Marketing requested. Fuck. You feel your soul draining out of your body. You see Rachel crossing through the gauntlet of cubicles. Ah! Just the person you needed to see.

“Rachel..!” You wave at her, stopping her in her tracks. She smiles at you.

“Ettie! How’s it going?”

“Oh, it’s going. You know how it is!” She gives a strained laugh. You semi-laugh back.

You lean in. “I actually had some questions. Like, when do I get back into lab-work?”

“Oh, lab-work.” Rachel gives a snort. “You have to be here for at least 3 months to become a junior lab tech.”

“But, my qualifications state--”

“Those are the rules, Ettie!” She squints at you, smile unwavering. You bite your tongue.

“...Got it.” You wait for her to walk away before letting out a small sigh. You miss feeling useful.

You head back to your desk, trying hard to ignore the way Craig the temp manages to stare at your thighs, without fail, each time you cross his path. You settle in and check your email. Spam. Spam. Ugh. You open your work agenda for the day. You’re… you’re shredding documents in the storage room. Riveting.

You stand to get to work when the intercom crackles to life above your head.

“Ettie Rauchen to the bridge, Ettie Rauchen to the bridge.”

Fuck. What had you done? The whole office is staring at you as you head up to the central ship navigation room. Cosma’s office.

After click-clacking down an absurdly long hallway, you knock on the large door in front of you, metallic tang ringing out through the corridor.
The door zoops open. You step into the spacious office (you’re pretty sure it’s bigger than your
backyard) and glance around. Cosma is leaning on the front of her desk, arms crossed and frowning
down at someone in the chair in front of you. The chair spins, and reveals a sharply-dressed
Professor Venomous. Your heart freezes for a moment. *Fuck.* You doubt this is good news.

“Morning Ettie.” Cosma says, with little emotion in her voice. “Have a seat.”

You quietly settle into the seat next to the Professor.

Cosma continues. “It has come to my attention that we might actually not be able to employ you here
at Cosmatech. Professor Venomous has been so kind as to present us with a minionship contract,
signed by you. It states here in paragraph 7 that you would dutifully and *exclusively* perform acts of
villainy under the direct order of Professor Venomous. Meaning I can’t legally employ you under the
Guild of Malice’s protection. You’ll have to turn in your employee identification immediately.”

You blink while you’re processing all that. Signed…? Oh, right, you did sign something when you
started at Voxmore. But you thought, you thought it was a standard tax form…!

“May I see the paperwork?” You ask. Cosma hands it to you.

“I assure you Cosma is correct on the wording, Ettie.” Professor Venomous chimes in. You feel sick
to your stomach. The terms of your contract are there in black and white. You couldn’t lawfully
practice villainy outside of Voxmore until you turned 22. How could you have signed this without
skimming the whole thing!! The print isn’t even that fine!

“…So she is.” You nod in agreement.

“We will dock in the evening. You need to pack your desk and get off my ship.” Cosma huffs. She
seems annoyed. Probably more so at you than at the professor. You felt stupid.

Professor Venomous raises his hand. “Or she could ride with me. I took the hover car.”

Cosma glances at you. “That would be preferable.”

You guess you’ll spare them the effort of docking. “...Fine.” You’re gonna throttle the professor the
minute he gets in the vehicle. You wonder how it got to this point. If you had seen it coming you
never would have shown up to his cursed fucking internship in the first place. “Thank you for the
opportunity, Cosma.” You duck your head at her before standing up to gather your things.

She nods at you, and you head out the door. You don’t have much to bring with you. You mostly
just wanted to grab your can of juice out the office fridge. Professor Venomous is silent as he trails
behind you, waiting for you to finish. Then, he leads you to the parking bay, opening your car door
for you.

You sit. He climbs into the driver’s seat and revs the engine. You stay silent. It’s quiet as you take off
into the clouds. It’s really pretty this high in the sky. You wish you could enjoy the view.

The soft purr of the engine and the sky whooshing around the vehicle is broken after a few minutes.

“Look. Ettie. I was hoping it wouldn’t come to this, but you working at that glorified office is a
waste of everyone’s time. You’re much better off at Voxmore.”

“I *quit* Voxmore. For a good reason, too.”
“I shouldn’t have given you a reason.” He states.

You’re quiet for a minute. “Why can’t you respect me enough to let me make my own decisions?”

“Because you don’t know what you’re doing. If you did, you wouldn’t be worrying about that contract, because you never would have signed it. Ettie, I hate to be mean but you’re certainly overconfident for someone who makes a reckless decision every three days or so.”

Ouch. He didn’t have to ream your ass like this. You frown, sinking feeling taking over your abdomen.

He sighs. “Look. I know you don’t like hearing that. But it’s true. And I know you think I’m the worst, or whatever, but believe me when I say that everything I do, I do for your own good.”

Oh please. You can’t help but sneer at him. “Why?”

“Why? What do you mean?”

“Why do you care? Why me and not just any other stupid girl you can lay your claws on?”

He’s caught off guard by that. “Because you’re uniquely-- You’re…! There’s no substitution…!”

“Substitution for what??”

He sighs. “It’s not going to make you feel better.”

“Just say it!”

“You’re unique in your ability. I have research backing up my theory that your power potential is very high. I think it would be beneficial to my studies to help you gain access to those powers.”

He’s using you. You’ve kind-of known this from the beginning though. You’re a test subject. Everything else is secondary.

“I see.” You go quiet again. You’re thinking about how you could make this work. You have to admit, you had access to a lot more resources at Voxmore. “Can you lay out your plan for me?”

“Not without compromising the outcome.”

“Mh.” That’s fair. Knowing the hypothesis would change your reaction. It did make you feel important, knowing you weren’t easily replaced. You tap your nails on the arm rest.

“Can I have unlimited lab access?”

“Hm?”

“To Voxmore labs. The restricted rooms.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because I said so. They’re not for you.”

You squint at him. He sighs.
“You can use the main lab and supplies as much as you want. Just don’t bankrupt me.”

You ponder it. That would be really useful, it would beat working out of your cluttered garage.

“...Fine.”

“Fine what?”

“Fine. I’ll come back to Voxmore.”

“And resume your testing?”

“...For now.”

He smirks. “Much appreciated.”

You know you’re playing with fire here. But, you can’t deny yourself the opportunity to take advantage. He may think he has you in the palm of his hand, but he doesn’t realize you’re learning more about him every day. And one of these days, that was going to be his downfall.

“Ahem.” Professor Venomous clears his throat. You snap out of your murder fantasy. He dryly asks; “Do you want to get lunch.”

“...Sure.”

You’re proud of yourself. Professor Venomous had taken you to a swanky Italian place, and even after a candlelit meal, you hadn’t gone home with him. Or banged him at your place. Cob forbid he saw your place right now. It’s a mess. But you’ve been stressed! It isn’t your fault. You’re getting ready for class now, feeling a lot more on your stride than you have been for the last few weeks. You put on a dress you recently found at the local thrift, a short tartan overall thing, worn over a long sleeve black t-shirt. Paired with red lipstick, it kinda made you feel like a hot librarian. You wear your hair down today.

You’re early. You sit in the desk you claimed last class and wait for everyone else to show up. You’re zoned out on your phone when someone sits next to you. Oh.

It’s Cheryl. Fuck. Why’d she sit here?

She leans in at you. “...Do you have any gum?”

You blink. G-gum?? Oh fuck! You do have gum. “...Yes.” You reach into your bag, carefully handing her a piece. She pops it into her mouth.

“...Thanks.”

You nod in response. Wow. She’s so cool. You’re shaken, and stirred. You feel kinda red faced.

Professor Vee walks in. “Evening, ladies. Wonder where everyone else is?”

Cheryl chirps back at him. “Right? The cafe, probably.”
You try duck behind your computer. You don’t want him noticing your face. You know he’ll be weird about it. His outfit is so… tight today. Not inappropriate but certainly not leaving much the the imagination either. You hate that it's highlighting how toned he is. You glance back over at Cheryl. Fuck. She’s really cute too. Look out the window!! Trees aren’t sexy!

Thankfully Kurtis and the other class meatheads walk in soon and kill your vibe. It isn’t long before you just hate everything again and can focus on the class.

“Evening class. I hope everyone turned their reading in. Today we’ll be discussing Chapter 3, general ethic taboos.” Professor Vee sits in his chair, legs parted in an assertive manner. What is this, a subway? You avert your eyes. “Who can tell me the name one of the taboos?”

Cheryl raises her hands. “Lethal Force.”

“Good.”

More people chime in.

“Mhmm.”

“Irreversible Alteration.”

“Yes. One more.”

You chime in. “Sexual assault.”

“You got it.” Professor Vee nods. “The three main taboos for any neutral zone inhabitant. Observed by most heroes and a good portion of villains. When practicing professional villainy, most tend to ask the following questions; is it unnecessarily lethal? Is it causing irreversible damage to an individual or entity? Does it cross a line into unsavory territory? Villains are villains, but they still have their own ethics code. You’ll find that the balance of good versus evil in neutral zones tends to push more extreme villains out into the danger zones, where they can break the taboos freely without as much repercussion. Of course, heroes generally avoid all three taboos, as a result of their good intentions. There are always exceptions to the norm of course. It’s also worth discussing that many villains thrive off the rivalry with good the neutral zone provides, and find that committing taboos can throw off the balance found in a carefully crafted rivalry.”

What the fuck is he talking about? Does being a creep not count if you wear a cloak and give yourself a new nickname? Because Shadowy Figure could definitely use this lecture about now.

He pulls up a powerpoint. Two charts appear on screen.

“You can actually see the difference in number of taboo acts between the neutral and danger zones here. A whole 40% difference in some places. Quite alarming, actually.”

The class murmurs in agreement. You’re losing focus. You’re just thinking about how even in the neutral zone creeps and weirdos can walk around doing whatever they want. They just have to be smart about it. You jot down the occasional buzzword before giving up and just doodling in your notepad. You can listen better like this anyways. Though when things devolve into open discussion, you can’t help but cloud out again. Hearing people pondering why people do bad things and, worse, hearing people justifying shitty behavior was just. Boring. You know why you do bad things. You’re selfish, and so is everybody else. You take or get taken from. It’s easy, taking. You look up from your drawing. The room is emptying out, the last few students filing out the door. What time is it??
Professor Vee is leaning on the desk, locked in, staring at you. “Ms. Rauchen. You were very quiet today.”

“I know.”

“That’s 5 points off your participation grade.”

You blink at him. Is he serious? You answered a question today! “...I’ll do better next time.”

He smirks. “Mh. Is something on your mind?”

“No.”

“I think we should talk about it. I could count it towards your participation today. You wanna head up to my office?”

_Huh_. You wonder where he’s going with this. You suppose you might as well find out. He closes the door behind you and you smell the familiar smell of sandalwood wall plug-in burning. Ugh. You hate how good it smells in here. You hate that the blinds drawn over the window cast a warm glow on everything as the sun sets outside. He grabs something from his desk.

“I wanted to welcome you back to Voxmore more formally.” He hummed, sliding a box over at you. Oh. Another present.

“...Thanks.” You open it, finding two metallic, sturdy bracelets inside. They’re similar to the ones you wear with your costume. You notice a little hole at the bottom edge of them, and a pressure sensor on the inner lining.

“You flex your wrist to activate them. They hold about 4oz of biofuel each. Used simultaneously they can light your hands for about 30 minutes or so before they need refilling.”

Oh… wow. That was actually really cool. You think your powers are way more advantageous when they’re actually burning something. “...Thanks.” You nod. “I’ll test them later. You have a lot of books in here.” You put the box in your bag.

“Good call.” He hums. “Now, about your participation.”

Gulp. You can’t help but feel like you’re in the hot seat when he’s looking at you like that.

“What are you willing to do to bring that grade up?” He grins, teeth glinting in the soft light.

You scoff, crossing one leg over the other and leaning back into your chair. “Are you blackmailing me? After your lecture today, too?”

“Hey, do as I say, not as I do. I don’t write the curriculum.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

“I saw the way you looked in class today. What were you day-dreaming about?”

“That doesn’t concern you.”

He’s getting closer to you. “Oh?”
“Mhmm.” You nod. He’s touching your thigh now. You bite your lip.

“You’re a bad professor.” You huff, legs parting a little. He takes a moment to respond.

“Get on the desk.” He growls at you, and you feel yourself quiver just a little. You scramble to your feet and lean on the desk, it isn’t long before he’s hoisted you up and positioned himself over you, hips grinding down and pressing his hardness against you. Fuck. You were gonna fucking ace this class. You pull him in closer, hand squeezing a firm cheek behind him. Your lips lock. He’s rough, his stubble is scraping your face, you’re pretty sure he just grazed your lip with one of those teeth. But you’d rather die than stop now. You had to admit, you knew he was good at this, and that made it all the more exciting knowing what he was about to do to you. He starts kissing his way down your neck, palming you through the cloth of your underwear when-- KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK. The door knob jiggles. You pull away in a panic, both of you blink confusedly before he mouths at you.

‘UNDER THE TABLE.’

You nod, ducking below and hiding. He straightens his hair and attire before opening the door. You listen in.

The Professor deadpans. “Ms. Nobelle. My office hours aren’t until tomorrow.”

“I wanted to-- ah. I wanted to drop off this form. I need a professor’s recommendation to be a peer tutor. And I wanted to ask about the upcoming essay. It’d just be a minute.”

“Oh, would it now?” He sits in the desk chair. You’re sitting right between his legs. You’re too horny for this. Why won’t she leave??

Professor Vee is shuffling papers around above you. “Just a signature here by the brief comment?”

You squeeze his thigh, feeling around.

Cheryl confirms. “Yep.”

Found it! You squeeze at him again, teasing him through his pants. You’re slow, cautious not to draw attention to yourself by rustling around too much. Your heart is racing as he grows hard in your hand. You hear the sound of the pen skirring across the paper resonate through the desk. He huffs as you begin working your hand into his trousers. You touch yourself as well, you can’t pretend this hasn’t been one of your top fantasies since re-discovering porn on the internet.

“Here you go.” He hands it off to her.

“Thanks, Professor.” She gets out of her chair and heads to the exit. Your heart jumps into your throat at what she says next; “That’s a nice shade of red on you.”

Click. The door shuts.

“.....You can come out now.” He sighs at you.

You clamber out, he pulls you onto his lap. You feel a little shaken. “Do you think she knows?”

“We need to keep an eye on her.”
"I guess."

Damn. You hope she didn’t become a problem. “Maybe we’re being too risky.” You murmur.

He squeezes your ass. “Oh, that’s a given, at this point.”

You’re quiet. He begins to kiss at your neck again. You sigh. He knows how to distract you, that’s for sure. It isn’t long before he’s slipped a hand into your underwear, fingers tenderly working you until you’re begging for more. You blank out, ignoring your worries and focusing on pleasure alone. It’s not long before he’s fucking you up against the bookshelf, knick knacks and rattling until they thunk down onto the carpeted floor. There’s no place you’d rather be than here, with his hand gripped tightly around your neck. He’s not showing any mercy, you feel fit to burst as he pushes inside of you, working you towards your climax. He doesn’t stop when you’ve cum, the last few thrusts almost agonizingly good before he finishes. Your eyes widen as you feel one shaft unload against your thigh, the other still buried deep inside you. You feel it twitch, something is dripping out of you. You hadn’t realized— he hadn’t warned you...!

“A-Are you serious??” You push him off, inspecting the area. “Why aren’t you wearing a--”

He presses a finger to your mouth. “Shh. It’s ok. Don’t freak out. You’re clean, I’m clean. We’re not genetically compatible, I’ve run tests.”

“You--” You blink at him. You wonder if he can hear himself speak. How are you supposed to trust that?? “You’re fucking insane. Can you ask next time??”

He shrugs. “I got caught up in the heat of the moment.”

You’re caught in your own disbelief. “....What do you mean we’re not compatible??”

“Well, you’re a broiling oven of a human being and I’ve got like, way more chromosomes than you. Even if the 65% of my human DNA was usable, I doubt your particular build is appropriate for a non-elemental zygote. If we ever wanted to combine our DNA it would have to be under far closer supervision. You know. At the lab.”

You take a moment to process that.

“So I can’t...?”

“You’re not barren. You’d just need to find someone compatible. Or use a GMO pod. Like Fink’s. Much safer than traditional conception.”

“Fuck, man, this is a lot to be dumping on me right now.”

“You were the one asking. Don’t be dramatic. You’re fine.”

You bite your cheek. You hated how dismissive he is. “Can I have a tissue?”

“Of course.”

You clean up, starting to feel apathetic towards the whole situation. You’re perturbed he knows more about your body than you do.

He glances at you. “Oh, don’t make that face.” He sighs. “Come here.”
You frown at him. He pulls you onto his lap. “You know I wasn’t really gonna dock your grade, right?”

You nod. Even though you know he could’ve been dead serious about it if you had refused him.

“Did you have fun?”

You nod again. You hate how weak you were when he was treating you this gently. You loved being held. You’re touch starved and will take whatever you can get. You lean up against him, he kisses your forehead.

“I know I’ve been kinda hard on you.” He murmurs. “I won’t lie, it’s addictive. Pushing your nerves. Seeing how long it takes for you to snap back. It isn’t a good habit.”

“You’re not a good guy.” You respond. You’re glad he’s aware at least.

“But I’ve been playing with you for so long now. I can’t help but get the feeling that you want more.”

“What is this, Psyche 101? Stop picking my brain after sex.”

“Sorry.” He’s hard to read, but you do detect a hint of remorse in his voice.

You sigh. You hate his sad man act. You hate that you know that he’s a lying, conniving bastard. You hate that you find him more attractive because of it. You really were a sucker for punishment. “You’re fucked in the head. I’m gonna get you back, one of these days.”

He glances at you, before smiling to himself, hand stroking the back of your head.

“Mh. I look forward to the day you do.”
Jeez. You don’t know how you let the crap in your garage pile up so high. As you sort through another pile of scrap components, you wonder how you manage to get any work done at all in here with your work station surrounded by all this garbage.

“Man, you could start your own robot factory with all the shit you have in here, Ettie.” Amelie chides as she screws together a new storage rack for you.

“Hey, at least half of this was my mom's. And you never know when you’re gonna need a…” You look at the object you’re holding, “Catastrophic Orb-ulator.”

“A whatsonic who now?” Amelie scoffs. “Say it with more pizzazz and you’d be a regular mad scientist.”

“Look, we’re almost done.” You state as you toss the last couple parts into the ‘toss’ pile. “Then we can move the car in here.”

Professor Venomous had been true to his word, providing you with a custom convertible that quite frankly was the sexiest vehicle you had ever seen in your life. He had gone all out on the detailing, right down to the little devil hula girl he had attached to the dash for you. He may not have morals but he certainly had taste. You reach down to grab a stray part. It doesn’t budge, seemingly embedded in the cement floor beneath it.

“What on earth…?” You give it a twist, and as you do, you hear a grinding noise. A panel is sliding open on the ground, taking a good third of the toss pile with it.

“Holy shit!” You back up to avoid falling in, and Amelie looks over.

“What did you do??” She bleats, standing behind you.

“I, I don’t know!” You peer into the hole, it seems to be some sort of pipe. Or, a slide? Oh my cob it’s totally a slide.

You glance at Amelie. “Wait here.” You say as you position yourself at the mouth of the tube.

“Are you serious?? What if it’s like, a septic tank??”

“I doubt it. I’ll let you know if it’s safe to come down.” You slip in, and the tunnel activates some sort of vacuum around you, whooshing you down at considerable speed. You stumble on a piece of scrap as you land, barely maintaining your footing. You’re in a small white room, facing a large metallic door. Next to it, a touch screen security panel flashes.

[ GREETINGS, DR. RAUCHEN. PLEASE ENTER PASSCODE. ]

Oh man. You are so pissed right now. Why didn’t anyone tell you this was here!! You wipe the dust off of the security panel. Password… Huh. Maybe… Nope. It’s not the wi-fi password. You try a couple more combinations that your mother frequently used, to no avail. Ugh. Maybe you could remember if you could remember anything about the couple years before your incident. Think! You strain to picture any semblance of a conversation with your mom. Password, password, come on, you must’ve had at least one talk with her that would be relevant-- ow! A jolt shoots through your head, you feel the tell-tale signs of a throbbing headache coming on. Fuck. You make a last ditch
attempt on the panel before it gives a sharp buzz.

[ INCORRECT PASSWORD LIMIT REACHED. GOODBYE. ]

A slot opens on the wall to reveal some sort of nozzle, you squint at it and-- WHOOSH. Flames shoot out of it, engulfing your entire body and searing the whole inside of the entrance. Ugh. Classic mom. When the flames stop shooting, you lick your thumb and put out the strand of hair burning in front of your forehead. Tsss. Fuck! Your clothes!! That was one of your favorite Kaktus Krew shirts! You dust the ashes of what had been your outfit moments ago off of your body and turn back towards the tunnel. It has a reverse switch next to it, you flick it and allow it to zoop you back into the garage.

As you emerge, you almost smack Amelie dead in the face where she had been peering in.

“Are you ok?? Wha-aat was that noise??” She asks, before glancing you over; “And why are you naked??”

“Close your eyes, pervert--” You reach over and pull her onto you by the horns, burying your fist in her hair for a prime noogie. “I pissed off the security bot.”

She cackles at you. “The what?? Let gooo!”

You do. “There’s a lab under my house.”

“What?? No way!”

“Yes way!” You stand up, dusting off again before heading into the house for some new clothes. Amelie follows.

“Who’s lab?”

“My mom’s. I didn’t know she had one here, we always worked out near the danger zone so that we could test products without upsetting the neighbors…” You pull a baggy shirt and some sweats on.

“That’s so crazy. You can’t get in?”

“Not until I crack the passcode. She has a firewall installed.”

“Oh, brutal.”

“Yeah. You would have been lamb kebab if you had come down there with me.”

“Thanks for the imagery.”

You head into the bathroom to search for your headache pills. “Shit gave me a headache. I hope it goes away before class.”

“You should skip class and come shopping with me.”

“I can’t, it’s discussion day. Plus if I cut class to goof off, you-know-who would totally ream me for it.”

“How would he know?”
You shrug. “I’ve given up on trying to figure that one out.”

Amelie pouts. “He gives me the heebie jeebies, always telling you what you can and can’t do.”

“He’s just a hardass. Do you remember how my mom used to be? I’d take P.V.’s needy ass over a literal prison warden any day.”

“I remember that year in middle-school you were only allowed to drink Rauchen Juice.”

“Ew god, I wish I could forget Rauchen Juice. That stuff was the worst.”

“What was the point of that again?”

“Fuck if I know. I did what I was told and didn’t ask questions.”

“Same old Ettie.”

Ouch. You frown at her. “Look, villains are just weird like that. They don’t want people up in their evil business. Yaknow. Like, hero people.”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it, I get it, you’re a moody broody villain now and I should let you embrace your darkness or whatever.” She rolls her eyes.

“I never said that. Just because I’m interning for a villain doesn’t mean I’m going full evil.”

Amelie shrugs. “You keep saying that. Why not just embrace it?”

You scoff. “What are you, the devil on my shoulder now? I’ve already got one of those, you know.”

“Oh I know. But I’m sexier than him, he should scoot over. He doesn’t have the horns for it.” She waggles her fingers up by her head, and you can’t help but grin at how cute she’s being.

“Ok, then, Satan, grab your books so we can get to class on time.” You hum, grabbing the keys to your new sweet ride.

Amelie smiles up at you. “Aye aye, Captain.”

Class has you utterly unenthusiastic today. It’s a hands on activity, banter practice, and of course with your rotten luck you had ended up randomly paired with Kurtis. You had considered asking for a switch, but ultimately just sucked it up. You didn’t wanna seem like a crybaby. It’s easier this way. You had your quips ready to go, but this thunking pain in your head wasn’t doing much to boost your spirits. You take an extra headache pill before class starts. As you look back down from swigging your water, you notice a folded up note has been placed on your desk. You unwrap it, and a little plastic USB plonks out.

[ Ettie. Things aren’t as they seem to be. Details enclosed. ]

You glance around. The class was almost full, anyone could have slipped this to you. It’s probably just some dumb prank, but you pocket the USB anyways so that you can look at it later.
Professor Vee walks in. “Evening, class. Please go sit with your partner. We’ll be jumping into our practice as soon as I’m done taking attendance.”

You begrudgingly wait for Kurtis to make his way over to the chair next to yours. He stinks of sweat and, and cut grass and you just know that his ass has been playing sports. You hate him so fucking much-- oh jeez. You were holding your water bottle and now it’s all weird and misshapen from the heat your hands were giving off. You set it aside with a sigh.

“Hey, Sunshine.” Kurtis hums as he plunks down next to you. “Ready to show these guys how it’s done?”

You hate how he talks to you like nothing ever happened between you. You know he knows that it bothers you, you can hear it in his smug intonation. But what are you gonna do about it?

You glance up at him, eyeing the metallic horn that now adorned his head where the previous one had been snapped off. “Call me sunshine again and you’ll lose your other horn, buckaroo.”

“See! Boom! We’re the banter dream team.” He smirks at you. You want to rip that entire, his, his whole FACE off his face.

“Save it for the Professor.” You chide.

Professor Vee hums; “Alright, looks like a full house. You guys can start working through your dialogues. I’ll come around to critique. Remember, keep it fluid, keep it funny, don’t force it. And, villains, don’t give away your full plan unless your hero is incapacitated. Which they won’t be. Traps and monologues are next week, so no jumping the gun.”

You think it’s ironic that Cowjock gets to play the hero. You both stand, and he clears his throat before launching into his bit.

“Well well well, Ettie, another sorry attempt at world domination today? Don’t you ever get tired of the whole broody emo chick bit?”

You force a smirk. “Ah, Kurtis. You’re right on time to watch me set off my… my Catastrophic Orb-ulator. And when I do, nothing can stop me from burning this miserable rock to the ground!”

“Oh, I’ll stop you, alright–” He pauses to allow you to quip back.

“And how exactly do you plan on doing that, shorthorn?”

He steps closer. “Oh, it’s really easy. It only took seconds to catch you off your guard last time–”

He’s going off script. Your next words catch on your tongue and you swallow them heavily. Last time. Does he mean...?

You frown. “Not very heroic of you to play dirty tricks like that. Are you sure you’re one of the good guys?” You growl at him. Your palms are starting to itch. Your head throbs. The sound of everyone practicing at once is exacerbating your head pain.

“Oh, I’ll always be the good guy so long as I’m taking down evil little brats like you, Ettie. That’ll never change.”

Tch. You ball your hands up. You’re at a loss for what to say next. Cowjock continues.
“And taking you down again is gonna be real sweet, just you wait and see.” He emphasizes his words with a curvy hand gesture, and you feel your stomach wrench with anger. Does he think this is a fucking game??

You spit; “You think I’ll let a sweaty animal like you lay a hand on me again? You have a lot of nerve--”

He laughs, cutting you off. “Oh, but you will! You’re a needy,” You dig your heels in as his words slam into you at full force; “Attention-seeking,” The floor crumbles a little beneath where your feet are planted; “Psycho with a dead-mommy complex and a fetish for--”

CRASH. The whole room goes silent as you flip your desk lunging at him, sending your pencils flying across the floor with a clatter. He grabs your fist before it impacts, you can hear it sizzle as your hands start to heat.

You spit at him; “Take it back before I send you home medium rare, you spoilt, rich, egotistical CREEP--”

He spins you around and tosses you out of the class window. You shoot out into the courtyard, landing with a BOOM. You shakily stand up in the crater you just created as Kurtis jumps down to your level. The class is staring up at you from the gaping hole in the second story wall, you catch a glimpse of Professor Vee panicking before Kurtis comes at you again with a violent swing of his fist. You dodge, barely, ducking down and scooping a branch off the ground. Come on, come on--FWOOSH, the branch ignites and you’re no longer up shits creek without a paddle. Other classes are piling up by their windows now, drawn in by the commotion. You block Kurtis’ next few blows with your stick, landing one to his side and another to his face before he shatters your make-do weapon. He’s grinning.

“There’s the Sunshine I know and love!” He plants his fist in your face, and you roll with it to the best of your ability before tackling him to the ground. You tumble down the grassy slope and wind up pinned down, writhing and squirming as he leans in and cackles at you.

“All that talk and you still can’t do more than scratch me up!” He laughs, spittle flicking out of his mouth and onto your cheek. You’re livid, glaring up at his face, and as you do, your vision flashes. The face you see resembles his, but older, more defined, with both horns attached and a scar trailing over the left eye. You feel a searing pain in your stomach, you look down, his hand is buried inside your stomach, blood spurting out as he haphazardly jerks his fist inside of you. You scream, yanking your hands loose and gripping at his face with one, digging into his eye with your thumb and yanking at his horn with the other as you try and flip him over. Your palms are burning hot, and you swear for a second you see actual flames flickering off of them.

You can’t help but screech; “GET OFF!!! GET OFF GET OFF GET OFF GET OFF --”

He does as he’s told, you jump to your feet to throw another punch. You’re finishing this, you’re not stopping until you’ve beaten him into a bloody pulp and he’s-- Someone restrains you from behind. You thrash and kick, you want him hurt, you want to see him begging for mercy that you have no intention of providing. As you blink at him, his face shifts back into his normal visage, but he’s not smiling, no, he looks scared, actually, burn mark covering his face and a considerable dent melted into his metal horn. The jocks holding him up look terrified. You stop thrashing, and look down. Your stomach is uninjured. But, but you could have sworn-- an agonizing jolt shoots through your head, you wretch forward and try to grasp at your head before it jolts straight off. You hear muffled speech from behind you.
“Ettie, you need to calm down, right now.” You know that voice, but you can’t help but continue to jerk and writhe, you need to— ZZZT. Your head pangs again and you cry out in anguish.

“L-LET ME GO--” You jerk forward, and his grip on your arms tightens.

“I will. But not until you take a deep breath.” Professor Vee warns, you feel his breath on the back of your neck. You feel your already strained heartbeat jolt into full gear. You need him to let go--

You’re heaving for air at this point, and as you raggedly gasp for more, he loosens a little. “There you go. Keep going.”

You shudder through another gasp, your head jolts again and you can’t help but sob as it does.

“Come on, one more.”

You wheeze through another breath, he lets your arms drop and begins rubbing circles on your back. “There you go. Come on. You’re going to the nurse.”

You look around. There’s a crowd of students looking at you, a lot of them are filming right now on their phones. They must think you’re insane. You think you’re insane, for sure. You feel your heart drowning in a cesspool of emotions when you realize that you were on your last warning for fighting. You’re fucked. You can’t even look your Professor in the eye as he silently escorts you to your checkup with the nurse. He doesn’t wait outside for you, you hear him walk off. He must have to go round up the other students.

Nurse Janet sighs as you enter the room.

“Whatcha do this time, Rauchen?” She looks at your tear stained face. “You want some water?”

You nod. She hands you a little paper cone and you shakily sip it.

She shines her light in your eyes, doing a routine check for brain damage and other possible injuries.

“Well, you look fine. Any concerns?”

“M-My head, it really hurts.”

“Probably just got knocked around during the fight. Take a Chill-Pill when you get home and it should be fine.”

“O-Ok.” You nod. You know it won’t help. But you don’t care enough to argue. You’re going upstairs to gather your things and leave this school for what will probably be the last time.

The classroom is empty as you grab your stuff, sniffling as you zip up your backpack. You hear the class door click shut behind you. Your head throbs.

“Ettie.” A gruff voice pierces the silence. Your gut twists, no, no, not again, you turn around and Kurtis is standing there, wounds bandaged up, blocking the door. You eye the giant gaping hole in the wall. “Ettie, I just wanna talk.”

“I don’t.” You take a step back.

“Seriously. They’re gonna call us in on this. You know what you have riding on this.” He’s
frowning at you.

“I’m not gonna sit here and listen to you bragging about how you’re getting me expelled, Kurtis. Leave before I finish what you started.”

“I’m not bragging.” He chuffs, stepping closer. Your hands ignite quietly. “I wanna make a deal with you.”

You freeze. A deal? What could he possibly want from you that money couldn’t buy? You’re not sure you want to know. The last deal you had made to cover your ass hadn’t exactly worked in your favor.

“I’ll take the fall, say I goaded you on.” He continues.

“You did.”

“Yeah, but I’ll make sure they don’t expel you.”

You know he could. “Why?”

“Don’t worry about that. I have a condition for you.”

You chew at your cheek. “And what would that be?”

“Oh, I think you have a good idea, already.” He eyes you from your legs upwards, cracking into a sick smile.

You tense up, sweat pricking at the back of your neck. If he’s implying what you think he’s implying, he’s out of his mind. “No deal.”

He huffs at you. “You’d rather flunk out?”

Your mouth begins to taste metallic as you continue biting at the inside of your lip. Men are all the same. They can’t stand being told no, they go out of their way to make themselves your problem with no care for what it’s costing you-- at least Professor Venomous buys you dinner sometimes before psychologically tormenting you. You ponder it. You already have one megalomaniac terrorizing you regularly. Maybe you could work this in your favor. “I’ll bargain with you.”

“I’m listening.”

You sigh. “You vouch for me, you can do whatever you want with me. But, only if you can beat me in a fight first. A fair fight.”

He raises an eyebrow, before cracking a grin. “Ooh, I was hoping you’d say something crazy like that. But I need more detail. How many tries do I get?”

"....Three."

"And if I win, can I come back for more?"

"....Only if you beat me again."

"Hmm. And if you win three times?"

"Then you leave me the hell alone for the rest of the school year."
"Oof. You drive a hard bargain. But...you have yourself a deal, Sunshine."

He extends a hand in your direction. You grasp it, locking eyes with him and gripping firmly, his hand sizzles as you do.

“Ow, ow, ok, deal made!’ He hisses as he yanks his hand back.

“Yeah.” You huff. You know this is a bad idea. "I hope you know what you’re getting yourself into.” You murmur, before pushing past him and making your way out the door. Sigh. This was going to be a long semester.
It’s early in the morning, early enough that you can watch the sun rising from your kitchen table while you wait for the croissants you have baking to be ready. You had slept pretty restlessly that night, dreams clouded with that face you had seen during your fight with Kurtis. Urgh. Kurtis. You were gonna have to do something about that guy. You sip your coffee, waiting for your laptop to boot up so you could check out the USB you had found in class the other day. You scan it for viruses before opening the folder it contains. Seems to be a bunch of PDF documents. You open them. They look like crappy scans of official P.O.I.N.T. documents, with a good chunk of the information blacked out with a marker or just torn out entirely. You wonder why someone would bother keeping the records at all if they were gonna blank half of them out.

Most of them are headed with the title NEW LEAF. You skim the little information that was left visible.

[ NEW LEAF juvenile villain reform -- DR B ---- targeted therapy for young cusp villains -- sculpt forces of evil into a power for good -- DISCONTINUED 20XX -- INCONCLUSIVE ]

[ Candidates R205- R208 --
L----B---- (DECEASED)
ULTRA B--- (IMPLANT FAILED)
C----- N------ (ESCAPED)
E---- RAUCHEN (COMPLACENT)
S---- ----- (IMPLANT FAILED) ]

Along with the text, you see a variety of images scanned into the document. Some depict what seems to be a smallish device, about the size and shape of an apple, others a small, spidery looking chip. You feel anxious you flick through the images. The last one depicts two point scientists shaking hands in their lab coats, faces torn out from the image entirely. That picture sent a prickle of sweat down your neck, filling your stomach with dread. The timer on your croissants goes off. You close the file and shut your laptop. This was ridiculous. Someone in that class had to be fucking with you. It’s 20XX, why would P.O.I.N.T. be printing classified documents in the first place? Maybe you could run a file tracker and figure out exactly who’s files these were.

RING. Your phone startles you as it buzzes to life, rattling off the kitchen table and almost clattering to the floor. You catch it, fumbling to swipe and pick up.

“Hello?”

“Ettie,” It’s the Professor. “I need you to come in early today. A glorb pocket just split in the danger zone and we need to get to it before everybody else does. Do you copy?”

“Ugh, it’s like, not even 6 in the morning yet. Are you serious?”

“Oh, I’m sorry to break you away from whatever riveting social media feed you’re scrolling right now while you procrastinate putting your big girl pants on. You’re up, aren’t you? Get your ass over here.”
Someone hasn’t had his coffee yet. “.....You’re the worst, you know that?”

“I’m the best of the worst. Bring me a croissant, will you?” He says, before hanging up. You glance around the room. How the fuck does he do that?? You get up with a sigh, tossing the pastries into a Tupperware and setting them by the front door, before heading into the bedroom and changing into your gear. Your cat rubs at your ankles, determined to get in your way.

“Oooh, glorbs in the danger zone, Ettie, do this Ettie, do that Ettie, babysit my kid Ettie, bring me a croissant, Ettie--”

Your cat lets out a long mewl.

“Jeez. You sound just like him.” You pick him up and give him a kiss on the forehead, he pushes your face away with a soft paw. You sigh. It doesn’t take you long to fix your hair and face. You opt to take your bike, it’s easier to park at the Voxmore facility.

You let yourself in, hauling your still-warm box of croissants to Venomous’ office and knocking on the door before entering anyways.

“I’m here.” You announce. Professor Venomous is sitting at his desk, applying his eye makeup with the aid of a little pocket mirror. He’s wearing a pair of black cargo pants and a matching tank top. Oof. You’re into it.

“Tired you long enough.” He replies.

“You’re not even ready yet!” You say as you sit on the desk next to him.

“I have other chairs, Ettie.”

“I wanna sit here.” You open the Tupperware, fucking ravenous now that you’ve had to wait an extra forty minutes to eat your delicious breakfast. You cup your hands around it, warming and crisping it a little more before taking a bite.

Professor Venomous brushes on his mascara, mouth opening awkwardly as he does. You eye his teeth. Man. You wonder if you could get your teeth that sharp somehow. “You’re gonna leave an ass-print on my desk. Don’t you own anything practical?”

“There’s nothing impractical about the range of motion my costume has.”

“Your skirt is gonna get caught in something one day, and when it does, I’ll be there laughing.”

“If that happens, which it never has, I’d just take it off.”

“How shameless.” He muses.

You shrug. “What can I say?”

He’s finished with his makeup. He grabs a pastry, munching it with one hand as he pulls up a holo-display with his other. It’s a map.

“We need to get here. If traffic is good, we can be there in three hours, give or take.”
“Traffic? Why not take the hover car?”

“No good. There’s a high chance of electric disturbance in the upper stratosphere today. It’d be safer to stay grounded.”

“Gotcha.”

“It’s also terror-dactyl brooding season. They’re highly territorial right now.”

“Ah.”

“We’ll take the all-terrain. Go pack us a box lunch while I fuel up.”

You wrinkle your nose. “Why do I have to make the box lunch?”

“Are you going to back-talk me this whole trip? If you are, let me know now so I can lose my temper in advance.” Oop. He sounds miffed.

You sigh. “Do you want wheat or rye on your sandwich?”

“Atta girl. Wheat.”

The car ride doesn’t feel long at all. You love riding with the Professor, he has good taste in music. You recline your seat and enjoy the view, there’s always something cool to look at when you’re passing through the danger zones.

You make idle conversation; “Who’s watching Fink right now?”

“She’s in Neo Riot City with Boxman, visiting Raymond.”

“So who’s the Raymond you send out to fight the plaza?”

“Eh, technically the same Raymond personality. But less glorbs go into stock bots. Business Raymond is objectively the best Raymond, and ergo, The Family Raymond. A master copy if you will.”

“Do the other Raymonds get jealous?”

“Oh, yes. That’s why they fight so hard. They love the approval they get from it. Most of our attack bots end up decommissioned post battle, and their data gets uploaded into the Master Raymond.”

“Kinda sad, if you think about it.”

“Not really. The robots don’t seem to mind it at all. It builds their AI. Makes them stronger.”

“Do robots have souls?”

He shrugs. “Not in the traditional sense. But yes. I’m fond of them and their little personalities.”

“That’s good, then.”
You sip your drink, then continue; “You ever thought about building another model? Someone Fink could hang with?”

“Fink hangs with Jethro all the time.”

“But like… Jethro is… A Jethro.”

“What, you don’t like Jethro? We don’t need another minion running around the house, they’re a lot of work.”

“I like Jethro. Just. Thinkin’ out loud, ya’know?”

“Mh.”

He turns into a more rocky, mountainous area. There’s a lot of lava pools near here. Parking where the car isn’t super visible, he puts it on lock-down mode and ushers you out.

He’s fiddling with a cellphone-esque device. “According to the sensor, the crack should be through this pass. Follow me.”

You suddenly regret your choice in footwear. Though, the upgrades Professor Venomous had made to the heels made them pretty comfy, you think a pair of sneakers would be ideal right now. At least their environment adjusters worked. You’ve got a good grip on this terrain.

“Right…. Here.” He points at a giant crack in the side of the cliff face, before starting to climb up into it. You jump up and join him.

“Light this for me, will you?” He hands you a wooden torch.

“What’s wrong with a flashlight?”

“Don’t you have any aesthetic sense? If you’re in a sewer, you bring a flashlight. If you’re in a crevice, you use a torch.”

“Wow, you know a lot about cracks, huh?” You snicker.

He rolls his eyes with a sigh. “You’re worse than Fink, honestly.”

As you keep walking, you notice a faint blue glow ahead.

“Mhh, perfect, they’re still here.” Professor Venomous hums, tongue flicking out of his mouth a little; “Oh, I can smell them~”

Must be a snake thing. He leads you into a gargantuan cavern, illuminated beautifully with the iridescent glow of what seems to be thousands of glorbs. Your eyes go wide at the sight of them.

“W-wow! So many…!” You hum, reaching out to prod one. They’re so cute…

“It’s the fucking jackpot, Ettie!” Professor Venomous can barely contain his excitement. He looks like a kid on Christmas morning. “Do you know what I could do with this many glorbs??” He picks you up by the waist and spins you around, before planting a fat kiss on your lips with a SMACK.

“Hall of Atrocity, here we come!”

Your cheeks flush redder than an apple as he sets you down and starts digging through his equipment bag. He pulls out a small cube adorned with a button, setting it on the ground and
activating it. In a matter of seconds, the device unfolds into what seems to be a giant containment unit, complete with a large tube and a stand to hold it up. It whirs to life, stirring up the wind in the cave and sucking up the glorbs, bucketfuls at a time.

“It’ll take about 30 minutes to compact them all for storage.” He hums, before bursting out into a straight up maniacal cackle. You can’t help but giggle when he’s done.

He turns and looks at you. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing. Just. The whole evil cackle thing always kinda got me. It sounds like my mom laughing.”

“Well no duh. Your mom is one of the biggest villains of the 8X’s.”

“I know, but like, what's the point?”

“Because that’s what you do. Just you wait, you’ll get your cackle one day and then you’ll feel real stupid for making fun of me.”

“I’m not making fun of you! And no way is that happening.”

“Wanna bet?” He smirks at you, a devilish twinkle in his eye.

Uh oh. He lunges at you, and before you have a moment to react, he’s got you wrapped in his clutches, one hand holding you around your chest, the other viciously tickling at your side. You hate being tickled. You flail and kick your heels at him, desperately trying to wiggle free, screaming as he continues.

“AHH-- STOP--!! AHAHAH--” You can’t help but laugh, and as he continues, your ugly laugh devolves into something mortifying. Oh my cob. You just cackled. Professor Venomous releases you, chuckling.

“See? I told you so.” He hums. You need a second to catch your breath.

Huff, huff; “Don’t-- ever-- do that again--” HUFF. You shake off the tickly feeling. “Point taken.”

You glance at the machine, thinking about what he had said. “You’re really not up in the Hall? I thought all the big shots were. Aren’t you like, one of the biggest villains on the map right now?”

He shrugs. “Mh. They don’t just hand spots out to anyone with a fat wallet and bad reputation. You have to do something truly disturbing to be honored. Something people won’t ever forget.”

“And you haven’t?”

“I started my career pretty late. I’m still on the rise, you know. But, nobody has been added to the wall since the Blood Rain of 199x. Our current generation of evil has been a little ...Mediocre. I want to be the first. Put Cosma and her little pyramid scheme in its place.”

“Ah.” You nod. “Sounds like a plan.”

“A diabolical one.” He nods.

You hear something over the whirr of the glorb-assimilator. “Shh. Did you hear that?” You glance up. Fuck!! Someone is about to drop kick the machine! You spring into the air, knocking them off course with a powerful kick to the ribs, sending them flying into the wall next to you. CRASH You
hang off one of the stalactites above the cave, glancing down.

“The Assimilator! Nice save, kid!!” The Professor yells at you, whipping a ray-gun out of his pocket. You see a figure approaching him from your vantage point.

“BEHIND YOU!” You yell, and he spins to avoid a punch from, oh shit-- it’s Mr. Gar.

Professor Venomous commands; “Go hit the transport button, NOW!”

Mr. Gar commands louder; “K.O., Don’t let her near that button!!”

You see K.O. peeling out of the dent on the wall you made with him. “Yes Mr. Gar!”

He launches himself at you. “You again, huh?? I should have known you were working with the likes of Professor Venomous!”

You block his powerfist, running along the sides of the cavern as he pursues you.

“Get lost, kid! You think a shitty little brat like you can beat me?”

“I did last time!”

“I’m not the same villain I was last time.” You state. You notice you’re in a good spot to help your boss out, he’s grappling with Mr. Gar and very much not winning that struggle. You chop your heel into the stalactite nearest to you, it drops down directly onto Mr.Gar, trapping him and allowing Venomous enough time to deactivate the machine and calibrate it for transport.

“Mr. Gar!!” K.O. wails, disengaging from your battle and hopping down hastily to try free his boss. You leap down too, covering Venomous’ back as he hits TELEPORT on the machine’s interface. Bloop! The glorbs and the machine vanish in a flash, he lets out another maniacal laugh, turning to face the two heroes.

“Better luck next time, Plaza Plebi ans!~ You better bring your A-Game the next time you come out and play , K.O!” He throws an arm around your waist as K.O. prepares his response, and with a click of a button, your surroundings change. You’re at the car, the huge crate of glorbs strapped to the top of it. He hits another button, a cloaking mechanism disguises the loot as a bunch of camping gear and canoes.

“Get in the car. We only have a minute or so before they get out and find us. Go, go go!”

You haul ass, buckling in as Professor Venomous floors the gas, tearing out of the crevice at record speed, leaving a trail of dust in his wake. He hits the radio, and a heavy rock track blares as you make your escape. You’re holding your breath, but he’s grinning, and soon you relax into your seat as well with a soft chuckle.

“Holy shit. That was wild.” You huff.

“That was the most alive I’ve felt in ages.” He grins. “I knew bringing you was a good idea.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. When we get back to the lab am going to fuck your br--”

He hits a road bump and bites his tongue. “Ouch!”
You snort. “You’re gonna what now?”

“You already know.” He states, slight lisp from his tongue swelling. You smirk at him.

“Whatever you say, _boss._”

The ride home feels longer than the ride there. You kinda wish you had packed a bigger lunch. That fight had made you hungry. Your stomach gurgles.

You break the silence. “I doubt there’s a Snack-and-Gas out here, is there?”

“Fat chance.” Professor Venomous grumbles. “Can you check my bag for my migraine pills?”

You rummage through it. “Uhh, are they in a bottle?”

“It’s like a mint tin. It has a skull on it.”

“Mmm…. Lemme check the pockets.” You fumble with the zippers, going through each one.

“I don’t think they’re in here.” You state.

“They’re in there. Look harder.”

You look again, shining your cell-phone light in to get a better look. Hmm. Wallet, keys, phone, tissues, a broken crayon, anti-venom, eyeliner, loose change, a condom, a spare ray-gun.

No mint tin.

You look at him. “They’re not in here.”

He growls at you in frustration. “They’re _in there._ Shake the bag out.”

You do. No mint tin. “Are you _sure_ you packed them?”

“YES. I always pack them!” He hisses.

“Well maybe you forgot this time. Do you want some water?”

He raises his voice. “No, I don’t want _water, _I want my damn pills!”

You don’t like his tone. “Don’t yell at me. I’m sorry they’re not here. This is your bag, not mine.”

He doesn’t respond, but you can tell he’s seething. You freeze for a moment, feeling tense as you cautiously grab your purse from the backseat and dig through it.

“…I have a chill-pill, if you want it.” You quietly offer.

“...Fine. It’ll have to do.” He takes it from you, gulping it down with a swig of your mango tea. Your post mission buzz has been thoroughly killed off. You chew on your lip. He stays quiet after that. You do the same.
There’s an hour and a half left to the drive. You’ve mostly just been playing on your phone, trying not to bother your Professor while he drives. He’s been wincing on occasion, rubbing at his temple.

“Uh, boss? Do you want me to drive for a bit?” You offer.

“Absolutely not.” He scoffs. You take offense, but you know better than to argue right now.

“Ok. Just lemme know if you change your mind.”

He doesn’t respond. You go silent. A few minutes later, he speaks;

“Are you keeping something from me, Ettie?”

Your gut sinks a little. What does he mean? “...Like what?”

“Just any recent developments in your life. You seem a little off.”

“Do I now?”

“Mhm.”

You chew your cheek. I mean. Things could be better. But you’d rather keep that to yourself. “You must be paranoid. I’m fine.” You answer.

He’s quiet. You feel nervous.

“Mh. If you insist.” He murmurs darkly.

About ten minutes pass, and you feel the tension in the car rising. You turn your A/C vent up a little higher. Professor Venomous shifts in his seat.

You’re gazing at the passing lightning storm when he breaks the silence. “Why did you make that deal with Kurtis?”

Your stomach twists, and you glance at him. He knew from the get go. “...How did you know about that?”

“Never you mind. Answer my question.”

“Answer mine first.”

“Ettie.” He snarls.


“You could’ve come to me.”

You frown. “I can take care of my own problems.”

“No, you can’t. What are you going to do when you lose, huh?”

“You stacked the odds in his favor--”

“The odds were gonna be in his favor no matter what I said! I had to make it appealing!”

“So when you lose--”

“IF, if I lose--”

“Are you just going to bend over for him?”

You freeze. Your heart is racing. You’d tried not to think about it, but now you have to. You dwell on it for a moment. “I’m not going to lose.”

“Answer the question.”

“I’m not-”

“ANSWER IT.”

You hate it when he takes that tone of voice with you. You bite your tongue for a moment, trying not to lose your temper, holding your hands together to avoid burning the car interior.

“If I lose, then I’ll deal with the consequences. I’m a woman of my word.” You huff.

He huffs back. “And your little added bargain, telling him he can keep coming back for seconds, you really thought that one through, huh?? You might as well just go knock on his door and tell him to stick it in y--”

You cut him off. “HEY. Can you shut the fuck up?? For two seconds?”

“Don’t cuss at me.”

“Stop busting my balls over this!” You retort. “You’re not my fucking mommy, ok?? I did something stupid and I’m gonna deal with it, ok??”

“Ok, so when you’re fucking Kurtis because of your bad deal--”

“Oh my Cob, will you stop saying that??” You hiss. Why is he being such a cobdamn drama queen right now?? Something clicks in your head. “You’re jealous.”

“Jealous?” He gawks at you, expression furious. You swear you can see a vein throbbing. “Like I could ever be jealous of a petulant little frat boy--”

“You’re so jealous! You’re upset because you’re not the only shitty half-baked creep that can bully my sorry ass into sleeping with him--’ Your head almost slams into the dashboard as he stops the car with a screech.

“GET OUT.”

“What??”

“Get OUT !!” He barks at you.

He can’t be serious. “It’s like 90 degrees out there--”
“Ettie, I swear to Cob I am going to kill you with my bare hands if you don’t march your arrogant, ungrateful little ass OUT of my car--”

“I’m wearing heels--!”

Professor Venomous slams his hand onto the central panel, and before you realize what he’s done, you’re flung out of the car with a sproing, landing face first in the dust outside. The car door clicks shut behind you, and you sit up just in time to watch him tear away down the road, leaving you behind. Your jaw is on the floor.

You are going to fucking kill him.

You’ve been trudging down the side of the danger zone highway for almost 30 minutes now.

In that time, you’ve been bombarded by wind spurts, spontaneous missiles, and a hail storm to boot. Heels in hand, you’re glad the scorching sand under your feet can’t really hurt you all that much. But you are parched, and you’re definitely seething. Fuck him. You’re quitting again when you get back to Voxmore. How DARE he leave you here on your own. In the DANGER ZONE, no less. What if something happened to you? You’re clenching your fists as you march forward. You hear a rumbling in the distance, and brace yourself for more freak weather. But, it never comes, and soon you realize it isn’t mother nature at all. A hoard of bikers is pulling up behind you, and as they do, they start circling around you like sharks around a bucket of chum. Just great. Exactly what you needed right now. You stand firmly, glaring at the ground before pinching the bridge of your nose as they slow down and park around you. SIGH.

“Well well, what do we have here, boys?” The ringleader laughs, approaching you. You eye his bike. Mm. How convenient.

“Looks like someone got a little lost!” Two pups chant in unison before giggling to themselves. Geez. These guys are practically feral.

“Good thing us guys came along and found her, right boys? Who knows what could happen to a pretty young thing out here.”

"YEAH." They nod.

The larger, purple skinned man casts a shadow over you as he walks into your personal space. You glance up, making eye-contact with him and staring him down. Whatcha got, big man? You hear one of his lackeys reach behind you to grab your arm, you spin round and kick him so far off into the distance that he’s not much more than a speck by the time he lands. His twin freezes. You turn back to the leader.

“You try anything and that one over there is going up your ass.” You nod your head at the scrawny pup. “I’m Ettie.” You extend your hand for him.

He eyes you up and down, caught off guard. Then, he cracks into a wide smile, shaking your hand with a meaty palm. “Mad Sam.”

He yanks your arm, trying to restrain you, you bring your knee up into his crotch faster than you can
say *torque*. He collapses to his knees, and you lean over him, murmuring in his ear as he recovers from the blow.

“Maybe I wasn’t *clear*. Now, if you can stop being fucking *handsy* for a minute, I have a proposition for you.” You yank him back up to his feet.

You continue; “A thousand technos, cash, if you take me to an ATM in Lakewood.”

You pull up your credit count and flash it as proof. Sam’s eyes glimmer.

“We got a deal, tough guy?”

He takes a second to think about it, before looking at his dogs. “Scram. The *lady* needs an escort.” The pups take off, not ones to anger their leader, it seems.

“There’s a good boy.” You hum. You walk over to his bike, he hops on and starts it, you climb on behind him, wrapping your arms around his middle. He smells, but not entirely in a bad way. It’s kinda that hot man smell, mixed in with the red earthy aroma of the desert and a little bit of gasoline. The gasoline smell always got you. You’re practically drooling at it. It isn’t long before you’re tearing down the road, wind rushing through your hair and cooling you off, Cob if this wasn’t a hundred times better than walking your ass home. You feel a little better. Only a little though. You’re still pissed as all hell, deep inside.

Mad Sam is the first to speak up as you race through the danger zone.

“What’s a city girl like you doing walking out on Highway 13?” He hums, gruff voice resonating through his chest and mingling with the vibrato of the bike. You’d have to bring yours out here one day. It’s good road.

“Long story short; my boss threw a temper-tantrum and left me on the shoulder.”

“Some boss.” He huffs. “Good thing you’re scrappy.”

“Yeah. It's complicated.” You wonder what could have happened if you weren’t ‘scrappy’. You feel a little warm. “What about you? What’re you doin’ out here?”

“I live here. Love every minute of it.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“...Don’t you get tired?”

“Sometimes. But the adrenaline keeps me going. I tell you what’s tiring. Following rules, playing the man’s game. They can’t touch us out here.” He hums. The sun is getting ready to set, casting a warm glow over the ruined city you’re passing through.

“You’re right.” You squeeze a little tighter as the road gets rockier. “I never thought of it like that.”

He’s quiet.

You clear your throat. “My mom and I used to hang around the outskirts. Blow stuff up. She was a demolition expert.”
“Yeah? Sounds like my kind of lady. She single?”

“She’s dead.”

“Bummer.”

You can’t even be sad about it, his response is so blunt. You grin quietly. “Yeah. But life goes on.”

Not moments later, you hear the beating of wings above you. Your stomach drops into your ass as you see a terror-dactyl swooping in on you. “INCOMING!!”

WHOOSH. Your chauffeur has been snatched off his bike. You scramble to take the handlebars as they wobble out of control, pulling the vehicle out of its swerve before glancing up and tracking the flying beast. Mad Sam is trying to beat it, punching it in the side and thrashing violently as it flaps onwards. Fuck!! You glance at the road ahead, hatching a plot. Up ahead, a collapsed highway ramp is approaching. You rev the accelerator, getting the chopper up to its limit as you come in hot to the ramp. You have to be careful, at this speed a piece of debris would demolish the wheel and send you flying, but, but you’ve got this. You’ve got this. Focus. You swerve and dodge a chunk of concrete. FOCUS. Almost-- there--- NYOOM. You fly off the ramp, taking the bike up into the air. You hope your aim was right, as you come back down, you just barely manage to grab the ankle of the bird with one hand, gripping the bike’s handlebar in the other. You fire up, sizzling into its flesh, causing it to release Sam, who just barely manages to grab hold of the bike before plummeting. FUCK, THIS IS HEAVY. You’ve definitely torn something in your arm.

“SWITCH WITH ME!!” You screech, and Sam pulls himself up the bike, holding onto the bird to avoid a nasty crunch on the pavement. You let go, shimmying up onto the animal’s neck and over to its head, grabbing it by the eyes and firing up again. The bird lets out an ear-piercing screech, losing control of its flight and beginning to descend.

“That’s right you stupid dinosaur, take us down!!” You shout, pushing down on its head until you’re close enough for Sam to drop safely.

“NOW!!” You scream, and he climbs onto the bike, revving it in mid air and making a clean landing, taking the lead below you. With a mighty wrench, you twist the head of the beast until you hear a clean CRUNCH, diving off it before it crashes into the ground. You land on the hog, barely, gripping to Sam as he tries to keep a balance of the vehicle. The terror-dactyl explodes on impact behind you, sending a gust of wind rushing past you as you continue tearing down the highway.

You huff and puff to catch your breath, Mad Sam as shaken by the incident as you are. After a few minutes, he breaks into a laugh.

“Holy cow! Where’d a city girl like you learn to handle a hog like that??”

“Uh… Good question. I’ve never done something like that before…!” You huff, kinda floored by what you had just done. You can’t help but laugh with him.

“Well I’ll be darned..!” He continues, “You’re welcome to the races any time, uh, what was your name again?”

“Ettie.”

“Anytime, Ettie.”
“Thanks.” You hum. Heh. Maybe you’d take a crack at it one day. You look out at the horizon. The sunset is gorgeous. You could ride like this forever.

It isn’t long before you can see Lakewood on the horizon.

“We’re almost there.” He points out. You can see other cars on the road now.

“You’re right.” You look ahead. Is that…? You squint. Sure enough, a black SUV with a fat stack of camping gear on top of it is driving up ahead. Ohh. *Oohhh, BITCH.*

“Be a dear for me and pull up close to that car up ahead?” You hum.

“Of course, my darlin’.” He chuckles, screeching up beside it and slowing down to match its pace a little better. You duck down and pluck a rock off the side of the road, and as you pass your mentor’s car, you press it *nice* and *deep* into the fancy paint job. *SCREEEEEEEECH.* Sparks fly and you leave a fist wide gash on the paint, exposing the metal and leaving a good scratch in that too. In the split second it takes for you to pass the drivers seat, you feel time move in slow motion. You lock eyes with the horrified Professor, watching his expression change from mild concern at the sound to complete disbelief as he realizes what had just happened. You grin at him, dropping the rock and bringing your hand up, pulling one of your eyelids down and sticking your tongue out, eyes rolled back. *NAH-NAH,* you stupid old man. *Eat dust!* Mad Sam hits the gas and you speed off, filtering through traffic at a pace Professor Venomous couldn’t possibly match. As you disappear off into the sunset, you have one thought.

*That’ll teach him to FUCK with me.*
Thank you guys all so much for the feedback! I never thought this fic would get as much attention as it did. Your comments really keep me motivated, I'm glad you're all enjoying reading it as much as I enjoy writing it. You guys are the best <3

You’ve never felt good while rifling through your mom’s room. You hated to disturb things. As a kid, it would really piss her off if she found out you were touching her things without asking. You definitely felt like she could pop up at any second and threaten you for it. Sigh. You wouldn’t actually mind it so much if she did. If things could go back to the way they were when you were just a stupid kid with someone taking care of you. You’re still a stupid kid. Just taller, with a bunch of responsibility you never asked for.

You flick through the notepad she kept in her bedside drawer. She must’ve written that password down somewhere, right?

*Pipe bomb musical*

Nope.

*Eggs for ettie*

Nope.

*glorb overload?*

Nope.

*Rauchen juice*

Definitely not. Fuck. There’s nothing written down other than half-baked, half-asleep ideas, her grocery lists, and some dream journals. You put the notepad back, closing the drawer, feeling disheartened. You wish you could find something, just one little clue. You check the time on your phone. Crap, you were gonna be late to class at this rate.

You hurry to the bathroom, changing into your cute sweats and slapping on some eyeliner. As you comb your hair back, you brush your bangs aside, checking out the minuscule scar you have on your forehead. You wonder how it got there. Probably just a cheerleading accident, or shrapnel from a blast gone awry at your mom’s lab. You run your finger over it, trying to feel if there was anything unusual about it. It seems pretty asinine. Maybe you’re just being paranoid.

You make a mental note to look into it further. Even if it was just to soothe some baseless paranoia.

You’re about three minutes late as you head up to the classroom. You pass a few people in the hall, one or two of them squint and turn their noses up as they make eye contact with you. You can’t help but feel like you really messed up your social standing by picking that fight with Kurtis. But you don’t regret it. You never really liked these people anyways. So what if they hate you? It’s not like
you care or anything, right? You chew your lip. The classroom door is closed, with a piece of paper taped to it.

**PROFESSOR VEE’S CLASS CANCELLED. MAKE-UP CLASS FRIDAY FEBRUARY 12th.**

Ughhhh. You flick open your student email. Yep. There it was, a cancellation notification. You really need to check that more often. You turn to leave, pondering if you want to stop by the school cafe or not before heading home. As you check your messages on your phone, you thunk face first into what feels to be a wall of meat.

“S-Sorry.” You duck your head and keep walking, avoiding eye contact with whoever you just walked into. You really don’t feel like socializing.

“Rauchen.” A hand claps onto your shoulder, stopping you in your tracks. You turn around and look up. Kurtis raises his eyebrow at you.

“You skipping class?” He jeers, insufferable grin ever-present on his insufferable face.

“It’s cancelled. I didn’t see the email.”

“Oh? Fuckin’ sweet.” He hums. “So you’re not busy then?”

“Uh, I’m sure I’ll find something to do.” You turn to leave again.

“Ay, not so fast, Sunshine.” He grabs your wrist this time. You frown up at him, yanking it away.

“I wanna call in that duel.” He hums.

“Already?” You huff. It hadn’t even been a week yet..! You needed more time to prepare!

“Why wait? I’m feeling lucky today.”

Crap. “...Takes more than luck to take me down.” You respond. Ugh. Did you really have to?

“Oh, I know.” He hums. “Gonna put the boys to good use.” Kurtis flexes his pecs rhythmically at you, and you turn away, nose wrinkling at the sight. Stupid jock with his stupid, perfectly sculpted muscles. It wasn’t right. Why’d Cob have to waste such immaculate physique on someone with a two whole brain-cells in his head? Or in his dick. Yeah, they’d be in his dick, for sure.

“Are you listening??” He asks, and you snap out of your internal monologue.

“Huh?” You respond.

“I said, let’s go to The Pit.”

“Right now??” You protest.

“No doy.” He chuffs, running a hand through his shitty mullet. You wanted to rip his sparkly golden nose-ring right out of his stupid face. Hm. Maybe you could, if you agreed to duel him.

“...I’m down. We should set some rules.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Rule One. No drugs. Especially none meant to inhibit powers. You think you can manage
He rolls his eyes at you. “We already agreed to a fair fight.”

“I’m just reminding you. Rule Two, no glorbs, or glorb-substitutes.”

“Of course.”

“Two weapons each.”

“Weapons? You gonna stab me, Rauchen?”

“I didn’t say that. I’m trained with a mallet staff. I need my gear to fight properly.”

“Hm. I’ll allow it. I’ll be sticking to these guns.” He flexes again. You roll your eyes at him.

“Yeah, I get it, you play sports, wow, amazing, incredible--”

“Hey, don’t hate.”


“Jeez, if you’re that passionate then why don’t we skip the fight and cut to the--”

“ANYWAYS.” You interrupt, before he manages to piss you off even more than he already has. You hold your hand out. “Do you agree to the rules?”

“I do.” He shakes it, squeezing firmly. You pull back, wiping your hand on your pants. “Then I’ll meet you at The Pit.”

“You need a ride?”

“I got one, thanks.”

“Then, I’ll see you there. Can’t wait.” He smirks, before heading down the hall. You sigh. Guess it was time to put your money where your mouth is.

You double check your fuelbracelets, making sure they’re full and ready to go when you arrive at The Pit. Kurtis pulls up soon after you do, you fidget with the hem of your shirt as he gets out of his truck and heads your way. The sun is starting to set, casting dramatic shadows over the forest. You remember your conversation with Professor Venomous the other day. Tch. When you lose. You’ll show him. You scan Kurtis as he walks towards you. He’s beefier than the first time you fought him. It’s later in the sportsball season, he’s probably been training harder. You’ve got this though. You’ve been training too. You can do this.

“You ready, Rauchen?” Kurtis cracks his knuckles, positioning himself a small ways away from you and getting into a defensive stance. You do the same, extending your mallet and preparing yourself
mentally.

“Ready.” You nod. You’ve got this. You really hope you’ve got this.

“We doing three second pins?” He asks.

“Yeah. That or a five second knock-out.” You nod.

“Sounds good.”

You grip your weapon a little tighter. “On three. One. Two. Three--”

You launch forward at him, faking him out with a mini-swing to his chest before ducking down and swinging at his ankle. It hits, and he bellows at you before upercutting you. You dodge the first time, the second time he clocks you in the gut, sending you flying across the pit. You roll as you land, rough texture of the dirt scraping your arms some, quick to scramble back to your feet and block his next fist as it swings down onto you. It hits the bar of your weapon, your feet dig into the dirt with the force. You contract the weapon and roll between his legs before springing back and landing a kick to the side of his face. He jumps back. You do the same.

As he pants, he grins at you. “Not bad for a cheerleader.”

“I’m not a cheerleader.” You retort. Those days were dead to you.

“Shame. You were always real cute in a miniskirt.” He taunts. You run at him, taking a wide swing at his gut. He blocks. You hit. It lands. He grunts, before ducking down and grabbing your ankle, yanking you off your feet and into the air. You swing forward, elbowing him in the stomach, he drops you. You roll as he attempts to stomp you. You trip him with your staff. THUD. As he hits the ground, you race to pin him, wrapping the bar of your mallet around his neck and pushing with all your might until his shoulders hit the dirt.

“THREE. TWO. ONE.” Yes!! You let go. He slumps forward, huffing for air. You back off, waiting for him to recover. Clouds are starting to form above you, a breeze picking up. You’re feeling chilly. You need to wrap this up. He gets up soon enough, expression less amused than before.

“Beginner’s luck.” He huffs, wiping the dirt off his face. “You won’t beat me again.”

“You sound real confident for someone who just lost.” You jeer, getting in position.

He begins the countdown. “Three, two, ONE--” He barges at you, tackling you into the ground. You squeeze out from his grip and leap a few paces back, twirling your weapon and waiting for him to charge again. He does, head first, and much to your dismay, he catches your weapon with his horns, standing up straight and yanking it from your hands before tossing it away. You snarl at him as he comes at you again, butting into your stomach. You feel one of his horns cut your side, and a pained sound chokes out of your mouth as you’re launched into a nearby tree.

You’re bleeding. You glance down at the wound, igniting your palm and pressing it to the open gash until it sizzles shut, hissing at the pain.

“Fuckin’ watch it! This isn’t to the death, idiot!!” You spit, before initiating your bracelets. Two flames shoot up around your hands, and you come at him swinging. You’re gonna burn that fucking horn right off of his pretty little head-- You land a punch to his face, leaving a fat red burn mark on
him, he snorts agitatedly at the sensation as he stumbles back. He punches you, you get hit dead in
the face, your lip splits and you stumble back, vision going hazy for a second. In that time, he comes
charging at you, you barely side-step it as he does.

He spins, spitting at you; “I’m done taking it easy on you, Rauchen!”

Kurtis opens his mouth and lets out an earth shaking bellow, the sound waves hit you like a freight
train and you go soaring into the side of the pit, knocking the wind out of you. Taking shallow
breaths, you try to regain the upper hand. He runs towards you, you grapple with him as he tries to
drag you down, you grab him by the horns and yank him into a backwards roll. He hits the ground
face first, stunning him just long enough for you to dig your elbow into his back and force him into
the ground.

“Three! Two! ONE!” You exclaim, holding him down a little extra for good measure. Then, you let
him up, wiping the sweat off your brow and bracing yourself for round three. You hear a dark
rumble in the sky. Fuck. Not now, please not now--- The sky opens up into a full on downpour. You
curse your luck, glancing around for your mallet, but you can’t see it within reach. Ok. You can do
this. He’s tired. Nevermind that you’re exhausted. You’ve got this. You lick the blood off the cut in
your lip, exhaling sharply.

“Last chance, Kurtis.”

He’s huffing to catch his breath. “You’re dead meat, Rauchen--” He comes swinging at you without
a countdown, barely missing as you slide backwards.

“H-Hey--!” You exclaim, blocking his neck punch with your forearm-- holy fuck that was gonna
hurt in the morning. It hurt now. Your whole body is aching, steam sizzling off of you as you’re
battered by the frigid rain. Your powers are useless right now. You have to focus. He swings again,
you dodge, you kick, you miss. Gasping for air, you try to put some distance between yourself and
your opponent, hopping up into the branches of a dead tree on the outskirts of the pit. You hear
something rustle behind you. What was-- Kurtis bellows again, shattering the tree at its base, catching
you by the hair as you try to land safely. He slams you into the dirt, mud splattering up around you
as you get a mouthful of wet earth. You sputter it out, frantically trying to crawl away as he drags you
in closer. You can't get a grip on the slimy ground beneath you, scraping gouges into the mud as you
try to wriggle free. No, no, no no no--!! He digs his heel in between your shoulder blade, pushing
your body down further into the wet earth, securing you as your thrash and flail, trying to shimmy
loose before it's too late--

“Three,” He starts.

Come on, come on--

“You can’t lose, not like this--

“One.”

You heart drops. It’s over. You lost.

If I lose, I’ll deal with the consequences.

You had made a deal. You breathe heavily, waiting for Kurtis to let you up. He removes his hoof
from your back, and you squirm forward, rolling over, trying your best to wipe your face clean. He
offers you a hand. You take it, standing up. He’s smiling, of course he's smiling. You wish you
could smack that smug look right off of him.

He starts to speak; “Well, don’t feel too bad, Rauchen. You lasted longer than I thought you would.”

“Spare me.” You hiss. “You don’t need to gloat.”

He clicks his tongue at you. “I’m not gloating. You fight harder than half the team.”

He’s pissing you off. “It doesn’t matter. I lost.”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah.” You nod. You hear something rustle near the outskirts of the pit again. You look up,
inspecting the area, unable to see through the hazy weather.

Kurtis approaches you, you back up, shoulders soon hitting the wall of the ditch. He looms over you.

“You ready?” He asks. You look up at him, his expression is near-voracious.

“W-what?”

“To pay up.”

His words send a shiver up your spine. The rain comes down harder, soaking into your clothes and
rinsing off some of the blood and dirt from your scuffle. “R-right now? I’m covered in--”

He presses a thumb to your mouth, agitating your cut and interrupting your sentence.

“Right now.” He huffs, and you bite your tongue, glancing up at him. You couldn't argue. You lost
fair and square. You said he could do whatever he wanted, Cob, you should have at least laid down
some ground rules for what he could and couldn’t do-- He leans in, lips crashing against your own,
catching you off guard as he takes what is rightfully his. Your eyes stay open, you hadn’t expected
this, it was too intimate- too inappropriate for the circumstance-- His hand grips your jaw and your
eyes screw shut as you feel his tongue work its way into your mouth and, fuck-- you should’ve
guessed that the varsity himbo would be a pretty decent kisser. You grip your palms, they’re red hot
despite the pouring rain. You're cursing yourself as he continues, hand slipping up your waist and
under your tank top-- You can’t enjoy this. Losing is one thing but you’d never forgive yourself if
you actually liked what he was about to do with you.

Are you just going to bend over for him?

Your argument with the Professor flashes through your head. He had been right. You lost.
He had known all along that you were going to, that you couldn’t handle it. You hate that he was right,
almost as much as you hate him for-- You hear the rustling in the woods again as Kurtis gropes your
chest. You pull back, struggling to break the kiss.

“Do you hear that?” You hiss as him, pushing him back as he tries to continue.

“I don’t hear anything. Cut the crap, Ettie-” He leans in again. You know you heard something. You
have a pretty good idea of what, or who, it might be. Your stomach wrenches as you think about it,
how he could be lurking in the shadows, watching you fail, laughing at the fact that you were wrong,
watching Kurtis claim his prize-- Getting jealous.
Holy shit.

You just had an epiphany. This situation could still be in your control, maybe, if you would--

You swallow your pride; “...You’re right. I’m just... Just nervous.” You huff, chewing your cheek and looking up at your victorious opponent, locking eyes. “Don’t stop.”

Kurtis blinks down at you, almost confused at your encouragement, before breaking out into a smug grin.

“Nice to see you’re not a sore loser, Sunshine~” He hums as he scoops you up at the hips, pressing you up against the back of the pit. You wrap your arms around his neck, supporting yourself, trying not to let your hatred for the situation spill through as you feign a smile.

“Am I really the loser?” You huff, leaning in so he can feel your breath on the shell of his ear. You whisper; “Take your prize, already.”

You initiate the next kiss, aggressive with your motion, teeth clashing against his, tongue ready to wrestle. You hear motion behind you, that’s right, you bastard, you don’t like it, do you? You run your fingers up into Kurtis’ hair, one hand grabbing a horn, he huffs and you feel him stiffen, pressing against you through your soaked sweats.

You hear something thunk down into the mud next to you. Kurtis hears it too. He pulls back, glancing down, you peer over his shoulder, noticing an orb sitting in the mud, beeping.

*Blip, blip, blip.*

Kurtis squints at it.

“What is--” *HISSSSSS.* A noxious purple gas begins spilling from the device, encapsulating you before you can do anything about it. Kurtis plummets first, eyes rolling back and jaw hanging loose as he hits the ground. You cover your mouth as you crumple on top of him, holding your breath as the world starts to go woozy, looking up as you hear a muffled squelch of footsteps approaching. You barely catch a glimpse of his shit-eating grin, hiding behind that *Cob-awful* hood, ominous chuckle ringing out through your ears before your vision fades to black entirely.

*When you wake up, you are going to kill him.*
“Rauchen!”

You barely hear it as your name is called. Sounds like someone is whispering aggressively at you. You try to open your eyes. Come on. Come… on…! You can do it!

“Rauchen...!” The voice hisses out louder now. You hazily open your eyes, brightness glaring in from your surroundings as you do your best to regain your focus. Where the hell did your glasses go? You muster up the consciousness you need to speak.

With a great deal of effort, you mumble; “....Whassup?”

“What the fuck did you do ??”

You squint. Kurtis is adjacent from you, tied up and missing his shirt, arms bound by what appeared to be… some sort of.. Metally… thing? Fuck! You can’t fucking see!

You process Kurtis’ question. He really thinks you did this?

“I didn’t do shit! You never been kidnapped before, meat-head?”

“Uh, no!”

“What are you, an amateur??”

“.. Shut up!”

You scoff. “Well stop acting like a pussy! It'll be fine!” You struggle with your own bindings, feeling around your wrists with the little wiggle you could manage. Felt like a metal tube was wrapped around your arms. Your bracelets are missing. You roll your eyes.

“I bet this is the work of Profe-- MPPGH .” You feel something lodge itself in your mouth. Damn it! Bastard is always one step ahead of you. You chomp down, but the hard surface of the material hurts your teeth. It tastes like steel. Then, a sharp jolt runs through your body as the metal springs to life with electricity.

“Ettie??” Cowjock looks horrified as you convulse, glancing at you and then around the room. Stainless steel walls surround you, with no sign of an exit. “Th-this isn’t funny!”

Obviously, you can’t respond, though the zapping has ended. You begin to inspect the room. You’re sure that bastard is building up to a dramatic reveal–

HISSSS. The lights go out in the room, and slowly fade back into a saturated red hue. You can barely see at all now that everything is the same color. You look up. Looming above you and Kurtis is a Shadowy Figure. The Shadowy figure, grinning at you with that awful grin. He’s sitting pretty in a comfy throne, that seemingly appeared out of nowhere. You want to punch his lights out. You struggle against your bindings, trying to muster your strength and light your palms.

“Nice of you two to finally wake up .” A familiar voice purrs. Your stomach practically does a somersault.

“Y-You!” Kurtis blurs, yanking against the silvery coil restraining his arm, to no avail. “You’re the
motherfucker that stole my horn!!”

A sordid cackle rings out through the darkened room. “Nice eye, kid! I sure am!”

You wish you could cut this stupid monologue short. You’re glaring daggers at the Professor. How fucking dare he interfere with your fight!

Cowjock practically has steam blowing out of his ears. “The second I get outta here, I’m gonna--” ZAP! Cowjock shakes as the high-voltage restraints jolt to life, letting out a pained grunt.

Shadowy Figure chuckles at him, rising from his seat.

“Tear you limb from limb and--” ZAP.

He steps closer.

“Shove my new horn up your--!!” BZZZZT.

Shadowy Figure looms over him, Kurtis can’t do much more than glare up at him as he leans in, sick smile exposing those heavenly teeth of his. You look away. It’s too much.

Your dark captor murmurs at Kurtis; “You talk too much.”

With that, he reveals a needle, primed and ready for use. Without hesitation, he pricks the vein bulging in Kurtis’ neck. Kurtis gasps, Venomous hums, pleased with the reaction.

“I’m sure this will make you feel much more… agreeable, Kurtis.”

He steps away, making his way towards you. You thrash against your bindings, they shift and grow tighter. You know he’s always one step ahead of you.

“And hopefully, Ms. Rauchen, this can curb your inappropriate behavior.” He hums. You squirm as he brushes your hair to the side, leaning in to press his lips to your neck before plunging the needle in. You squeak. You hated the sensation, almost as much as you hate needles. You have to look away whenever you have blood work done at the lab. You wish you could cuss his ass out. Your jaw is starting to ache.

“What did you just do, you b-bastard!!” Kurtis fumes, still struggling.

“Nothing you’re not familiar with, Kurtis.”

You’re starting to feel warm. You know this feeling. You suspect this is a similar concoction to the one he’s given you previously. The buzz growing between your legs confirms your suspicions. You glance at Kurtis, you can barely make out the shape of his shorts, but you definitely notice it when they start to twitch. Another menacing laugh rings through your ears.

“You know, Kurtis, I’m really not a big fan of sharing my toys. But, since she ran off and made a deal with you without my permission, I’m feeling open to a compromise.”

You frown, ooooh, that bastard, that jealous fucking bastard--

“W-What?? This wasn’t the agreement--!!” Cowjock protests, glaring at you. You shake your head at him. This wasn’t your idea!

“Oh, well, it is now.” Shadowy figure shrugs. “Better get used to it, kid.”
You hear the sound of fabric rustling. You squint, oh man, Shadowy figure has his junk out. You brace yourself for the sounds of protest Kurtis is about to make. Three… two… one…

That is not a sound of protest. You can’t see too clearly, but you’re pretty sure Kurtis is getting a mouthful of your bastard boss right now. You hear a soft grunt of pleasure, then something very distinctly wet and rhythmic. A soft moan from your classmate confirms your suspicions. Fuck. You’re… You’re not sure what to make of this. You feel something snake it’s way up your leg, positioning itself against your heat and buzzing to life soon after. You yelp as it does, taken off guard as the stimulation rocks through you without mercy. You try to writhe away, but soon relax into it, helpless to how fucking good the sensation felt. You can’t help it-- whatever the Professor had stuck you with felt at least twice as potent as his usual mix. A soft moan escapes you, and when it does, you feel your binding shift, dragging you closer to your captor and his victim.

It doesn’t stop until you’re adjacent with Kurtis, and something very familiar is prodding against your lips, gag shifting out of the way to make room. You don’t have the sense you need to speak right now.

“Ettie, dear. Do me a favor and show Kurtis how it’s done.”

You bet he’s feeling real proud about having two dicks right now. Smug asshole, you’re gonna destroy him when you get out of-- Mhh… The jolt of arousal that shoots through you as he presses his member into your mouth is out of this world. He could make a fortune off this mix. You lap at it gently, you know what he likes, and if you could work a moan out of him it would almost feel like a victory. You try to ignore the fact that Kurtis is sitting right next to you, but you have to admit, it’s a little distracting. You wonder if he’s ever done something like this before. He’s never struck you as anything other than heterosexual. You suppose it doesn’t matter when you’re as doped up as you are. You close your eyes and focus, skin burning with desire as you focus on his tip, working your lips over the head a hot minute before pushing down further.

Venomous groans ever so slightly, you’re delighted, no, ecstatic as he does, arousal boiling up inside you like a pressure bomb waiting to burst.

Kurtis is beginning to copy your technique.

“Mhh.. Atta boy. You’ll be a pro in no time.” You captor hums, stroking Kurtis’ hair. Your stomach wrenches with jealousy, you want to be touched like that-- A cool hand rests on your head, sharp claws gently running over your scalp. You melt into it, it feels incredible, every brush against your skin feels positively euphoric. You, you can’t even remember why you were so mad in the first place, you want nothing more than to please your darling Professor, to prove to him you’re worthy of his affections, his touch-- You feel your mechanical restraints pull you off of him, no, no, no-- They hoist you up and bend you over. Kurtis has been re-positioned as well, he’s in front of you now, you’re close enough to see him clearly. Specifically, you can see his fat fucking dick. Holy cow. The thing looks like a damn tube of lightning chips. You feel Shadowy figure shifting behind you, and then something cold pouring down between your legs with a sizzle. You wince as it does, but it doesn’t feel bad, it just caught you off guard and-- FUCK! Professor Venomous pushes into you with little warning, burying himself to the hilt in one fell swoop. It goes in easy, you guess he prepped for it, but that doesn’t make the wave of pleasure that crashes through you any less intense. You make a downright primal sound. He works his hand into your hair again, pushing you forward and against Kurtis’ member.

“Open wide, Ettie. This is what you wanted, isn’t it?” He hums as your lips part, jaw hanging open to accommodate. Is this what you wanted? You wanted to win, didn’t you? You can’t think straight with your Professor thrusting into you like that. You moan softly against Kurtis, he begins to thrust as well, pressing too far on occasion. You gag when he does, but he’s quick to pull back when
You’re struggling for air. You feel your excitement reach a boiling point inside of you, amplified by the Professor’s poison, and soon you’re shaking with absolute bliss, orgasm crashing through you like a tsunami. You’re trapped, neither party relenting with their thrusts as you scream and cry out, overstimulated and oversensitive to their dual-ended assault.

“Oh, is it too much for you, firecracker?” You feel his breath on your ear as Venomous taunts you. “We were just getting started...!"

The metallic binding shifts again, rolling you over onto your back, keeping you suspended in the air as Professor Venomous realigns himself. Your head tilts as Kurtis pushes into you again, it’s easier to take him this way, even if your jaw is starting to go a little numb. You feel that cool sensation between your legs again. Two fingers begin to press against your only unoccupied orifice. Your eyes go wide at the sensation, and you begin to jerk against your restraints.

“Calm down, Ettie. You’ll enjoy this, I promise.” The Professor hums, rubbing his thumb over your hip soothingly, before starting to work the offending fingers in gentle circles. “You trust me, don’t you?”

You give a muffled response, it’s not like you can answer properly in your position. You can’t deny you feel heavenly right now, you wonder if that’s just the shot talking. When he presses the head of his second member against you, you close your eyes, bracing for it, you’re sure it’s going to hurt-- O h ? OHH!~

Your captor cackles, pleased with your response, pushing both lengths into you cautiously, you can hardly stand how big he feels as he fills you completely, not to mention the frontal bombardment you’re receiving from Kurtis right now. This is too much. You’re overwhelmed by each thrust, it feels so good that you physically can’t stand it, it almost hurts--

“H- Hey..!” You hear Kurtis protest, though you can’t see what he’s protesting.

“Relax, boy. Look, Ettie’s enjoying it.”

You hear something mechanical shifting by your head, and can barely make out one of the professors robotic appendages working its way up Kurtis’ thigh. Is he..?

“Ettie’s a-- MMPH!” Kurtis is silenced by a second metal appendage working its way into his mouth. Soon after, he makes an absolutely feral sound, you can only guess what’s happening. Your suspicions are confirmed when his thrusting becomes less erratic, like he’s being pushed into you, you can only imagine he’s going to be furious about this. But, he is moaning harder than you are right now.

“See? There’s no reason for you two to be so argumentative. I’m a villain, not a savage.” Shadowy Figure hums, before smacking you on the ass with a sharp THWACK. You yelp as he does, body clenching, and he moans as he pushes deeper into you, bending your legs up and securing them with his metal restraints. You feel like you’re going to explode, it’s too much, you can’t handle it--

FUCK! A second climax rocks through you, and you pray to Cob he takes it easy, please, please--

No such luck. You can only hope they finish soon, you’re not sure how much more of this your body can take. It isn’t long before you relax into it again, closing your eyes and enjoying the ride. You hear Kurtis moan out around his gag, hips trembling, and shortly after feel the sensation of something sticky coating the back of your throat. He pulls out and you gulp before coughing-- Was he trying to fucking drown you?? A little more spurts out onto your face, dripping down into your eye.
“W-Watch it!” You hiss as Kurtis leans back onto the ground. Seems the Professor is done with him. Speaking of the Professor, soon enough you hear him let out a low groan, thrusting intently. You feel him cumming inside you. The sensation drives you wild, and you weakly tense around him as a third climax rolls through you. You’re exhausted as he pulls out, metal restraints loosening and depositing you on the cold ground as you pant to catch your breath. Shadowy Figure zips up his pants, before pulling a small device out of his pocket.

“Well, it’s been fun, kids. I’ll see you around.” Click! The room hisses as a noxious purple gas begins to fill it, occupying your lungs and knocking you out before you even have a chance to protest.

Your boss is the fucking worst.

Your eyes flutter open, disturbed by the sunlight that is filtering in through the blinds and filling the room. You fumble around. This isn’t your house. You find your glasses on an unfamiliar nightstand, pushing them onto your face and blinking as you take in your surroundings. The room is nicely decorated, with crisp white sheets and a few… interesting looking plants scattered around as decor. Ugh. Your whole body is aching. You inspect yourself, you’re in a comfy white t-shirt with a Boxmore logo on it, and a pair of soft boyshorts you don’t recognize as your own. Are you at the lab? As the memory of last night begins to bubble back to the surface of your brain, you sniff check yourself, feeling around for stickiness. Well. At least he had the decency to bathe you.

You can’t believe you lost the bet. Worse than that, you can’t believe what Venomous pulled last night. The more you think about it, the more agitated you get. How dare he stick his di-- His NOSE into your business like that! You throw the bed sheets off of yourself and head to the door, half expecting it to be locked. You’re pleasantly surprised when it swings open. Now, where the hell are you?? You pace down the unfamiliar hallway, until you pass the rec room Fink usually likes to play in.

Ok. You’re in D-wing, which means the kitchen should be right… Here!

Sitting at the dining table is the man you love to hate. You’re seeing red as soon as you lock eyes with him.

“Mh, good morning, Ettie.” He hums, sipping his coffee. “Did you sleep we--” CRASH. He narrowly dodges the frying pan you just threw at his head.

“You selfish, manipulative, egotistical--!!” Your words are punctuated with the toss of more kitchenware as you stomp your way across the kitchen, hurling whatever happens to be in arms reach at him. You don’t hit him with much more than a wet dish sponge, at which point he aims and fires a small ray-gun at you. You feel yourself stiffen as a blue beam engulfs your body. Fuck! Since when did freeze rays actually work??

“Easy on the cooking utensils. They’re Billiam-Sonoma.” Professor Venomous yawns. “Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed. You should be thanking me, you had fun last night, didn't you?”

“Are you serious?? That’s beside the point--!! I told you I could handle it--”
“But you lost.”

You're seething. “I lost because someone was fucking around in the bushes distracting me!!”

“Oh please.” The Professor snorts, and you thrash as hard as you can, doing little more than rocking back and forth within the force field that's holding you. “You don’t have to thank me, but a little appreciation would be nice.”

“As soon as you let me go, I’m gonna put my foot so far up your--”

Swoosh. The door slides open and Fink sleepily shuffles into the room with a yawn. She doesn’t acknowledge you or the Professor as she slides into her chair and begins to pour herself a bowl of cereal. Cob Dammit. Professor Venomous releases the freeze beam, you drop to the ground, clenching your fists and glaring at him with the intensity of a thousand suns. You are gonna murder his ass. Just, just not right now.

“Morning Fink.” Professor Venomous hums, sly smirk on his infuriating bastard face. You’re really gonna give him something to smile about the second you have him alone.

“Morning Boss.” She looks at you. “When did you get here?”

Professor Venomous responds, "Ettie had to work night shift last night. Grown up business.”

“You get any glorbs?” She blinks up at you, with those big ol' eyes of hers. Ugh. Why did she have to be so darn precious?

“Yeah, a couple.” You sigh as you sit down next to her. She slides you the cereal. You begrudgingly begin to make yourself a bowl of… Sugar Crusted Sugar Flakes? Ew. On second thought, you’ll pass.

“You let her eat this garbage?” You scoff at her boss.

“It’s not garbage!” She protests. “It’s fuel.”

“Yeah, fuel for diabetes.”

“I assure you my minion is properly nourished, Ettie.” Professor Venomous sips his drink. “Though, I’m sure she wouldn’t say no if you wanted to cook something more appropriate.”

You snort. “Fat chance.” You really can’t believe the nerve of this guy. You’re gonna rip his legs off.

He shrugs. You stand. Fuck this. You’re gonna go find some pants and get the hell outta here. He doesn’t say anything as you skulk out of the kitchen, making your way down the hall.

Family pictures litter the walls, you can’t help but stare at some of them. They all look so happy, Fink and her robot siblings, Boxman and Venomous posing goofily together. You wonder if he ever treats Boxman the way he treats you. You somehow doubt it. You can’t help but feel a pang of jealousy with each photo you walk past. You never got to have a sibling. You spent plenty of time with your mom, but, you had to admit it was mostly doing things she wanted to do. And all she ever wanted to do was work in the lab or blow stuff up. You wish you could’ve gone to Whimsy-World… And Craft-A-Critter… Oh. This must be their wedding photo. You stare at it, their matching suits, the mutant flower bouquet. They’re beaming at the camera like it’s the best day of
their lives. You feel your eyes sting and steam, quickly looking away as you rub at them. What do you care? It’s not like you’re in love with him or anything…! You’re his, his, lab assistant? Sugar baby?? You don’t even know. You don’t wanna be his anything right now. You just wanna find some pants and go home.

You keep walking until you find a large, grand looking door. You push it open. Bingo. It’s the master bedroom. You’ve never actually seen it before, despite the fact that you’ve been… involved with your boss for almost six months now. It’s clean and luxurious, decorated in dark woods, white sheets, with a red accent wall. Ugh. It’s beautiful. You hate it. You would think it would be all dark and broody considering who slept in it, but it looks cozy and romantic, intimate despite its large size. You could get used to a room like this. Not that you’ll ever be allowed to. You’re not even supposed to be here. But you don’t care. If he couldn’t respect your space, your house, your life choices, then why should you respect his?

You head to the closet, it’s walk in, feeling your way through different items of clothing. It smells delicious in here, like sandalwood and laundry detergent. You can tell which side belongs to Venomous by the color scheme, and, well, the sheer size of it. Boxman doesn’t seem to have much more than a corner rack to himself, the rest of the room filled with luxurious suits, designer shoes, oh, hello, what’s this? The boots you’re inspecting are almost sluttier than yours. You’ve never seen him wear these before. They’re cute. You wonder what size he is. You hold them up to your feet. Definitely too big. But you could stuff the toes… Something else catches your eye. Hanging up, a dark lacy garment. You pull the hanger down. It’s a lace nightgown, short, translucent, trimmed with soft feathers around the hem. This. This can’t be his, could it? You hold it up to your body, examining it in the mirror. It’s big. Who else could it belong to?? You’ve forgotten about the pants now, this opportunity to snoop is too interesting to pass up on. You flick through the hangers, jeez, he’s got plenty of questionable things hanging in here. Is this leather?? Why doesn’t he ever wear these for you?? Your eyes glance at the drawer standing next to the mirror. Do you dare? Of course you do. You slide the first drawer open. Socks. Ties. Nothing out of the ordinary. Next. Boxers, briefs, tank tops. Yawn. Next. Ooh. Hello.

The third drawer seems to be filled with lacy garments. You start filing through them. Leather, latex, mostly in black, with a few pops of color here and there. To the side, you see a sealed storage box. You pry the lid off and-- OH. That. That’s a lot of sex toys, and that’s a bold statement coming from you. You’re not touching those, though you do wonder what the Professor is doing with so many novelty dildos. You’re inspecting the label on the pair of panties your holding when--

“ETTIE.” An all too familiar voice growls behind you.

You jolt with fright. Busted. You spin and raise your hands defensively, clenching the underwear with a sweaty palm, caught red handed.

The Professor looks pissed, if not a little flustered. “Pray tell, Ettie, what are you doing in my closet??”

“I-” You flounder. No. You will not flounder. He’s snooped around your house plenty of times! You hold yourself in a confident stance, head held high. “I was looking for a pair of pants, considering the fact that you seem to have stolen mine, Professor.”

“Your pants,” He hisses, “Are in the guest-room closet.”

Well. That would make sense. “And? I wanted a fresh pair.” You shift your weight, jutting your hip out as you rest your hand on it.
“Is that my--” He glances at your hand, and you feel positively giddy with glee as he begins to blush. Ha! How’s it feel to be the flustered one, idiot?

“Your Coco Del Ray thong? It is, actually~” You hum, swinging them around your finger. “Don’t I have a matching pair of these?”

“G-Get out of my closet!” He snaps at you, and you’re so entertained by his reaction that you’ve almost forgiven him for being a giant fucking douche-bag.

“Aw, but it’s so fun in here, look at all the neat stuff you have!” You grin, flicking the panties at him. He snatches them out of the air.

“Ettie!”

“Don’t Ettie me! You’ve been through my stuff, don’t even try to deny it.”

He scowls, launching into his defense; “Well, that’s because I’m--”

“A creep? A pervert? You know, I’ve noticed a few of my favorite pairs have gone missing, I don’t suppose that was you, was it?”

His mouth opens to respond, but no words come out. Oop. You’ve got him there. He’s glaring at you.

“Anyways. How come you don’t ever dress up all pretty for me, huh?”

He blinks, remaining quiet. You can practically hear him thinking.

He finally murmurs; “I.. I don’t know. I just assumed it wasn’t your sort of thing.”

You raise your eyebrows, pursing your lips. “Your box is interesting.”

“Oh come on, you went through the box?”

“I just took a peek! I don’t know where they’ve been.”

You love the blush that’s crawling up his face as he speaks; “Oh, you don’t? Do you want a diagram?”

You snort. “I don’t. This is just a very interesting discovery, is all.”

He unhooks a pair of sweats from a hanger near-by. “Just take the pants and go. You’re not supposed to be in here. This isn’t just my room.”

You take them, glancing up at him. You don’t think he’s ever looked this vulnerable with you before.

“Oh, I’ll just return to my chambers like the mistress-pauper I am.” You sigh dramatically, folding the pants over your arm. “Do let me know when you need another boost to your ego, good sir --”

“Ettie.” Professor Venomous grabs your wrist. You freeze. You hope you haven’t made him mad again. “I don’t like it when you talk like that.”

You chew your lip. He sounds mad for sure.
He continues. “Look. I know I’ve been kind of hard on you these last few months. I.. I don’t want you to think it’s your fault.”

Your feel your throat grow tight at that. His words caught you off guard. You don’t think he’s ever said something like that to you before. You turn to face him, biting the inside of your lip as you feel it tremble a little. He looks beyond concerned when he sees your expression. “Hey, come on, don’t make that face--” He pulls you in, and you hide it, burying your face into his chest as he strokes your hair. “You know I can’t stand to see you cry…”

You shake your head, you can’t help it, he squeezes you carefully. You feel the purr of his voice against you as he speaks again;

“I shouldn’t have left you out in the Danger Zone. I took my bad day out on you. I’m lucky you didn’t get hurt.” He sighs. You wonder if he really means that.

“And last night. I know I went against your wishes. I was mad about the car. But, I was also worried about you. You know what that Kurtis boy is like. I wanted to make sure he didn’t take it too far with you.” He strokes your hair. You feel your resentment washing away. You can’t hate him.

You’ve been on your own for so long, knowing someone was looking out for you like he was made you feel, like, like you were worthy something.

“You know I’d never let anything bad happen to you, so long as I can help it, Ettie.” He murmurs, and you nod against him, holding him tight.

He pushes you back after a few minutes, dabbing at your tears with a tissue he had in his pocket. You sniffle, fidgeting with the pair of pants you’re holding.

“...T-thanks, Professor.”

He blinks down at you, before giving a nervous smile. “You, uh, you can call me Vince, if you like.”

You blink up. “...Vince?” You honestly forget that most people have like, real names under their super-identities.

“Yeah. You don’t have to, I just, I don’t know…” He seems flustered. “Professor feels so formal.”

You snort. “Is that so?”

“Or you could call me Ven. I like that one. Venny is off the table though.”

“Aw, but Venny is so cute.” You tease, coiling your arms around him again.

He frowns down at you.

You grin. “Ok, ok, I won’t use it.” You definitely weren’t promising, though. "Vince. I’ll have to get used to that.”

“I’m sure. While you’re in the area, do you want to get brunch? I heard a new Greetailian place opened off the 175.”

You nod.
“...I’d like that.”
You're snapped from your focus by the rustling of papers as people begin packing up. Ah. Class must be over. You inspect the room. Yup. Professor Vee is talking to some students up front while other people file out the door.

You glance at the window. You're surprised by how fast they can patch up a wall around here, you can barely see the seam from where you and Kurtis took a chunk out of the cinder-block. You have to admit today's discussion glazed over you. Everyone was just repeating the same basic idea, thinking their spin was a unique take. Blegh. The only person in this class with half a brain is Cheryl, and that's if she bothers to show up. She's not here, today.

You can't help that your attention keeps wondering. Unfolded on your desk is your laptop, screen flickering occasionally with an update on the password cracker you've set to work through your mom's lab security. You spent the weekend pouring over what little detail on your house's architecture you could find. Looking for vents or pipes into the lab below. You had found a cooling vent, but almost took a laser to the eye trying to shimmy in through it. Ugh. You knew from being grounded in middle school that your mom ran an air tight ship. You'd ran 2000 possible combinations over the last hour or so, almost 10,000 total, but nothing was clicking just yet. You're itching with anticipation, you need to know what the hell she's got locked up down there. Nothing was left of the old lab, at least nothing salvageable, or remotely useful to you. Especially not now that you're trying to piece together what happened that afternoon, to remember exactly who you'd been when your life fell apart. You click to your 'mom research' file. It was harder than you thought it would be, figuring her deal out. You were still having a hard time wrapping your head around the whole evil mom thing. She really just seemed like an average scientist to you. Brainy, eccentric, proud of her creation. Proud of you, specifically. She always gushed over your awards, your athletic ability. You missed when she would cook you your favorite meal after you had won a medal or two, serving it up with a smile. Calling you her little protege.

Sigh. You pack up, tugging your skirt back into place as you stand to leave. As you step out into the hallway, you feel a warm hand on your shoulder. You glance up. It's Kurtis.

"Rauchen. We gotta *talk.*" He states, turning you on your heel to face him, leaning his shoulder on the locker next to you.

You sigh. You expected this. You launch into your pre-rehearsed apology; "*Look.* I know our deal got fucked up the other night. I know I still owe you--"

He quirks an eyebrow up at you, before shaking his head.

"*What?* Forget the deal, I don’t care about that--"

"*You don’t??*" That doesn’t sound right.

Kurtis glances around, to make sure nobody is listening in. You’re alone in the hall. He leans in, voice low.

"You can’t tell anyone about what happened, ok?" He's frowning, intent on getting his point across.

"I wasn’t going to. I was about to suggest the same to you, actually." It would be bad for both of your reputations.
He rubs at his neck. “I’ve... I’ve never felt that way in my life. Who was that guy??”

You examine his face, trying to decode his expression. You can’t tell if he’s upset or not, but the way he’s talking to you seems more akin to a smitten school girl than an enraged jock.

Who was that guy indeed. You ponder what to say for a moment, before settling on something that sounds believable. “My... drug dealer.”

He glances around again. “Really?”

“Yeah, really. I don’t know much about him. But his supply is good.” You lie through your teeth. You don’t need this situation getting more complicated than it already is.

“Well...Can you hook me up?” He asks.

You blink at him. Is he joking? “You can’t be serious.”

“What do you mean? Whatever he used on us the other night felt fucking great--”

“You liked it???” You gawk at him. You’re almost at a loss for words. The last thing you expected to hear from Kurtis was him asking for seconds.

“Keep your voice down!” Kurtis hisses at you, leaning in closer. “I wanna know what your deal with that guy is. You obviously have something going on with him.”

“It’s not your business.” You scowl. “And you shouldn’t get involved. I think it’s great the other night was fun for you, or whatever, but it’s really not, it’s. Just, you should keep out of it.”

“I’m not trying to steal your fuckin’ boyfriend, Ettie, I just wanna know if he’ll sell to me!”

“He is not my boyfriend!” You hiss, trying to squirm away from this conversation. Kurtis remains looming over you.

You exhale, glaring up at him as you continue; “Look, Kurtis, I can’t help you. You wanna find him, you need to go looking for him. But trust me when I say it’d be smarter to leave it alone.”

Kurtis grabs your arm, squeezing gently. “Tell him I’m looking for him.”

You notice Professor Vee is leaning on the doorway to his classroom. He’s observing you. You brush Kurtis’ hand off with a sigh. “I’ll put in a good word for you.”

Kurtis smiles, releasing you from this obnoxious conversation. “Thanks, babe.” He emphasizes with his thanks with a slap to your shoulder, before trotting his way down the hall. You stare at him, jaw slack, squinting in confusion. What… what the hell was up with that guy?

“He giving you trouble again?” Professor Vee skulks up behind you, giving you a fright. You’re going to have a heart attack one of these days.

“W-what? No. Don’t act like you weren’t eavesdropping.”

“You know me so well.” He hums, starting to walk down the hall. You follow.

“Well? I don’t think your plan worked. Now he’s just into you.”

“You think so? I think he just wants more ambrosiac.” He leads you into his office, clicking the door locked behind you.
“Well, now he’s snooping. What are you gonna do if you get called out on, oh, *I dunno*, hosting a dubious drug-filled orgy with your two of your students?”

“You’re being dramatic. He’s not that smart, he’s thinking with his jockstrap.” He pats his leg, you settle in on top of him. He coils his hands around your waist, holding you close.

“You’re not gonna mess with him again, right?”

Professor Venomous gives a soft laugh; “Why does it matter?”

“...It doesn’t. I just think it’d be stupid to.” You mumble.

“Mh. He could be useful, in the grand scheme of things.”

“What *is* the grand scheme of things?”

“*Wouldn’t you like to know.*” He chuckles, but you’re not laughing with him.

You sigh. You sit in silence for a moment, chewing your inner lip. You’re stressed. The more you remember, the more you find out about your life, the more confused you get. Eventually, you can’t help but blurt out;

“Do I have a chip in me?”

“Pardon?”

“A microchip.”

“What gives you that idea?”

“Someone gave me this file. It was like, a weird old P.O.I.N.T. document. It could have been a joke, I don’t know. But it mentioned a chip. I just wanted to know.”

“Mh. I’d have to run a scan. I wouldn’t be surprised if you did, considering your mother. I’ve chipped Fink. It’s quite convenient.”

“Well, I know I had a chip in my leg before the accident. I think it burnt up, though. I’m saying like. You don’t think they could’ve put one in after that?”

“It’s possible. For what purpose?” He hums.

You ponder it momentarily. “...I wouldn’t know.”

“I’ll run a scan next time you’re at Voxmore.”

You nod. “You knew my mom, right?”

“Not too well. I assisted her on some biochemical engineering she was doing a couple years back.”

“I just think it’s weird. I can remember middle school pretty well, like, going to school, doing chores, mundane stuff. But all I can remember about my mom is like, her doing mom things, like cooking and yelling at me to clean my room. I hung out in her lab almost every day, why can’t I remember what she was up to?”
“Do you suspect tampering?”

“I do.” You nod again.

“I’ve considered it a possibility.” He shrugs.

“I wanna find out.”

“Hm?” He blinks down idly at you.

“You can help me remember, can’t you? This is right up your alley. Why haven’t you?”

“It’s not as easy as you make it sound. Brain chemistry is very nuanced. I would hate to accidentally lobotomize you.” He brushes a strand of your hair behind your ear.

You frown slightly. This is frustrating. “Can we try?”

He sighs, pondering your question for a moment.

“I’ll see what I can do.” He murmurs. You nod, holding him closer, inhaling the enticing smell of his cologne. You could sit in his arms all day, if he’d let you. The way he made you feel, you could hardly describe it. As he holds you, you think about the little things you appreciate about him. His witty banter in the lab... The way he makes you feel when he takes you out, showers you with gifts and money and... The way he takes care of Fink, how cute it is when she's around him. You always liked him best when he was acting daddy. It felt good, being involved in their weird little family. You'd missed that feeling of belonging somewhere.

You break the silence. “Hey, Professor?”

He chuckles at you. “Back to the formalities?”

“.It feels weird calling you Vince.”

“Fair enough.”

“I...” You don’t know what you wanted to say. Well, you did know. But the word is sitting heavy in your throat, weighed down by uncertainty. Would it be inappropriate? Maybe he already knows.

“Hm?” He hums, brushing his thumb down the nape of your neck. Your face flushes. You regret saying anything.

“I- I think I’m in love with you. No. You swallow your sentiment. You can’t say it. He has a family. A husband. You’re secondary, an intruder on their unit, and you know that. No strings attached. You’re lucky he pays any attention to you at all, even if you'll never be his number one. “I just. Wanted to say thanks. For looking out for me.”

He’s quiet, smiling at you gently. “...Of course, Ettie. You’re my flame. Don’t you forget that.” He cooes, brushing your hair to the side so he can kiss your forehead.

You melt into it, you love it, you can’t get enough of it when he’s treating you like this. You could lay here forever if he'd let you-- RING RING.

Your phone buzzes to life in your pocket. You pick up, disgruntled by the interruption.
“Hello?”

Amelie bleats; “Ettie? Heyy! Are we still on for tonight?”

Shoot. You forgot all about that. She’s been messaging you for a while now. You check the time. You’re not late yet, but you were cutting it close.

“Oh, uh, yeah! Sorry, class ran late, I might be a few minutes behind. My place, right?”

“Yeah! See you soon!”

Click.

You put your phone away, shuffling off of your Professor.

“Leaving so soon?” He murmurs, brushing the creases off his shirt.

You nod. “I gotta go. I’m meeting my friend–”

“I was hoping to take you to dinner.” He shrugs. You bite your cheek. Ughh. You don’t want to refuse, but you also don’t want to flake.

“Would tomorrow be ok…?”

“Mh…” He glances up, before rolling his eyes dramatically. “I suppose.”

You lean in over him, kissing his cheek. “Sorry. I would stay if I could.”

“No, no, it’s fine. I need to get some work done anyways. Tomorrow would be better, anyways.”

“I’ll be at Voxmore in the morning to work on my new build. Do you want me to bring breakfast?”

“Mh, that would be nice. Oh, before you go, I had a favor to ask.” He chimes.

“Yeah?”

“Boxman is coming back to town next week for our anniversary. We’re going to be taking a little vacation. Would you be open to taking Fink for a few days?”

“Oh? Like, babysitting? I wouldn’t mind.”

“You’re a peach, Ettie.”

You look at him. Guilt twinges though you as you think about his husband. “Lord Boxman really doesn’t mind…? Our whole… arrangement…?”

“I don’t believe so. We’ve been open about this sort of thing for a while now. He does his own thing when he’s abroad, I do mine at home. If anything, it’s liberating, not having to worry about that sort of betrayal.”

“What if he did mind…?”

“Then you and I would have to rework the nature of our arrangement.”

“Ah.” You nod. You expected as much. "You're not scared he'll find someone he likes better...?"
Professor Venomous frowns. "I assure you, there isn't anyone on this Earth that he'd 'like better.'" He throws up some air quotes for emphasis.

"What if you did?"

"We'll burn that bridge when we get to it." He shrugs. You sigh. Well. You should've expected as much.

He looks up at you. "Stop worrying, Ettie. Boxman likes having you on the team. You two should hang out one of these days. You'd get along."

You snort. "Oh yeah, that wouldn't be totally awkward. I think I'll pass."

He shrugs. "Suit yourself."

You grab your bag and head towards the door, saying goodbye and making your way home.

You see Amelie parked in front of your house as you pull up through the forested driveway. Fuck. You hope she hasn’t been waiting too long. You park your car in the garage and hurry to let her inside.

“Young! Sorry I’m late. Got held up.” You explain as you lean in to hug her.

“Oh, don’t worry! I stopped by Taco Dell so, like, I only just got here.” She shrugs, holding up a warm bag of hot junk food. “Here, carry the drinks. I got you a Pina Del Frostie.”

She’s so thoughtful. “How much do I owe you?”

“What? It’s my treat.” She waves her hand at you. “Just because you’re a rich bitch now doesn’t mean I can’t spoil you.”

You go a little warm in the face at that. As you enter, your cat yowls at you for attention. You pick him up and hold him like the little baby he is.

“Did Smokey miss me? Did he miss me?” You jiggle him a little, nuzzling your face into his fur, and he pushes you away. You gently bowl him back onto the ground. “He’s just hungry.” You sigh, depositing kibble into his bowl.

Amelie scoffs, pulling her frostie from the drink holder. “Where’s my tummy rub? I haven’t seen you in like, a week. I’m starved.”

You lean over and pinch her belly, before rubbing your palm on her fuzzy sweater. “Drama queen.”

“Oh, please. You’re the drama queen. How many craters did you put on the school lawn last week?”

“Hey! That was totally not my fault. Kurtis started it.”

“Kurtis?”
“Cowjock.”

“Oh. Well, nobody can blame you for that, then.” She laughs, settling on the couch with her burritos. You do the same.

“Ha… Yeah.” You haven’t told Amelie about what happened with Kurtis. You haven’t told her much about the situation with Venomous, either. And you don’t intend to. You don’t want her worrying. You grind up some solar haze and begin rolling it into a joint.

Amelie swallows her food. “...Sooo… How’s the lab crack going?”

“Oh, uhh, it’s going. I should get it running again, actually.” You nod, handing her the rolled haze and shimmying your laptop out of it’s case. “It’s taking forever.”

Amelie sets it on the table. “I wonder what she’s hiding down there. My bet is doomsday device.”

“I don’t think she was too into doomsday. She was more of a statement bombing girl, if her wiki page is correct.”

“Statement bombing?”

“You know. Blowing up people that pissed her off. Intimidation tactics, showmanship.”

“Yeah, that sounds about right.”

“She did burn a town down in the 80’s.”

“What??” Amelie gawks up at you.

“Yeah. It was a new little town forming in the danger zone, between here and Neo-Riot. I don’t know why, but she torched the whole place.” You sip your drink, shrugging.

“YOU’re kidding right? Why would she do something like that--?” Amelie bleats, eyes wide.

“I.. I don’t know. You know I don’t remember that stuff.”

Amelie looks away, demeanor nervous. “She seemed so nice when I was over.”

“Being nice and being evil aren’t mutually exclusive.”

“...Yeah. You’re right.”

You sigh. “She probably did it just to see if she could.”

She’s quiet a moment. “Those poor people.”

You bite your lip. You do feel kind of bad.

“...She won an award for it, too. They commemorated it with a mural.”

“What?? Where??”

“Villain turf. They have a whole wall of them. They're called The Atrocities.”

“No way.”
“I’m serious! I’ve seen it.”

“Jeez.” Amelie slurps her drink again. “You’re not… like, getting into that sort of villainy, right?”

“What..? I.. No, I mean. I’m more of a, a sneaky stealy person than a villain, I would say.”

“But you’re studying under Professor Venomous.”

“He’s not that kind of evil.”

“Uh, were you asleep when he possessed the little bodega boy and used him to tear up half of Lakewood?”

“…” You blink at her. When he did what now? “…Was I?”

Amelie counts on her fingers. “Oh, yeah, I guess you were gone for that.” She shrugs. “It was a fucking mess for like, three weeks. Then they had some weird little bonding moment with their loved ones and everything went back to normal.”

“Are you sure they weren’t both possessed?”

“…I dunno. They might have been. My dad put the house on full lock-down until the situation was sorted out.”

“I’ll have to ask about it.” You nod.

“I know Voxmore did a lot of PR work to kinda cover the incident. Not a lotta info on it online. I think they paid people to take their videos down. I remember the news saying they ticked off the Guild of Malice pretty bad. Disrupted contracted rivalries, picked on lesser villains. Lord Boxman almost divorced him over it.” Amelie sips her drink. Wow. You can't believe you'd never heard about this. “Jeez. Must've been crazy.”

Amelie nods. "Totally."

You twiddle your thumbs, before lighting the joint with your palm. “Well, I’m not that crazy. I’m not even sure if I’m gonna go full-time evil yet. I could go the mercenary track, easy.”

“That could be fun.”

“Yeah…”

You inhale a deep puff of the haze before passing it her way. “Growing up sucks. Everything is hard and confusing and everyone wants you to be good at it even though you have no fucking clue what you’re doing. I’m over it.”

“You’re telling me. My dad’s busting my ass over finding a job right out of school. All the jobs in my field have crazy internship requirements, I’m gonna be stuck living at home for years.” She sighs.

“Why don’t you just move in here?” You shrug at her, biting into your food.

“…Seriously?” Her ears prick up and she blinks at you. “I thought this was a two bedroom.” She knows how you feel about your mother’s bedroom.

“I mean, yeah. But the attic is actually really nice. Well, it used to be, we’d probably need to fix it up
a little. But it’s really big. I could clear my junk outta there, if you wanted.”

“...I’ll talk to my parents about it.” She nods. Leaning in to take the haze from you, she remains close as she inhales it. She exhales through her nose. “You don’t think we’d start hating each other if we lived together?”

“Please. You’re literally the only person in my life I don’t hate like, 80 percent of the time. We’d be fine.”

“You mean that?” She hums, you can smell her strawberry-scented shampoo wafting up from her hair, she’s so close.

“Yeah, I mean it, ya goof.” You sniff her loudly, trying to break the awkward tension you felt rising up around you. “Why do you smell like a smoothie?”

“Oh, do you like it? I got the new Strawbaby Bath Set at the plaza the other day.”

“It’s nice. I should pick it up.”

“You should get the Strawbaby Tropical set. I liked it too, but the Strawbaby Classic was too good to say no to.”

“It suits you.” You hum. You’re done eating, so you sip the rest of your frostie, before hitting the haze again, blowing a few smoke rings into the air as you do.

“Whoah!” Amelie blinks up at you. “How did you do that?”

“Huh? Oh, you just kinda pucker a little and stick your tongue up like this.” You demonstrate.

“Like this?” She takes a hit and purses her lips, trying to imitate your technique.

“No, more like, a wide ‘oh’.” You correct her. She coughs as she attempts again. “It takes practice.”

She clears her throat. “I know a trick. Lemme show you.”

“You just wanna hog the joint.”

“Nuh uh!” She puffs on it again. “Close your eyes.”

You do. You feel her bosom push up against you, your eyes flicker open with surprise when soon after, her lips press against yours. Oh.

Her lips part and yours follow, and she gently exhales, passing the smoke onto you. You promptly choke on it, pulling away from her to sputter and cough, fumbling for your drink.

“Are you ok?” She fumbles with you, before just handing you her drink instead. You slurp it until your throat stops itching.

“F-fine, just--” You’re beet red right now. Way to fumble up a really cute moment-- Oh my Cob. Amelie just kissed you. You touch your lips, glancing at her. She’s looking away, cheeks burning red, just like yours. “Uh, I, I like your trick.” You manage to blurt out. Smooth.

“I-I’m sorry!” She bleats back. “I, I should’ve warned you or, asked before--” Oh no, she’s
You’re warm, hands getting a little toasty with all this nervous energy in the air. “So are you.” You affirm.

You’re still leaning in close, she closes the gap again, and it isn’t long before she’s perched in your lap, leaning over you, tongue shyly twining with yours as you pull her in for more. You can’t believe it took so long for you to realize this was a possibility. You’d always just assumed she felt platonic towards you. You felt guilty whenever you looked at her and thought about touching her like this, like it would gross her out and scare her off, but now, with her embracing you so openly, you feel an ocean of affection washing through you. But, as her hand begins to slide up your shirt, you feel a twinge of paranoia slip through you. You know there could be cameras watching. The thought of anyone seeing this, seeing her without her knowing. You couldn’t put her through that. The fact that you have to worry about that at all is a testament to what a bad decision Amelie was making right now. She deserves better than this. You pull back, pulling her hand out of your shirt gently.

“A-Amz...” You huff. “Don’t take this the wrong way. B-But, we can’t do more. Not right now.”

She looks down at your face, looking concerned. “O-oh? I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to upset you--” She starts, you shake your head.

“No, no, I’m not upset, I liked it, I’m just.” You try to find the words. “I.. I’m in a weird place right now. And, I, just need to get that figured out first.”

She’s quiet. You can’t stand to see her face fall like that. You feel like the worst piece of garbage on the whole planet.

“It’s not you, or anything you did. I. This is gonna sound like, insane. But I think someone’s watching me.” You know someone’s watching you. But you don’t want her to know that you just, kinda, well, let him.

“What??” Amelie glances at the window.

“Not like that. Just. That I’m under surveillance. It’s just a hunch, but, like. You know. I don’t wanna drag you into that.”

Amelie squints at you. “That does sound just a little crazy. If you don’t wanna kiss me, you can just say so.” She seems to be teasing, demeanor rising, but you’re not sure.

“W-we can kiss...! Just, keep it above the belt. If that’s ok?” You stammer. This is embarrassing. You feel like a dork.

“What am I, a pervert? I won’t touch your boobies in front of the government surveillance agent, if you don’t want me to.” She’s grinning at you.
“It’s not funny..!” You can’t help but smile. “I like, really need someone to come inspect the place.”

“I could do an inspection right now.” Amelie waggles her eyebrows, honking her hands in the air at you. You snort. She takes your hands.

“Ettie?”

“...Yeah?”

“I... I don’t want you to feel like we can’t just be normal around each other. I know you’re seeing someone and, like, I don’t wanna cause issues-”

“It’s not an issue.” You assert.

“I, I just don’t wanna make things weird between us. You’re my best friend, and I--”

“Amelie. You’re worrying too much.” You tuck a piece of her hair behind her ear for her. “I liked it. It doesn’t change anything.”

She blushes, looking away. A few moments later, she hums; “Do... do you wanna keep going? ...Above the belt, of course.”

You smile at her. She’s so fucking cute, and earnest, and nice, and she had to be crazy to be interested in kissing someone like you. But you weren’t going to tell her that, not while she's sitting so pretty on your couch and gazing up at you with those big dark eyes of hers.

“Yeah.” You nod, heart thunking heavily with anticipation. “I’d love to.”
Wind it Up

The ticking of the clock hovering over your Professor’s head is more than enough to drive you bonkers. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. It felt like every second was getting slower as you waited for this lecture to end. Professor Venomous could have warned you this class was so... Entry level. You suppose it would be helpful to kids who didn’t grow up in a laboratory, or heck, maybe even yourself a year or two ago. But now, learning the theory of arching through anything other than practical experience felt asinine. You bite your cheek as Professor ‘Vee’ asks the room a question;

“Allright. Class, who can tell me the difference between a mad scientist and an evil scientist?” He hums, scanning the room as the cogs in people’s heads start whirring.

“Is this a trick question?” A young turtle near the front of the room inquires. Professor looks at him with a look you can only describe as stone-cold contempt before breaking into a ‘warm’ smile.

“No. Just an exercise in philosophy. No wrong answers here.”

You wonder where that angelic patience was the other day in the Danger-Zone. Those migraine pills must work magic on him. You raise your hand. Almost immediately, Kurtis chuffs from the seat diagonally behind yours.

“Of course you would know.” He jeers, though you’ve grown immune to his constant chatter in your ear. If you ignore it, he’s quieter. Most of the time. Well. That’s the theory so far, but you might have to rework your hypothesis soon.

“Cheryl.” Professor Vee nods at her.

“Commonly confused, the main difference is motivation. Mad science is usually separated on the notion that the scientist had ‘good’ or ‘neutral’ intention. Evil science can be a subset of mad science, but not always. Usually heroes frown upon mad science either way because of the boundaries it crosses, usually breaking one or more of the three main ethical taboos. That isn’t to say good guys aren’t practicing mad science, they just keep it out of the public ey--”

Professor Vee interrupts her. “The first two sentences would have sufficed. Thank you, Cheryl.” He turns and writes the word intent on the board, drawing a circle around it. You blink at the board. You wonder if he’s even qualified to teach this class. Kurtis gives a little oh of understanding as the circle is drawn. Soon, a second circle of intent is drawn.

“So, who can give me an example of good intent?”

“To help someone!”

“To save somebody.”

Professor jots the suggestions down onto the ‘good’ circle.

“To protect.”

“Mhm, mhm. Now some bad intent.”
“To hurt someone.”

“To trick them.”

“To kill.” You offer.

He surrounds the ‘bad’ circle.

“See, it seems cut and dry laid out like this. But, what happens when the bad guy is tricking someone in order to protect something noble? What about when the hero intends to hurt a villain? Is it bad then?”

“The context matters.” Cheryl quips.

Professor Vee nods. “Exactly. Our actions are inherently neutral. We’re two sides of the same coin. Good, and bad. We all have our individual motivations to pick apart. And the key to a healthy rivalry is to know the intent of your enemy. If you can’t empathize with your victim– ahem, your foil, rather, you will never truly be able to destr– defeat them.”

He takes a sip of his lukewarm coffee. “Mad science, or mad anything, really, tends to ignore that principal in favor of self-gratifying motivation. It isn’t to help or harm, it’s because you can. There are no ‘why not’s, no consideration to the ethical conundrums, and this often leads into work that challenges taboos for both heroes and villains. I’d argue mad science is infinitely more dangerous than most evil competition because you never know which scientist is going to be going mad next.”

“Are you saying mad scientists can’t be arched?” Kurtis inquires.

“Not necessarily. I’m just saying their unpredictability makes them… difficult to arch effectively. It’s usually unbalanced and more often than not they’ll drag the non-mad party down to their level and keep them there. You remember what happened to the Human Bat, don’t you, class?”

The class collectively shudders. That incident was gruesome.

Professor Vee glances at the clock. “Oop. Look at that. Doesn’t time fly when we’re having fun? Make sure to turn in Reading 5, and have an essay intro ready for work-shopping next Tuesday.”

He folds his computer shut, dismissing the class. You’re gathering your things when you notice someone hovering by your desk. You look up. It’s Cheryl.

“Hey!” She smiles at you. “Gum Girl.”

“Uh, my name is Ettie. But yeah.” You nod. “You go by Cheryl, right?” You knew that. But you wanted to play it cool.

“Eh, to most people. You can call me Cher, if you want.”

“How glamorous.” You joke. Did you sound bitchy? You hope she doesn’t think you’re being bitchy.

She leans on your table. “Anyways, cool kid. I saw the dent you put in that beefsteak last week. I’m going somewhere with a few buddies tonight I think you might enjoy…”

You blink up at her. “..Huh? It’s a Thursday.” Nothing exciting was open in Lakewood on a Thursday.
Professor Venomous drops his stapler on the floor. Cher eyes him, leaning in closer.

“Just a girl’s night in. You’ll like it. Here.” She hands you a post-it note. You squint at it over your glasses. A phone number? Oh. She’s walking off and out of the room. That’s cool, then. Later...?

You stuff it in your pocket and stand to leave, the only one left in the room. Professor Vee must’ve-- AGH. You feel a cool breath on your ear;

“Leaving so soon, mon petit diable?” Your Professor cooes. You shudder. Since when did he speak french? “It’s almost like you hate me or something.”

You scoff. “Oh, sorry, I’ll come watch you grade papers like a good little minion.” You mock, rolling your eyes as you spin to face him. He’s leaning in close, you’re stuck between him and your desk. “The door is wide open, Romeo.”

He takes a step back. “I was going to have you grade them at the lab tomorrow, actually.”

“Oh, how exciting.”

“Whatever that Cheryl girl invited you to, tell her you aren’t going to make it.” He hums. You frown at him.

“What? Why? I was gonna--”

He presses a finger to your lips, shushing you. “I was gonna go to Cheryl’s house and we were gonna paint each-other’s nails, and have a sexy pillow fight, and gossip about boys~” He mocks, raising his voice a solid octave as he mimics your intonation and flutters his eyelashes. “Reschedule. I need you on business tonight.”

You struggle for words at that, the pillow fight comes before nail paint-- You can’t believe him. “You’re rude. Could you give me more than a few hours notice on like, anything??” You start, and he cackles.

“Beg your pardon, princess, but this industry moves hard and fast, and if you can’t keep up with it you better go get your good girl panties on and ask P.O.I.N.T. if they need another rookie to come lick their boots for them.” He says, voice gravelly against your ear as he leans in. You can smell him, he smells like the woods, it’s delicious, you could burn him right up-- Ahem.

You sigh at him. “Ok, ok, I get it. Where are we going?”

“The Underground. Wear your dancing shoes.”

“What? I thought you said we were going on a business trip.”

“We are--”

“At the club?”

He hisses at you, patience wearing thin, “Ettie, if you say another word I am going to--” He stops himself and sighs deeply. “I’m not asking, I’m telling. You take that pretty little ass of yours home, doll it up, and be ready for pickup by 8:30 or so help me COB I will--”

You raise your hand to shut him up. “OK! Fuck! I’ll be there if you’re gonna bust my balls over it!” You spit, sparks surging between the two of you, closing the minuscule gap between your heads and
you prepare to butt them. ZZT. You lean back, taking a deep breath.

He does the same, reverting to his fully neutral tone like he hadn’t just been threatening you. “Good. I’ll see you at 8:30, then.” He hums. You roll your eyes with a scoff before making your way home. You shoot Cher a text, letting her know you won’t be making it tonight. This sucks. You wanted to get to know her better. But, what could you do? Your career matters more than frivolous friendships anyways.

At the end of the day, you know the Professor is only doing what’s best for you.

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You turn the boiling water of the shower off, knob squeaking as you do. Hot steam envelops the bathroom as you exit the tub, and you relish in the comfortable heat for as long as it lasts before your skin starts to sizzle and evaporate the last of the water off you. You had needed that. Though you were currently bruiseless, your bones and other insides were definitely aching from the recent barrage of training you had been going through. That, combined with your scuffles with Kurtis and your, frankly, almost-too-rough in the sack Professor, had left your body a wreck. You thank Cob you were raised to be flexible, because the way you’ve been fighting recently was a torn muscle waiting to happen. You wrap yourself in a towel, this one was a little short, barely covering both your chest and your ass...assets. But hey, who cared? You walk out to enter your closet, and are promptly spooked by your mentor, who’s nonchalantly sitting on your bed like he owns the damn place.

“Jeez--!” You clutch your chest.

“Jeez indeed. Are you trying to personally dry up the ocean? I’ve been here 40 minutes.” He gestures at his watch.

You glance at the clock. It’s only 7:30. You weren’t running late. “I was shaving my legs. Why don’t you go outside and knock like a gentleman?”

“I never said I was a gentleman.” He shrugs. “You know, waxing leaves a smoother finish.”

“I don’t wanna hear it from you, scaly. It must be easy keeping your skin fresh when you shed it off twice a year.”

“How did you know about--” He frowns, realizing you were talking out of your ass. “Oh, haha, very funny.”

“Do you keep them when they peel off? The skins? Or, ewww, do you eat them??” You tease from within your closet.

“Stop! That’s none of your business!” He jeers at you.

You come out holding two dresses. “Which one?”

“Left has greater range of motion. Go with that.”

“M’kay.” You hang the rejected one up and start dressing, working your way into your underwear and tights. You had tried to step behind the Professor, but he just spun to continue watching you.
You roll your eyes.

“I’m gonna start sneaking into your house and stare at you inappropriately for an uncomfortable amount of time.”

“I’d love to see you try.” He hums, before licking his teeth. “If you want to see me naked you should just ask, Ettie.”

“Fine. Take it off, lover-boy.”

“What? No. We’re busy right now. Ask later.”

You snort. You expected as much. You tug on your dress before sitting down at your vanity to do your face properly. You didn’t wear a full face often, but when you did, you went whole hog on it. As you blend your Tangerine-Dream foundation out, you hear Professor Venomous connect to your bluetooth sound system and play some music. 80’s alternative fills the room and you internalize your swoon.

“You’re so goth.” You hum as you begin working your eye-shadow on.

“It’s called having good taste.” He cooes back, leaning onto your bed. You glance at his face in the mirror. He’s got a lot of eyeliner on tonight, you’ll have to wear more or he’ll look prettier than you.

“Mh. I can’t argue with that.”

“Oh, that never stopped you from trying.”

You ignore his quip in favor of getting your cat-eye right. The way he’s laying on your bed right now is positively twinkish. He’s on his stomach, legs kicked up in the air, idly scrolling on his phone.

“You have 20 minutes.” He hums.

“I’m almost done.” You affirm, coiling your hair around all eight of your fingers and heating your hands up, sizzling the coils dry and solidifying their shape. You brush them out, and they floof out nicely, taking your look from cute to SUPER-GLAM. Perfect. You saunter up behind the Professor, pulling him back by the hips towards you. You plop a hand on each cheek and give a squeeze, he props himself up and glances back.

“Boxman was right about this thing. It’s a weapon of mass destruction.” You smirk, groping it again.

“You’re going to burn my pants--” He replies, squirming slightly, and you playfully smack a cheek before pulling him in by the hips again.

“You’re kinda cute, bent over like this. You should do it more often.” You hum, pressing your hips up against his ass. He looks away, but you caught the flustered look in his eye before he did.

“We’re going to be late.” He argues.

You let go, stepping back.

He stands, fixing his jacket, and you grin at him. He blinks coolly at you. “Besides, I doubt you’re equipped to handle it.”
You scoff. “I gotta whole drawer of equipment locked and loaded for you, pretty boy--”

He looms over you, pulling you in by your waist and leaning you against the wall. “Oh, do you now? Well, I’ll remember that the next time you’re feeling so… spirited.”

Your cheeks flush and you can’t help but snicker at him, leaning in to peck his lips before tucking your phone into your purse.

“You ready to go?” He murmurs.

You nod your head. “Ready.”

You love the passenger seat of the Professor’s convertible. It always felt luxurious riding this way, though you had opted to keep the top up to preserve both of your hairstyles. You’re not the only one who meticulously crafted their coif today.

Dark rock plays through the speakers, you can feel the seat vibrating beneath you, but you know it’ll be nothing in comparison to the deafening noise of the Underground. You almost wish you had pre-gamed, the dash to the bar was going to be nerve wracking. Hopefully your Professor would stick by your side. You’re not so sure he will.

You admire the Atrocities through your window as you pass them. They flicker, brighter than ever, you catch new details with each monument you revisit. You can’t help but swoon at how they look, it’s almost as if they were made of neon and diamonds.

“...Hey. What do they make these out of?” You ask, turning down the radio slightly.


“Ah. Just curious.” You shrug.

“It won’t be long ‘til we’re shining up there.” He hums. “Me, Boxman...The rest of Voxmore.”

Ouch. You’d thought he had meant we as in you. But hey! You’re part of Voxmore.

“What’s stopping you?”

“It’s a waiting game.” He sighs. “But when that perfect moment strikes…”

“Ah.” You nod. “I see what you mean.”

He opens the car door for you once you arrive, walking you in casually. You wish he’d hold your hand. As you saunter down the stairs together, he signs you in as his guest before leading you into the bass-soaked crowd. Fuck. It’s busier than last time, by a lot, you’re brushing skin with some of the most notorious villainy in Lakewood, fuck, in the whole Neutral Zone.

“I reserved a table.” Professor Venomous says, leaning in by your ear so you can hear him. He takes you by the wrist and guides you, cool fingers tingling against your fiery skin. You’re burning up in here. As he slides into his seat, he gestures for you to sit next to him. “We’re saving the other side.”
You shimmy into the booth, maintaining a polite distance from the Professor. You feel his arm snake around your waist before he abruptly slides you closer, leaning you against his side, throwing an arm around you. Your heart swells and your cheeks go dark as you settle in. You suppose it’s the downside to secret identities, but he’s never been so affectionate with you in public before. You’ve always hated PDA, but man if this isn’t swaying your opinion.

“Professor!~” You hear an annoyingly affluent voice pierce through the thumping music. You look up to see Billiam Milliam sliding into the seats across from you, along with his two buff shining henchmen.

“So glad you came out~ You know I love it when the competition is competent.” Billiam croons, leaning across the table. You feel something brush against your leg, it’s his shiny golden boot, prodding around for your Professor’s foot. You watch Ven push the foot away again gently with his own.

“Evening, Billiam. Ettie, this is Billiam Milliam~”

“We’ve met.” You state.

Professor Venomous blinks at you, before squinting. “You have?”

“Oh, we have, Vince~” Billiam agrees. “Ettie’s quite the wild child.”

Now you’re squinting. Professor Venomous glances at you and then glares at Billiam.

“Anyways. Were you going to dance with us later?” Professor Venomous asks, though you sense a little tension in his voice.

“Oh, you know I’m not a dancer. My boys will take great care of the floor for me tonight, don’t you worry.” Billiam sneers, patting one of his henchmen on the cheek. “Though, if your little birthday candle over there cleans up, maybe we could have her gold plated for me. I’d pay top dollar.”

“Mh. I’ll pass. She’s far more valuable at Voxmore.” Ven pats you on the shoulder. Ugh. You hate when they size you up like that. You’re a henchman, not a piece of meat.

“If you say so~” Billiam cooes. “They’ve banned Cosma from the floor after the incident last year. She’s sending her little interns out. I haven’t laughed so hard since the first time you brought the Boxman to dance with you.”

“May I remind you that Lord Boxman and I took the floor that night.” Venomous replies, foot tapping on the ground. You wonder what the hell they’re talking about. A scantily-clad demon waitress comes up to your booth.

“What can I get for you today, my evilnesses?” She chirps.

“I’ll have a Pot O’ Gold. Smolten, not stirred.” Billaim answers. “And a dash of polish for my boys.”

“I’ll have the Snakebite.” Professor Venomous follows.

The waitress blinks at you.

“Um…” You’re not even old enough to drink in public, why would you know the name of some fancy bougie cocktail to order at something like this, fuck, what are you gonna say?--
“She’ll have a Molotov.” Your Professor states. The waitress nods and zips away.

“Oooh, I do love your new little tag-along.” Billiam hums at the Professor. “You guys match. It’s quaint.”

You can’t figure out if this guy likes you or wants you dead in a ditch. You’re not going to pry though.

“Oh, believe me I do agree.” Professor Venomous nods at Billiam, squeezing you closer. “We’re quite proud of everything she’s achieving at Voxmore.”

That makes your heart flutter even more than it already was. He’s so embarrassing, but, you’d be lying if you didn’t love it when he was complimenting you like this.

Your drinks arrive. Both Billiam and Ven have fancy little martini glasses in their hands. You’re not gonna lie, the smolder of Billiam’s drink looks really appetizing. You glance down at yours, it’s a little shot-glass. The waitress pulls out a lighter and torches it for you, so that the rim of the drink ignites.

“Cheers.” Professor Venomous toasts his drink in the air, you do the same, clinking cups with the two villains at the table. You down your drink with a solid gulp, smoke emanating from your nose as it goes down the hatch. It burns, but you love the sensation.

Ven smiles at you, multicolored lights flashing over him as he does. You could stare at him all night, if he’d let you-

“GOOD EVENING, VILLAINS~” The music is overshadowed by the booming voice of what seems to be The Devil himself. “So glad you could all make it out tonight!”

The audience cheers, and Professor Venomous pushes you up, standing behind you. “Time to get moving.”

“Wh--” He ushers you towards the dance floor, you notice the glistening metal minions Billiam brought with him do the same.

“POWER COUPLES, make your way to the central dance floor and get ready to shake it like your mama baked it--!” The DJ continues. You feel the Professor lace his hand around yours, and you almost swoon on the spot when he does.

He leans in and murmurs at you; “Just remember, Ettie. Your mama really did bake it. You’re gonna knock ‘em dead.”

You squint at him. You hope you’re just confused because that drink had a high proof of dumb bitch juice in it. “What are you talking about?”

You look around the dance floor and see about 15 other villainous duos positioning themselves on the dance floor. Ok. So was it a dance contest? It’s been a hot minute, but you know you can tear it up to most generic pop songs thanks to years of training on your cheer squad. And then years more shaking your ass alone in your room. But nobody needs to know about that.

“Now, remember, fiends and crooks. LAST HEATHEN STANDING WINS OUR GRAND PRIZE. Each villainous organization can enter two representatives. All weapons must be carried in one or two hands, or attached to the body. No floor mounted weaponry. No portal may direct to anywhere other than the dance floor. No room swarming bees, no death chants. At least 75 percent
of the body must remain intact and in the ring to be counted as in the ring. While in the ring, you MUST be dancing or kicking ass, or I will shoot you where you stand!”

An array of lasers descend from the ceiling.

“NOW! Are you guys ready to BRING IT????”

The crowd cheers in a deafening cacophony, you flinch ever-so-slightly as it does.

The ground begins to tremble beneath you. Oh. The dance floor is rising up into a steep platform. You step inwards a bit to avoid being so close to the edge. Oh jeez. Is that lava down there?

Professor Venomous looks unstirred.

“Let’s see who our competitors today are… FROM BILLIAM SONOMA, CHAD AND KLYDE!”

The screens above illuminate with the POW stats for each of the metal minions. They’re both a sturdy -6. Their collective power-score blinks between them.

“Our current reigning champions, FROM PLUTONIUM INC; NUKE D’BOMBA and HALF-LIFE!”

The crowd goes nuts. Their cards flash up. You see a ginormous man and a toned girl standing side by side in matching rave gear, decked out in neon yellow with the nuclear waste symbol decorating their gear. The girl is cute, at least her body is, her shirt is barely more than a bikini made of two nuclear warning symbols. Her face is obscured by a hazmat mask, though you can vaguely see her eyes through the glowing green material. Their collective score sits at a -16.

“FROM COSMATECH; Rachel the Assistant and Doug, the new Intern!” Their power score sits at a -10. The Devil prattles through the rest of the character introductions as you scale up your competition. Hm. There’s a lot of bulk in the crowd. You’re worried about your Professor. You know he can fight, but you’d be lying if you said Kurtis hadn’t seriously tussled him the last time the two of them brawled. You’re on the smaller side of things, but you’d honestly be surprised if half of these girls could even keep up with you on the agility front. You fidget with your bracelets, freshly fueled courtesy of your mentor, awaiting the action that awaits.

“And, last but certainly not least, representing VOXMORE, Professor Venomous himself, and lab tech Ettie!” The crowd cheers for you. Professor Venomous poses confidently. You follow his example, standing up straight and giving your best arrogant smile to the audience. Your collective power score is… -13. You look at your card, holy smokes! When did you hit -4??

“And of course, I’m sure we’re all eager to see our prize for the evening!” The lights begin to flicker, before two spotlights illuminate a case of orbs that rivaled the collection you and the Professor had jacked from the danger zone. “Ten THOUSAND glorbs! You heard me folks! Ten thousand grade-a glorbs. Now, lemme see your best moves out there, cuz we’re about to KICK IT!”

The lights go black. Professor Venomous takes your hand, and suddenly the stage is engulfed in red and white strobe lighting. Fuck if this wasn’t disorienting. The lights flash in tangent with a rising beat, you begin to rock your hips as the tension rises. Professor Venomous tugs you in to dance with him properly, you notice the other villains are coupling off and focusing on their partner for now.

“It’s rude to clash before the bass drops.” He leans in to murmur at you. “Be ready.”

He spins you, he’s leading, and you’re not gonna like, his moves are a little old school for your
liking. They work, you suppose, you’re not off beat, but you can think of better. You keep quiet, the song is building to its climax, you feel the bass trembling beneath your feet, fit to drop at any moment now.

WOOOOOBB. The drop smashes into you with the force of a freight train, and you almost lose your footing as Ven swings you into a spiral, whacking you directly into an incoming minion jumping at you. You instinctively twist to smash his head with your knee, sending him flying across the floor. Cob, they come fast, there’s two more minions charging at you now. You let go of the Professor to defend yourself, blocking their strikes with your forearms and heating up your hand, openly grabbing them by the face and sizzling them before twirling to toss the two of them over the ledge. A siren blares.

“AND THAT’S TWO OVERBOARD, TOSSED LIKE GARBAGE BY THE VOXMORE LAB TECH.”

You two-step your way back to your mentor. The siren blares again, though you don’t see who got tossed. It’s hard to see anything, the way these lights are flashing.

“Nice job.” He affirms, before dodging a punch to the face from one of Billiam’s minions. He pulls a vial out of his jacket, smashing it against Chad, the liquid rusts his face on contact, much to his dismay. Professor Venomous sinks his fist into the rusted metal, punching a whole clear through where a face should be before kicking Chad off the platform. The siren blares.

The drop has settled, and is building up again. You see pairs rejoining to recuperate. You pull the Professor in. He’s resistant to your movement.

“Loosen up, grandpa. This isn’t a sock hop.” You chide at him, before popping and locking, trying to get him to follow your league. You drop into a low stop, Ven clicks his teeth at you.

“I’m 44 Ettie, I’m not trying to hurt myself. You’re worse than Boxman--” You pull him in as he argues, placing his hand on your hip as you start to shimmy.

“Just try to keep up, grandpa.” You grin as the bass begins to swell again. You’re in your element. Gymnastics, cheer, it was all for show. You know how to perform.

The bass drops again. You push off of Professor Venomous and fling yourself into the air, backflipping into the center of the floor. It was a risky move. It was safer at the center, but you had everyone’s attention now. You duck as the fists come flying, oop, someone has a staff, better watch out for them. You see Venomous hurtling through the air involuntarily, you grab him by the ankle and delicately spin him around in your arm before depositing him on the floor, forcing him into a low crouch with you as the staff-wielder attempts to knock your head off again. You kick your enemies ankle, sending them toppling, rolling out of the way with your mentor.

“Catching air, now?” You hum at him as you fight back to back, ducking and weaving in tangent with the music as you’re bombarded by the all-angle assault.

“Hey, that’s why I brought you with me, firecracker.” He hums as you clobber the remaining metal man.

The floor begins to fill with fog from a smoke machine. Ha! A little fog never stopped you from getting where you needed to be. You launch yourself out of the haze, scoring the floor out from above the rising confusion. You can see the heads of the bigger contestants peeking out, so as you hurtle back to earth, you make sure your foot makes contact with one of their heads. CRACK. The siren blares.
“We have a KNOCK OUT!”

The fog is starting to clear again. The song fades, a new one cross-fading in. You pair back up with the Professor, he pulls you in by your waist and grinds his hips against yours. Ooh. He’s getting into the swing of things.

“You’re a natural, Firecracker. Why don’t we turn on the gas?” He cooes at you, and you swear you catch a blue spark of energy emanating from his arms. Oh, those wonderful arms, you wish you could dance in them all night. But alas. The bass is dropping. You step back, and he takes you by the leg, scooping you up into his arms and essentially twirling you like a human baton. You clench your fists, activating your bracelets and sparking up, flames engulfing your hand and emanating from you as you’re slammed into various oncoming foes. You love it, the way the ignite on contact, the way it disorients them, the way they *scream, you can hardly get enough of it*. Professor Venomous sets you down again, and you do a high flip into a low roll before gripping the ankles of your nearest enemy and swinging them off the dance floor. The siren blares.

“More than half our dancers have been eliminated! Keep those feet moving, contestants!”

You watch someone who was doing a lazy shuffle get zapped off the platform. A familiar face comes swinging at you with a set of dual electro-rods.

It’s Rachel! “Hiya, Ettie!” She chimes as she comes at you full force with her rods. She catches you with one, you froth at the mouth as you attempt to resist it, punching her in the face to get her to stop.

“Rachel! Been a minute, huh?” You kick at her. She catches your foot and flips you. You slide between her legs and stand, catching her on your shoulders before dropping your weight forward, body slamming her into the ground. She loses her prongs.

“You’re hard working as ever!” She coughs, yanking at your hair as you roll on the ground with her, fighting for control.

“Oh, you don’t know the half of it, girl.” You slap her in the face with a burning palm before kicking her in the stomach, and off of the ledge. The music settles again, you regroup with your Professor.

You’re engaged as what can only be described as a high-speed tango as you await the next drop. Both heaving for air, you smile and admire each other’s scuffs and bruises.

“Only 8 opponents left, Ettie. Keep your head in the game. We need those glorbs.” He says. You nod.

“You want them, they’re yours.” You affirm. The bass drops. You launch into action, engaging in hand to hand combat with the larger of the Plutonium pair. Unfortunately, he’s bigger than you, and had little difficulty picking you up and tossing you across the dance floor. You’re heading straight for the ledge, you can see Ven is occupied with another combatant, crap! You’re dead! Maybe! Maybe not! You remove one of your bracelets and toast it at full capacity, watching as it begins to swelter and buckle. Come on, come on, the compressed fuel in here should-- BOOM. The bracelet explodes, and the force is enough to propel you back into the swell of battle, even if it did burn out the midriff section of your dress.

“An amazing save from Voxmore!” The Devil announces, and the music picks up in speed. “Only four competitors remain on the floor! And what do you know! It’s Voxmore Vs Plutonium INC.”

Half-life comes dashing at you, hands in tiger stance as she claws at your face and kicks at your ankles. You see the Professor grappling with the larger opponent, clearly struggling. You dodge,
dodge, kick, duck, swing, slide, shimmy, BLAST at your opponent, but she’s almost as fast as you, matching your rhythm with impeccable grace, her feet are practically tapping along to each beat—She clocks you in the face. You go rolling, careful to avoid the ledge, hissing as you attempt to regain focus. You do so just in time to watch Nuke D’Bombah toss your darling professor overboard. NOOO! As he hurtles down, his tail coils up around D’Bombah’s leg, snapping tight with a spark of blue energy and yanking him off the platform with him. Fuck! The siren blares multiple times.

“WE’RE ONE ON ONE, FOLKS.” The DJ announces, and the cascade of villains gazing at the battle bursts into rabid applause. “PLACE YOUR BETS NOW FOLKS, WHO’S IT GONNA BE? LEVEL -4 VOXMORE ROOKIE, ETTIE, OR LEVEL -6 REIGNING CHAMPION, HALF-LIFE??”

The crowd goes feral at the mention of her name. You’re in over your head. But, glancing up at those glorbs, you know what has to be done. The music settles again.

“NOW NOW, DON’T BE SHY. GET IN THERE, LADIES.” The Devil Demands, and you feel a laser shoot up behind you ankles, guiding you towards Half-Life. She’s walking towards you calmly, and you soon realize they expect you to dance together in anticipation for the last drop. Ok. You’ve got this. You snake your hand in around her waist, securing the leading role. She’s taller than you, not that it matters, and as you begin to step in time to the rhythm of the music, she falls into place with you, expertly working her hips and feet to match your movements.

“You sound so certain~” She hums, tightening her grip on your waist and lifting you into a twirl. You kick your leg out, holding a pose as she does. The crowd is eating it up. “I figured you wouldn’t recall me. That’s ok. It doesn’t really matter, anyways. You never win, that’s all I need to know.”

The bass is beginning to swell again. You grit your teeth at her. “Is that so? I hope you’re ready to eat those words, then.”

The bass drops. Her grip on you immediately tightens, and she swings you into the ground, leaving a crater as you impact. You can feel your nose bleeding, you quickly jive out of the way of her next punch, ducking and dodging before launching yourself up, coming back down with a flaming fist. You impact her, creating another crater next to yours, which you opt to fill with smoke. You land a few blows in the dark of your cover before it clears, light emanating from your opponent, who is quite literally glowing from head to toe. She tackles you, and you end up rolling on the floor, tossing each other around like rag dolls and attempting to get the other under control. It isn’t long before you find yourself trapped in a headlock, head threatening to pop like a watermelon as she squeezes ferociously with her thighs. If you pass out, it’s over. You try to wriggle free, to no avail, think, what would Professor Venomous do--THINK--! Ah!

You sink your teeth into her thigh as deep as they will go, until you taste the metallic tinge of blood, simultaneously reaching around and torching your palms against her supple legs. You can smell the burn as she screeches and releases you, and you quickly secure your remaining bracelet in your hand, knocking her out cold with it. THUNK.
The siren goes wild.

“WE HAVE A WINNER!!!!” The Devil cheers, the audience erupting into a torrent of excitement you’ve never seen before. Professor Venomous is hoisted out of the pit by two little cherub-esqu demons and placed at your side, while another demon with a large broom sweeps Half-Life off the platform.

You’re wheezing for air at this point, bruises blossoming on your face and body, but you beam as your arm is raised victoriously over your head.

“Ettie, when we get home I’m gonna show you exactly how proud of you I am for that--!” Ven affirms, hand on your shoulder as he waves at the crowd. “But first, we’re gonna party like the world is ending--!!”

You’re not sure how you both made it home in one piece considering the amount of booze flowing in your bloodstream right now. Not to mention The Underground candies. And the shady bathroom intoxicants, of which you were offered many due to your status as victor. You’re pretty sure you were more booze and drugs than blood at the peak of this evening. The sun is starting to come up now. You’re laying in your bed, sweaty, tangled in the sheets, limbs twining with your lover’s as you both catch your breath. That battle had been nothing compared to what you and the Professor had just done to each other. You’re going to have bruises for weeks. You smile up at him, nuzzling the crook of his neck as he pulls out a cigarette, breath heavy. You grab a water bottle off the nightstand, sipping it with a sizzle before he offers you a smoke of your own. You shake your head.

“I’ve got my own.” You state, pulling a roll of haze out of your dresser drawer.

“Ah.” He hums. “You know that’s bad for your work ethic.”

You snort. “And nicotine rots your lungs.”

“Fair point.” He shrugs.

You shrug back. “We’ve all got our poisons.”

He glances at you, breaking into a soft grin. “That we do... You’re beautiful tonight, Ettie.” He hums, clearly still intoxicated, or at the very least still sentimental about the evening you had just had. You blush. You can’t help but eat it up when he compliments you so sweetly.

“You’re not too bad yourself.” You tease, leaning in closer to blow your smoke at him. “Here. Have some.” You offer.

“Really. I’m too old.” He waves his hand.

“Don’t be stupid. It’s good for joints and stuff--” You press it to his mouth. He takes a puff, coughing slightly.

“It tastes like shit.”

You roll your eyes. “You’re dramatic.”
He takes another puff of your joint, before puffing at his cigarette. “...I suppose it’s an acquired taste.”

“Mh…” You ash it out once you begin to feel a pleasant buzz from it, nuzzling closer to the Professor. “I had fun tonight.”

“I’m glad. You killed it out there.”

“I…” You gulp. I love you. “I couldn’t have done it if it wasn’t for you.”

“Oh?”

“Mhm.” You nod. You can hear his heart beating beneath the cool rise of his chest. “I know it’s sappy. But I’d do it again in a heartbeat.” Because I love you. Why can’t you just muster up the courage to say it?

“I’m flattered.” He hums. "...I’d do the same for you.” He takes a drag of his cigarette. “So long as you’re my flame, not another soul will harm you.” He ashes it, ember sizzling out against the ashtray. You sleepily nod in response, eyes growing heavy as you fight to stay conscious.

“Sweet dreams, Ettie.” You hear him coo as you finally drift off into darkness.

Your dreams couldn’t get much sweeter than this.
As you enter the Voxmore lab for your afternoon shift, you sip your latte, desperate for the inkling of caffeine it had to offer you. You might have to ask Fink for an energy drink later. You carefully tote the drink holder along with you as you wind your way through the halls and over to Venomous’ study. As you approach, you hear an unfamiliar voice ringing out from the office. You lean onto your tip toes so that the click-clack of your heels don’t alert to your presence, then you position yourself outside the door.

“We had an agreement, Vincent.” The voice rings out. It’s Boxman, you’d recognize his intonation anywhere.

“Oh, baby, don’t Vincent me…! I took my dose before going..!” Venomous grovels, hell hath no fury like a lover scorned.

“That’s beside the point…! You didn’t even call to see if it was ok--” Boxman spits.

“I know I didn’t ask, but, I had Ettie there, and--”

Boxman interrupts him. “Ettie is not equipped to deal with y-”

Venomous interjects; “She mopped the floor with the other villains!”

“It’s not the other villains I’m worried about!!” Boxman raises his voice. Professor Venomous holds his tongue.

Boxman sighs. “Look. I’m sorry I’m yelling. But you know why we stopped going to glorb night.”

“I know.”

“And you promised--”

Professor Venomous exasperatedly sighs; “I know. I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.”

There’s a pause between them before Boxman sighs back. “Fine. I gotta get back to work. Are you still getting me from the airport tomorrow?”

Professor Venomous nods. “Yeah. Six thirty?”

“Yeah.”

“Got it.”

“Love you, baby.”

“I love you too, Boxy.”

You hear the tone of a phone disconnecting. Ah. He must’ve been on speaker. You fix your bangs before knocking on the office door, pretending you hadn’t been listening in for like, five minutes.

“Afternoon, Professor.” You hum as he slides the door open. He squints at you momentarily, before sighing.

“Hi, Ettie.” He makes his way to his computer desk, settling down as you hand him his iced mocha.
You perch on the desk next to him.

“What’s the plan for today?” You lean to peak at the screen. You usually work mornings, usually when you’re requested in the evening it means you’re getting up to something... shady. Not that you mind.

“Eager, are we?” He hums.

“Just curious.”

“You know what curiosity did to the cat.”

You roll your eyes. “Yeah, it made him dump over the trash can so that he could lick the tuna can clean this morning. Then he got juice on his paws and tracked it all over my beige carpeting.” You were still pissed about it. Your cat Smokey is sooo grounded.

He blinks at you confusedly. “Uh, no, it killed it-- never mind. The metaphor is wasted on you. Anyways. We’re going out in the field. Intel recovery. Stealth protocol. We're leaving at 7, so we have time for lunch if you’d like.”

“That sounds great, actually. Is Fink coming?”

“To lunch? Yes. To the mission? No.”

“Got it.” You nod, sipping your drink.

“I’ll go pry her off the console if you can find my keys for me.”

You nod. “Sure thing, boss.”

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You can always tell the quality of a house by it’s vents. When you had rolled up the obscenely large estate, you had squinted at the looming building in the dark. Luxurious mansion, or a plywood McMansion impersonator? The vents could always tell you, and boy were these lush. Sure beats the last crummy sewer pipe the Professor had dragged you through. The air in here is crisp.

Ven crackles to life in your ear. “I’ve got the mark tracked.”

You chew your lip. You don’t know what you’re here for. But it’s been made clear securing it is very important. You’re equipped with a mining chip, one that would slurp the information out of a computer faster than you could say hacked.

He continues; “Alright, left at the fork. We’re a floor up from where we need to be. Keep quiet, we have inhabitants below you in 8 feet. Slow crawl.”

You don’t respond, he knows you’re listening. He’s stationed at a remote location, directing you as usual. He says it’s easier to keep an eye on the situation from there. You trust his judgement. You’re coming up on a vent screen, looks like a ceiling. You shuffle forward carefully, praying to Cob nothing creaks or groans. You see light emanating from the slits of the vent, accompanied by the sound of gruff voices. Wait a minute…

You cautiously peak through the slit. You’re above a luscious dining table that stretches across the
room, lined with food that smells delectable as it wafts up through the vent. At one end of the table, you can see a bull-faced man, sitting pretty in his pinstripe suit, dark hair pulled back into a ponytail. Your gut churns. Do you know this guy? Why does he look so… familiar?

You continue scanning the scene. On the other end of the table, you see a larger man… a larger boy. One of your least favorite boys, too. Kurtis Bovinian.

You’re pissed. Professor Venomous could have warned you the mark was someone you knew. This was stupid, and risky, and better be stinkin’ worth it. You resume your observation.

“Aw, come on, pops! If I don’t fund the next party at Kappa Kappa then what good am I as a brother? Huh?”

“For the last time, Kurtis, I’m not funding another one of your idiotic parties until you stop acting like an imbecile and show me results.”

“I’ve been trying, dad!!” Kurtis huffs, balling his fists at his sides. “I- I almost had her at the last party…! An, and I got all B’s last semester!”

“Oh, brilliant, you’re making a C average at a school that you got into because I’m the main stockholder. Can’t wait for you to take over my exceptional business and bring it down to your impeccable level of mediocrity.” The Elder Bovinian stabs his utensils into his grilled turf and huffs at his son.

Venomous hums to life in your ear again. “Jeez. I thought I was bad with the fatherly pep talk. Keep moving, kid.”

You begin to shuffle forward. They begin arguing again.

“Well, maybe my grades would be better if I had more time to study instead of running about doing lab shit for you, DAD.” He bangs his fists on the table for emphasis.

Mr. Bovinian’s face contorts as he spits; “WATCH YOUR MOUTH, BOY.”

Both men rise up from their seats, leaning over the table.

“Don’t you think for a second that I can’t pull the plug on all the work we’ve done to make you succeed, Kurtis!” He snarls, bashing his hand onto the mahogany wood surface of the table.

Kurtis objects. “I never asked for all this extra shit to deal with! I just wanted to go to school, play on the team--”

“Peak in college and never see a dime of my money--”

“I’m a Bovinian-- You sit in your lab all day! I’ll be out there, continuing the legacy you abandoned when mom--”

“DO NOT SPEAK OF YOUR MOTHER. Not now, not ever you little BRAT --”

“She--”

“She would be extremely disappointed to see what a lazy brute her son has become!! You make me sick!”

Kurtis blinks at his father. Ouch. That’s gotta sting.
Mr. Bovinian continues; “She would be sick. I’m sick. You don’t think I see what you get up to when I’m busy? Gallavanting around with, with that vile Rauchen abomination—”

Your ears prickle. That what now?

“Dad—”

“You don’t think I see it when you disappear off to some, shady abandoned lot with her? What is it? A lair? You spent the night there, surely you must have the details—”

Is he talking about…?

“It’s not like that, dad! I got kidnapped, she happened to be there, it’s not a big deal—”

“IT’S A HUGE DEAL, KURTIS. I will not have you fraternizing with the enemy—!! Not as friends, not as rivals—”

“She isn’t even that bad! She’s just, weird, and snobby, and kinda bitchy, but, she’s not like, a monster—”

“Oh, she isn’t? Do I need to remind you? What she did?” He snarls, beating his palms down onto the table again. That poor, poor table.

“DON’T!!”

Kurtis throws a chair across the dining hall, narrowly missing his father. It shatters to splinters on impact with the wall. Mr. Bovinian pulls out his phone and presses the screen, electric sparks springing to life around Kurtis as he bellows at the shock.

His dad glares at him, before sniffing and rubbing at his nose, finger still on the button. “Sit down, Kurtis.”

Kurtis sits, struggling to do so as he seizes and writhes in pain. He’s fuming, glaring daggers at his dad. The electricity stops.

Professor Venomous crackles; “Ettie. Move out. That’s an order.” You wish he would shut up. You need to hear this.

Mr. Bovinian remains on his phone. “Not that bad. Tch. All brawn and no brains, that was my fault. Not that bad. Not that bad.” He rubs his neck, before glancing up at your vent, eyes locking with yours. “Why don’t we get her opinion on the matter?”

Fuck. You begin to scurry out of sight, but it’s too late. A laser blasts the vent out from underneath you, and you crumple down into the dining hall, barraged by rubble and debris. FUCK. You hurry to kick it loose, stumbling to your feet, dead center between the two bulls.

“E-Ettie??” Kurtis blurs, looking at you in confusion as his father breaks into a slow clap. You’ve never heard a good guy do the slow clap before. This can’t be good.

“ETTIE!!” Your headset blares. “ABORT MISSION. GET OUT OF THERE.”

You assume a battle stance, turning towards the older Bovinian. Kurtis shouldn’t be a threat right now. You think.
“Ah. Ms. Rauchen. So wonderful of you to drop in.” Mr. Bovinian hums. “Though, I can’t say I’m too pleased to see you again.”

“Can’t say I remember you, Ugly. If you have beef with me, I’m going to need a reminder.” You spit.

“Ettie. Do not engage.” This headset is pissing you off. You yank it out of your ear and pocket it.

Mr. Bovinian breaks into a cackle. “Oh, I know you’ve forgotten! Trust me, you don’t want to remember, Ms. Rauchen.”

“You think so?” You crack your neck to the side. Gotta stretch out before kicking ass and taking names.

“Oh, not so fast.” Bovinian hums. “Kurtis, be a good boy for Daddy and take out the trash.”

You glance back at Kurtis. He’s groaning, hunched over himself, shaking, tensing. He’s... definitely not ok. You watch as his eyes roll back into his skull, leaving two blank scleras. Is he glowing? Yeah, he’s glowing, a harsh cyan radiating from his form as he snarls in your direction. Oh, fuck, he’s coming in hot, floor thunking ominously beneath his hooves as he charges you. You brace for impact. He slams into you with astronomical force, denting the wall with your silhouette before dragging you up by the neck and holding you still for the next punch. You bite his finger, he barely flinches-- Fuck!! That usually works. You writhe as he comes in with another punch, jaw crunching as it impacts, it hurts, you’re not used to this-- You can usually writhe or shimmy away-- He comes in for another blow;

“ENOUGH--” You snarl as you lose your temper, heat from your palms coursing through your body in a violent wave. You shudder, it feels good, to be burning all over-- Kurtis drops you as the heat begins to singe him. You stumble to your feet and adopt a defensive stance as he swings at you again. You block. Duck, weave, slash, kick. Kurtis stumbles back.

His dad looks furious. “TAKE HER OUT, KURTIS.”

Kurtis snorts, scraping the ground with his foot before lunging at you again. You snatch up a dinner plate and smash it across his head. He socks you in the gut. You almost throw up your lunch from earlier. You kick his jaw, he grabs you by the hair and ragdolls you across the room. You think you should bail.

“Ettie.” Mr Bovinian calls out from the corner. You ignore him. You get ready to leap out of the window behind you. Kurtis isn’t playing, and he’s coming in fast, horns aimed and ready to jab you.

“Ettie.” Mr Bovinian continues. “The sun is shining too bright tonight.”

Great, he’s talking gibberish now. It’s now or never, you need to leap--

Mr. Bovinian chuckles, smirk blossoming on his face. “Don’t move.”

You feel a pain you can barely describe rattle through your body as you flex to jump, muscles hardly even twitching before the agonizing sensation rushes through you. It feels like you’ve been hit by lighting, you scream as it rings out before locking your feet back into place. Kurtis is going to hit you- you need to get out of the way-- you can’t move, can’t control your body. Don’t move. He told you not to move, nothing else mattered--

“Hk--” You glance down. Kurtis’ head is buried against your stomach, mechanical horn embedded in your skin. You fumble to feel behind you. Oh jeez, oh fuck, it’s poking out the other side. It’s
burning inside you, you grip to pull him off, but the agonizing shock runs through you again, far worse than the pain you were feeling from the literal impalement. You freeze. You’re shaking, you don’t understand. W-what had he done to you, how was he hurting you like this-?? You glance up at the ceiling, scanning for weaponry, but you can’t see anything. Your vision is getting kind-of hazy.

“Kurtis, get off.” Mr. Bovinian hums. You choke back a sob as he pulls out from you with a squelch, blood gushing from the gaping hole he had just put in your midriff. Oh jeez-- You’re gonna be sick. You can’t move. You can’t even try anymore. You’re freaking out, lungs swelling and constricting, you feel like you’re going to suffocate in here.

“Ettie, patch yourself up already. You’re ruining my carpet.”

You nod, though it feels like you’re on autopilot, your body operating on its own while you sit tied up in the driver’s seat. Your hands press to your stomach, and you feel a sharp burning sensation as you heat up and cauterize the wound. Fuck. *Fuck, it hurts.* You want to be sick, if it would take this feeling away--

Mr. Bovinian frowns. “Honestly, what were they thinking letting someone like you run around unsupervised? I told them this would happen, they all said I was paranoid. But look at you, you’ve come right back where you belong!” His expression shifts as he speaks, he practically looks excited by the time he saunters across the room and rests a hand on your shoulder.

“Now we can put you away, for good.”

CRASH. The windows beside you shatter as a familiar Shadowy Figure bursts into the room. He’s equipped with his cattle prong, thwacking it into Mr. Bovinian, snatching you out of his grasp.

“Beg your pardon, Ettie--” He hisses before sinking his teeth into your neck. Ouch! What was that for??

“Ettie! Kurtis, capture the intruder!” Mr. Bovinian snarls, launching back into the relatively safe portion of the room. Kurtis begins to rush towards your boss, and you feel that familiar agony pricking up inside you again. *You need to fight.*

Shadowy Figure struggles to grapple with the enraged quarterback, who seems near immune to the cow-prong in this state. You’re not sure if Ven was strong enough to beat him down. *Fuck. You need to help him.*

You stand, knees weak, before swinging at Professor Venomous haphazardly. No-- *NO!* You don’t want to fight him, not today, anyways--- come on--- *Sit down-!!* The electrifying sensation rings out through you again as you resist your orders, you cry out as it does, fuck, can somebody put you out of your misery---!! Professor Venomous dodges as you slash at him weakly, now understanding the purpose of his bite. Thank Cob. You let the poison wash over you, pain and vision fading rapidly as your consciousness melts away.

You wake up to a foreign sensation on your torso. It hurts, it feels like something isn’t right. You open your eyes. You can’t see your surroundings, maybe there aren’t any. Just an expanding void of darkness, with some faint static drifting in front of your eyes. Your stomach wrenches again, you feel a weight on top of you as the agony churns through you rhythmically. It hurts, it’s excruciating--
You glance down. A nude, muscled figure looms over you. Are you floating? You glance up. Two horns gleam at you, condition pristine. You can smell arousal. You feel warm. You want to be touched. You feel scared. Stomach aching again, you look at it. A hand far larger than your own is buried inside of you, wet with your blood as it pulsates within you, feeling your insides. Tearing you apart. You look up. Mr. Bovinian is smiling down at you. He coils his spare hand around your neck, squeezing. You open your mouth to scream. No sound comes out. He leans in, breath hitting your ear;

“Wake up, Ettie.”

You shudder. His fingers press into you harshly, digging in, it’s agonizing. You want to cry, but the tears won’t come. His features shift. He feels cooler. His grip loosens. His fingers stay buried inside you, though they hurt more now. They feel sharp, like they're cutting you up. A smooth tail coils up your thigh.

“Ettie--” His voice rumbles through you and you feel heated, shuddering as his hand twists within you. Razor-sharp fangs line up with your neck and you wince as they prick in, piercing delicate flesh and lapping at the sanguine treat that oozes out of you--

You awaken with a yelp, jerking upright and directly headbutting your boss in the process. He grunts, leaning back and rubbing his head, stepping away to examine you. You glance around, adrenaline coursing through your body. Where are you?? What happened?? It’s the medical wing of Voxmore labs. You’re on the med-cot, under a blanket. You’re with Professor Venomous. You feel your stomach. The texture of your skin is rough in a few places, but it feels like the hole has healed over. You rub at your neck. Still tender, but scabbed as well.

“H-How long was I out--?” You mutter, panic prickling up your neck. You failed the mission.

“About 12 hours.”


“Ettie, it’s ok. We’re home safe now.” He tries to rub your shoulder, you shrink away.

“I’m s-sorry--” You sputter, unable to contain it. He places a palm on your head.

“Hey. You don’t have to be sorry. We weren’t prepared to deal with an attack like that. That was my fault.” He assures.

“N-Nooo--” You’re inconsolable. You feel like a failure. You should’ve listened and kept moving.

“Come on.” He pulls you into a proper hug. You melt into it. You felt so scared, so powerless in your own body. How could you have lost control like that?? “Don’t feel bad.”

“B-But the mission--”

“The mission went fine. While you were causing a ruckus upstairs I got us the intel we needed.” He kisses your forehead. “I’m just upset we put you in harms way.”

You shake your head, pulling back from his hold. You don’t want to be touched right now. You don’t deserve it. “W-what did they do to me?”
“I’m still piecing it together. I think you were right, with your little microchip theory.”

“What?” Your heart sinks. He can’t be serious.

“The chip in your brain. Well, on your skull. Near your brain. The first time I looked at it I could’ve sworn it was just a dead tracker.”

“Are you saying it isn’t?”

“I’ll have to check my intel.” He shrugs.

“What’s the hypothesis?” You need more detail. You hate being left in the dark, you can’t stand him being so nonchalant about it, either.

“I think it might be a supervision chip. One designed to keep you in line now that you’re a free citizen and not a ward of P.O.I.N.T.”

“And..?” Come on. Spit it out.

“And that Mr. Bovinian could have been taking advantage of it. It would make sense, he is their lead experimental bio-engineer.”

You feel sick to your stomach. You can’t believe he could just, just possess you whenever he wanted to-- You spit; “I want it out.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Why not??”

“Because we don’t know if it’s safe! That’s why we’re doing our homework! We need the intel! The blue-prints! For all we know, there’s a kill switch installed. If I tamper? Boom! Bye bye, Ettie!” He gestures erratically to emphasize his point.

“But there must be something--”

“Ettie! I said I’ll figure something out! Stressing about it isn’t going to fix the situation!”

“Then what will??”

“I will.” He hisses. “Just, give me some time. Please.”

You sigh. You hate this. You hate knowing there’s something alien in your head messing with your thoughts. You want it gone.

“...Ok.” You nod. He kisses your forehead again.

“It’s going to be ok, Ettie. We’ll figure this out. I promise.”

You grip him tight. You want to believe him so badly. But this gnawing feeling in your stomach makes it feel like it’s the end of your world.

He sighs. “You’re my flame, Ettie. So long as I’m around, nothing will take that away.”

His words wash though you, and you sniffle slightly as you cling to him, face buried in his sweater. You love him, you love him so much it hurts. You bite your tongue. You wish you could tell him. You never will, though. Telling him how you feel would only be a burden on him. He’d respect you
less for it. Maybe even cut you off for it. You'd rather die than lose him like that.

*He's better off not knowing.*

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