The Powerpuff Girls: Declassified

by xbriannova

Summary


After finding their footing and redeeming themselves for their past mistakes, earning the admiration and friendship of many Townsville citizens, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup continue to fight crime in a calmer City of Townsville. However, something is brewing under the surface of the city - something that is threatening to swallow them whole and plunge them into darkness. Can the Girls face up against a deadly world full of deadly consequences?
Prologue: The Wail of Sirens
THE POWERPUFF GIRLS DECLASSIFIED
'The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently.' -Friedrich Nietzsche

'Before the wicked ones were punished for their sins, before the new Trinity has graced us with their holy light, there was complete, utter darkness. God, who gazed upon the battleground of good and evil, was displeased with man's way of keeping within his sins and follies, and so rose from his throne to wield, once more, his sword of creation.

And God said, 'Let man receive the gift of wisdom, intellect, and virtue.' His song brought forth the first of the Trinity. From the light emerged the first Angel of Justice, whose mind is sharper than cold steel, second to none except the Holy Father.

And God said, 'Let man receive the gift of love, kindness, and companionship.' His song brought forth the second of the Trinity. From the light emerged the second Angel of Justice, whose heart is purer than gold, second to none except the Holy Father.

And God said, 'Let man receive the gift of the will, strength, and energy.' His song brought forth the third of the Trinity. From the light emerged the third Angel of Justice, whose body is tougher than diamond, second to none except the Holy Father.

God looked upon his new Trinity and smiled. Sending them down to the battleground of good and evil, the Angels of Justice took to their work, restoring balance, spreading the good word through their actions.

For seven days, they learned the ways of man. For seven days, they suffered the cruelty of man. For seven days, they fought against the wicked. And finally, for seven days, they delivered justice against the wicked.

Then in the next seven days, the Angels of Justice rested and basked in the adoration and adulation of their worshipers, for in their wisdom, they knew that they had completed but one cycle of many …' - Book of George Extract from The New Trinity Bible, First Edition, 1989.

Prologue: Wail of Sirens

Townsville. The Outskirts. Lombardi Family Estate.

{String corrupted} 1989 {String corrupted}

The sky was overcast, darker than a normal night. A final snowstorm was blanketing everything in whiteness as if winter itself knew it was dying as it had gone into labor to birth spring. Snow fell in greater volumes. The fog hung a thin curtain over everything as if it knew that everyone on site could not afford to be distracted.

General Blackwater gripped the loudhailer in his hand as if he was holding tightly to an M1 Garand in the middle of World War II. He was completely decked out in next-generation SWAT gear, all the better to shield his important life from gunshots and shrapnel. In a way, the place and time he found himself in was just as pivotal a moment as the last days of World War II, back when...
he was in Berlin. For decades, Townsville had suffered, and the past few weeks had been hell for everyone, as the body of the city became overcome with fever as if to kill off the viruses and bacteria and parasites that had been infecting it for far too long.

He was seated on top of his command humvee, behind a machine-gun mounted on top of the roof. Around him were more humvees, off-white with the shield of the USDO - the United States Defence Organization - printed on their doors. There were even a few M60 Pattons, surplus main battle tanks acquired from the US military on the cheap, still fresh from purchase with the army green of the war machines' previous affiliation. Although outdated, they were nothing the criminal mobs in the city could hope to ever match, as even the Foundation - a terrorist organization that had been locked in a secret war with the USDO for decades - had never fielded such firepower before. It might seem like overkill, but with what they were facing - enhanced individuals capable of great feats of strength and speed and strange abilities - General Blackwater believed it was worth the financial and logistical cost.

Accompanying the USDO was the TPD - the Townsville Police Department - represented by dozens of blue police cruisers, SWAT vans, and buses. Squads of USDO SWAT soldiers and TPD SWAT officers were swarming forward, taking positions on the front, getting ready to storm the mansion before them.

They were at the Lombardi Family Estate. Everything they had done - months of hard work, sacrifice and losses sometimes severe - had led them up to this point when they could finally cut off the head of the snake.

"This is the USDO!" General Blackwater bellowed into his loudhailer. "We have you surrounded! Disarm yourselves and surrender peacefully or we will be forced to use overwhelming force!"

Silence. There was not even a single mobster at one of the many windows. Not even a slight movement. There were no gunshots. It was all too anti-climactic, and General Blackwater knew why. Climbing down from the side of his command humvee, the huge bear of a man landed on the snow heavily - he was sixty-something but his age wasn't showing, thanks to a combination of next-generation medicine and good genetics.

B-47, B-48, and B-49 had beaten them to it. He'd known the moment he saw through his binoculars the giant double doors of the mansion. They were flung wide open and left ajar. One of the twin oak giants was even knocked off its hinges. Like the gates into a fortress, if that was the case, then the fortress was likely breached.

"I'm scared for them," a familiar voice said from behind him, with shivering voice, likely from the cold. General Blackwater turned around. It was Professor Utonium, who was still in his lab coat, which wasn't exactly the best thing to wear in winter, even if the winter was nearing its end.

'How far the great Utonium has fallen', General Blackwater could only think. Months ago, he had been Head of Research for the USDO, but ever since accidentally creating B-47, B-48 and B-49, he had voluntarily taken it upon himself to raise the subjects of Project Powerpuff, demoting himself to a Field Researcher and dedicating himself to them. It was clear why the once-powerful man would do such a thing. Being a widower who had lost his only daughter too, Professor Utonium had instantly taken to the three subjects of Project Powerpuff. Was it love? Or simply a path to redemption? General Blackwater could never quite understand the man simply because they were two very different people.

"After all they've been through… After all, they've been put through," Professor Utonium continued, almost mumbling. He didn't look much better himself - and it was obvious why. It wasn't exactly a cakewalk for the polymath either. "They shouldn't have to suffer another second
more. It's all my fault."

"You need to stop treating them like little girls. They're far more than that," General Blackwater declared gruffly. "They can take care of themselves."

"I can still remember a time when they couldn't, and it's not that far from now," Professor Utonium said, his voice shaking just as much from worry and fear, as it was from the cold. "I still remember it like it was yesterday when they couldn't even talk when they were still in diapers. Sometimes I wish they had to grow up like normal little kids."

"Do you want that for yourself, or them?" General Blackwater questioned the scientist as he pulled an assault rifle out of his vehicle. An XM4 Carbine - latest tech that even the US military did not have. In fact, there were many things that the USDO had that the US military could only dream of, and with the breakthroughs they'd been making - thanks largely to Professor Utonium and his research into Chemical X and its predecessors - they were fast approaching territories of technology that used to be science fiction. If their latest Project Powerpuff subjects weren't counted.

"I care nothing for myself," Professor Utonium contended. "Not after what I've done. I want the Girls to be happy - it's all I want. Sometimes, I'd even think that... They might even do better without me."

"Don't be stupid, Upton," the general growled at the professor. The irony that he was telling a leading intellectual that wasn't lost on him, though some would argue that he himself was an intellect in his own right, just that he specialized in the art of war. "If I can see that those three little kids and you need each other, then it shouldn't be a question for you too. The four of you are like a tightly-knit squad. One of you can't function without the other. You're going to have to learn how to let them go, however - eventually. Just not right now."

"That's funny, coming from a control freak like you," the professor retorted. He didn't like how the general was lecturing him. The General Blackwater, who wouldn't hesitate to deploy the Girls over and over again to achieve whatever objectives he had in mind, with little regard for the Girls' well-being. He hated the man for that. "I'm going in there with you. Ready when you are."

"The hell you are! You know how important you are to the Girls and the USDO!" General Blackwater refused.

"You're going to need a doctor, Blackwater. The Girls might need a doctor," Professor Utonium countered. "I've heard about what the Amoeba Boys have accomplished, felt it personally, and we've all fallen for it. They have something up their sleeves, I just know it. I'm afraid for the Girls."

"Fine. You've always had your way, Upton, and so you will this time," General Blackwater said. "You prepared?"

"Always. For my Girls," the professor said. He reached below his lab coat and unholstered a pistol. Once upon a time, it'd been a danger to himself and the Girls. Now, it might just be the thing that could save them. General Blackwater scanned him from head to toe. The professor had a bullet-resistant vest on as well.

"Just keep your head down. The Girls may not go down easy, but one bullet to your brain and they'd definitely go down crying," General Blackwater said. He then turned to his captains - and he had brought in the finest and most veteran of them all, those who had been with the USDO when it was still the Organization and had been on numerous missions going back up a decade or more.
"Let's move into the hot zone! Brick, you and Sierra-Tango-One on me! PTF, give me an Alpha-Two before the rest of us head in. Butch, lead Sierra-Tango-2 and Sierra-Tango-3 and back us up. Boomer, you and Sierra-Tango-Four are on reserve in case the surrounding forces need reinforcement."

---

20 Minutes Earlier…

A tri-colored streak of light raced across the sky of Townsville, screaming towards the outskirts of it, towards a prominent building occupying many acres on the boundary between urban civilization and the wild countrysides. Far behind them, the wail of sirens and the red and blue flashing lights of authority shouted the USDO and police's intentions to catch up. It would be a long time before they do. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup had grown strong over the months, and they were close to breaking the sound barrier by the time they were homing in on their object of revenge. Their light shines ever brighter, the 'X-energy contrails' the result of waste energy expelled as light through the burning of Chemical X in their blood.

They were mad, really mad. Even Bubbles, the sweetest and most forgiving of the three, wore a frown on her face, one that advertised only deadly consequences. The memory of what had happened was still fresh on their minds, and they had too many bad things to remember, whether they'd occurred just hours ago or months ago. It was time to make sure it wouldn't happen again, that they wouldn't have to remember anymore bad events in the foreseeable future.

They didn't wait when they got to the mansion. They plough through the double-doors of the old mansion with their shoulders, their 'sister-sense' allowing such synchronized feats at such critical moments. It was only when they were inside that they stopped… Briefly. They were greeted by a Grand Foyer with two great, curved stairwells leading up to a second floor. The stairwells were filled with what were essentially rows upon rows of firing squads, composed of members of the numerous gangs in Townsville, now all under the leadership of the Lombardi. The Italians, Sicilians, Russians, Chechens, Jewish Mafia, Black Mafia… The diversity of criminals had only served to remind the Girls, Blossom most of all, of their past mistakes.

As if as a show of force, more men showed up behind the banisters of the second-floor corridors overlooking the main hall, cocking their weapons. The familiar trench coats and fedora of the typical American and Italian gangsters were most familiar, with the Yakuza in their smart business suits and the flashy and trendy rugged look of the Chinese Triads accompanying them. Even Blossom would be lying if she were to say that she wasn't intimidated - she had fought dozens before, not hundreds. Bubbles was outright terrified, her forehead already streaking with sweat, her eyes betraying that fear. Only Buttercup remained optimistic, though that word would be lost on her. She flashed a killer smile to match the mob's, ready to do battle with them.

Three men stood waiting for them in the center of the grand foyer, one burly and smoking a cigar, exuding the confidence of a leader, the next slim but looking slimy, and a third who was short but looked like he had far more up his sleeves than he could physically pack. Bossman, the bruiser type, was armed with a Tommy-gun that had been in the Lombardi crime family for forty years, passed down from one crime boss to the next. Slim had an M16, likely bought from a corrupted army officer, and Junior had a pair of Uzis. They looked human, but the three Girls knew exactly what they were underneath.

"If it isn't the Powerpuff Girls," Bossman greeted Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, who glared at him with a kind of look that could kill. "Are you three here to kill us or get your manicure done?" Slim and Junior sniggered at the remark, and it'd pushed the Girls' buttons. Hard. Blossom gritted her teeth while a tear streaked down Bubbles' cheek as she, too, stared daggers at the heads of the
Lombardi family. Buttercup alone remained stoic, her killer smile disappearing.

"We were friends back then, don't you remember?" Bossman continued and turned to his fellow Amoeba Boys. "Right Slim, Junior?" They acknowledged their leader's words mischievously.

"We were never friends," Blossom growled at Bossman as she stomped forward, who only smiled dismissively at her. Blossom, being a little girl, even if enhanced, could only bite harder than she bark, and the Amoeba Boys knew it.

"Funny, 'course I remember us lunching together, not too long ago," Bossman revealed and his flankers giggled, spiting the Girls and they knew it. Blossom clenched her fists harder, so hard that she could feel her nails digging into her palm. "Yeah, you've even slept in my bed. It was awfully comfy, ain't it? You looked cute when you're asleep, by the way."

Blossom felt like she could explode - she had never felt such anger, betrayal, and shame in her entire life before. It was all because of the Amoeba Boys that the city had turned against them, the Powerpuff Girls. Visibly shaking, Blossom could feel tears of rage streaming down her cheeks as she closed her eyes, counting backward from ten to zero, just like how Daddy taught her. And it worked. Sort of. She opened her eyes.

"Oh, we remember alright. It was a mistake," Blossom said as she took another step forward. The room resounded with the metal clacking of guns getting cocked, ready to shoot. "We're taking you in-"

"-Amoeba boys!" Bubbles completed Blossom's sentence for her. She had stepped up next to her. Buttercup too, who was shaking with anticipation.

"Can I kill them? I'd like to kill them," Buttercup said, no longer taking pains to hide her lust for blood and violence.

"No, Buttercup! Haven't you learned anything yet?" Blossom chided her wayward sister. "We can't be like them! Isn't it bad enough the last time!"

"Yeah, Blossom, keep your bitch sister on a leash," Bossman mocked the opposing leader. "You should know how. You've learned from the best. You've learned from me. I sure kept a leash on you." At this, Slim and Junior laughed again, already assailing the Girls before any shots were fired. The Girls were taken aback by the foul language, too. Professor Utonium had taught them better.

"Haha, nice one, boss. 'bitch sister', haha," Junior, less important next to his biggest brother-in-crime, laughed.

"You'll be eating soap for the rest of your time in prison, Amoeba Boys!" Blossom warned.

"We'll give you one more chance, Amoeba Boys!" Bubbles continued after Blossom.

"Drop your weapons or else!" Buttercup threatened, though her warning was less than genuine. She wanted a fight, and if the Amoeba Boys came quietly, there wouldn't be one. Not that she believed they would do so – even a 5-year-old could see that, and she wasn't too far from being one.

"Else what? You're going to fight me in that pretty little dress of yours?" Bossman Taunted again. "What? Isn't Mommy there to wash your little SWAT costume?"

Blossom knew that Bossman would set Buttercup off with that taunt. She immediately took hold of her by the arm when Buttercup launched forward.
"Lemme have him!" Buttercup screamed as she strained against Blossom's grasp. "I'll kill him!"

The Amoeba Boys weren't cowed by Buttercup's threat. Slim especially, since he had personally defeated and drowned Buttercup in seawater before. Blossom leaned closer to Buttercup. "Buttercup, stop," she whispered into her ear. "I think we'll have to fight them, but we do it my way."

"Well, are you three giving up or not?" Blossom said to the Amoeba Boys. Bossman stayed silent.

"Oh fine, you got me, I'm so scared," Bossman said sarcastically, before suddenly lowering his Tommy-gun and pointing it at Blossom. "How 'bout I give you my gun one bullet at a time, kiddo!? I'll decorate your pink dress with some shiny lead!"

"Buttercup, right! Bubbles, left!" Blossom screamed her orders, which were followed promptly by her sisters, who darted up into the air at high speeds, leaving behind a baby blue and light green trail behind them.

Bossman opened fire after that. Slim and Junior followed suit. Blossom knelt down on a knee and did a cross-block with her arms – better her arms than face and chest. A pink X-energy shell appeared before her. The stream of bullets did not let up immediately, and when she was hit by too many, her shell broke, and some had slipped past her arms, Blossom held on even as Bossman fulfilled his promise, and decorated her pink dress with some shiny lead. Bullets rained down from above as well, and Blossom knew that something had to be done about the weather.

The moment the torrent of bullets from the front let up, Blossom charged up her eyes, letting the heat build as her tears turned to steam, and within the space of a second, let off a twin beam of Chemical X enhanced heat beam. Sweeping the beams across the second floor, she'd forced the gangsters above to duck, scramble and run for cover, as she burned the ancient architecture with her rage.

Buttercup bowled into her side of the hall, into the gallery of men arrayed on the right stairwell. She was too fast, and even against a wall of bullets, relatively few had struck her. Dozens shredded her dress as she tackled several men at once. Getting up, she upper-cut a Russian gangster in the elbow when he pointed his pistol at her, shattering it. In a fluid motion, as half a dozen other bad guys were struggling to aim and shoot at her, Buttercup drove her foot into another man's chest, breaking every bone in it with a loud series of sickening crunches, pulverizing heart and lungs. This slowed her momentum, and soon, she could feel the angry sting of multiple assault weapons on her back, though the only thing hurt was her dress and psyche.

Whirling around, her eyes became red, as if in anger made manifest, and a pair of laser beams swept past a dozen gangsters. Half of them fell backward with deep lacerations through stomach or chest cavity, blood staining everything - the others collapsed where they were, with one of them holding his intestines before his eyes.

Bubbles on the left stairwell had circled around her fifty or so opponents instead, who fired into the air at her, but she was too fast that only a tiny fraction of the bullets had hit home. Zipping behind them, she had outmaneuvered the column of gun-toting gangsters and landed at the top of the stairs, most of whom were on lower steps and couldn't even see past their higher friends. Charging into the gangsters, she pushed them down the stairs, causing cascades of gangsters rolling down to the foot.

But not all of them were caught in the human waterfall. A Sicilian mafioso pointed his shotgun at Bubbles, but she pushed the gun out of the way before he could fire, mainly out of fear of the weapon, before punching him out and sending him tumbling down the stairs with his friends.
Another Sicilian pointed a Scorpion submachine gun at her, but he was too close - he could only get a few shots off before she was right up his face, delivering a sucker punch at him and sending him rolling down with the rest of them.

Blossom charged towards the Amoeba Boys immediately after she had set fire to the entire second floor, but their sustained fire had slowed her down as she needed to cover her face. Backtracking, the leaders of the Lombardi crime family retreated towards a door between the hall's grand staircases, replaced by another group of gangsters, this time heavily armed with machine guns of various make meant for suppressing hundreds in a war.

Opening fire, they pushed Blossom back, before another Italian mobster came forward with a rocket-propelled grenade launcher on his shoulder, which Blossom noticed too late - when the rocket grenade was fired at her. All she could do was to throw her arms up in front of her once more, but she felt it in her shoulder.

An explosion resulted. Buttercup and Bubbles turned from where they were to look at their leader sister, but all they could see in her place was smoke. The machine gunners stopped while the gangster with his RPG began sticking a new rocket grenade in its tube. It was a bad mistake on their part. From the smoke, two red, glowing orbs appeared, before two heat rays, their paths made clearly visible by dust and smoke, shot at the gangsters who'd hurt her, tracing a path across several of them, burning them and knocking them out.

Buttercup returned her attention back to battle when it was apparent with a bullet bouncing off her skull that it wasn't over on her side. Flying towards the shooter, she smacked aside his pistol arm, sending the pistol flying across the hall, and gave him a multi-ton punch in the jaw. The sound of bones shattering and teeth scattering on the floor sent shivers of thrill and excitement up Buttercup's spine. Rebuilding her teeth collection, however, would have to come later as she could feel a spray of bullets down her back. Warping elsewhere with her near-sound-barrier speed of flight, she fired a well-placed laser eyebeam at her attacker, straight to his neck. The gangster was beheaded immediately, with his head bouncing down the steps. His body's hand had reached up to his neck, only to find that there nothing above the neck left, squirting blood. The body collapsed after that.

There were still more gangsters on Bubbles' side - she had merely sent half of them tumbling down the stairs like bowling pins in a party game. Flying backward, she surveyed the human terrain, which was when she could feel goosebumps.

Duranium.

One of the bad guys had it. Even as bullet rattled off her while she threw up her arms in self-defense, she searched them with her keen eyes for any sign of Duranium - after getting shot one too many times with it, she had developed some kind of sense for detecting it, as arcane as it sounded. Even her Dad couldn't fully explain it yet. That was when she saw it - something shimmering vaguely in the sniper rifle of one of the thugs as if the chamber of the gun was invisible.

Before she was prepared, the Duranium Thug fired his Girl-Killer shell. Bubbles burst with energy at the same time, throwing up a baby blue bubble of protection around her - a bit of an overkill, but she still remembered how she nearly died from a couple of Duranium bullets, and it wasn't pleasant.

The Duranium shell punched through her light blue Chem-X shield regardless, burying itself in her chest, with blood spraying out. In response, she sucked in a prodigious amount of air, and let loose a deafening scream, breaking any glass windows that were intact, blowing eardrums and knocking the remaining gangsters she was fighting down.
Blossom, in the meantime, emerged out of the smoke after that like a jet airplane, her dress still on fire, charging into her attackers. She'd only held back just enough not to kill them, first knocking men into the cold, hard walls of the cold, hard mansion they were defending, then beating the snot out of the rest, who could only panic and fire wild shots at the indestructible girl at close quarters, doing absolutely nothing but enraging the red-head who was both literally and figuratively on fire. She took the last man standing by the collar and threw him to the ceiling, knocking the wind out of him as he crashed into it chest-first. The fall did the rest and knocked him unconscious - and possibly breaking his back. Blossom could hear a sickening crack, but she cared little because of how much pain they'd caused her - both during and before this battle.

Panting and shaking, Blossom finally landed, before heading back to the center to see her sisters. She patted down the fire that was still burning through her pink dress, realizing in dismay that the top-left quarter of it was completely burnt off, leaving the dress hanging only by a blackened shoulder and the belt. Half the remaining fabric was a sooty black, leaving very little pink left. The rest of her dress was pockmarked with holes; she couldn't just see it, she could feel it as it was colder than before. The undergarment covering her chest survived, albeit singed with spots of black and brown and holes as well. One of her socks was similarly burned up, turning it from a knee-high sock to a calf-length sock. Both of her socks were a mix of white, brown and black. Her red bow was singed, and one of its ears was slightly disfigured, tattered. Queasy and lethargic from having expended some of her X energy, she searched the right staircase for Buttercup to find her approaching a wounded Italian gangster dragging himself away from her, clutching a broken leg that was bent the wrong way in multiple places, the result of Buttercup's ruthless policy of zero compassion for crime. Buttercup took her time, watching with glee how frightened her plaything was.

"No! Please! Don't kill me!" the Italian begged before he met the wall in his futile effort to get away. He pressed himself against it, leaning on it, a look of abject horror in his face. "Mercy!"

Buttercup, however, did not appear to have heard him, coming closer step by step, a victorious, unbridled smirk on her face. She particularly liked the way the once proud and confident mobster was now begging for her to show mercy. She loved how the blood of the gangster's friends was spattered all over her dress, all over her. The warm blood felt good on her skin. She loved the sensation of the bloody teeth in her fist - more souvenir to add to her collection.

"Here, doggy, doggy..." Buttercup taunted the wounded gangster with a vicious smile that'd spread from ear to ear, her voice shivering with ecstasy as she raised a fist, only to feel a hand seizing her by the wrist.

"Buttercup! Stop!" it turned out to be Blossom, who immediately shot a mild heat ray at the hurt gangster to knock him out. "Did you kill all of them?"

"Well..." Buttercup said, unsure if she should tell her sister. They both turned to look at her handiwork. The men on the right stairwell were all motionless except perhaps one, or two. They strewn about the scene randomly, their bodies broken, and it was clear who had twisted them. "Not all of them, I think..."

In the middle of the grand foyer, Buttercup had met her with damage to her dress as well, which was full of holes and scorch marks from the gunshots. There was a rip on her right side where she had sustained the most bullet impacts. Despite this, she didn't look as worn out as Blossom. In fact, she looked energized from all the fighting she had done, from all the manslaughter she had committed.

"It's wrong to kill, Buttercup," Blossom lectured her sister, though the confidence in her voice was
drained. "Dad said so himself."

"Even after what they did to us?" Buttercup countered, folding her arms after stealthily depositing her collected teeth into a pocket. "After what they did to Mom? To Blake and the rest? What about Olivia And Mullens? They'd hurt them badly, and we should do the same! It's fair!"

Blossom was actually tempted by thoughts of revenge, and Buttercup was particularly good at that, drawing the darkness from inside her. For a moment, she stayed silent, fighting this darkness in her, closing her eyes as she struggled with it in her.

"No," Blossom simply said.

"No? Blossom! It was because of them that-" Buttercup was about to add another name to the list when Blossom exploded on her.

"DON'T YOU DARE BRING HER UP!" Blossom screamed like a mad girl when she figured out quickly who Buttercup was going to mention. It was so sudden that even Buttercup was taken aback. Blossom, however, on seeing Buttercup's reaction, realized that she had gone too far.

"I- I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout at you. It's... It's just-" Blossom apologized, but she was unable to finish her sentence before her traumatizing losses caught up with her - especially when it concerned HER. She whimpered in pain as she felt fresh tears on her face.

"Blossom... It's not your fault. You didn't know," Buttercup comforted her sister, gave her a hug - she'd changed for the better recently, ever since she'd returned after running away. Blossom couldn't explain it - no one could, really - but she wasn't about to question it. She'd put it down to Buttercup getting wiser with a change of perspective after living on the streets for a while, and it sure beat the old Buttercup who wouldn't hesitate to strangle her.

Unbeknownst to Blossom, Buttercup was wearing a psychotic smile, but Blossom could not see it while she was embracing her.

"I should've listened to her," Blossom cried, into Buttercup's shoulder. Buttercup patted her on the back before Blossom let go, stifling her cries and sucking it up, locking her tears away. "I- I'm fine... We needed saving back then, and t-there's no one to save in this house. You could have tapped those men and they'd still go down. Like what Bubbles probably-"

Just the mere mention of Bubbles' name has had Blossom remember about her other sister's welfare. She'd been so caught up with her own miseries that she'd shamefully neglected the sweetest of them all.

"Buttercup, where's Bubbles?" Blossom asked while she was still drying her cheeks, noticing that her blue-eyed sister was missing. She clutched her head - she could feel a headache coming on. They were invulnerable to (almost all) physical threats from punches and kicks to even anti-tank shells, yes, but their minds were relatively fragile. Blossom remembered that the professor had warned them just as much, and too much pain from enough physical attacks could be bad for them - and Blossom was discovering that, again. She felt like vomiting and fainting. Buttercup held her up. The RPG was the worst - for an instant, it felt as if she really was blown apart, only to remain whole.

"I'm fine," Blossom said. She was able to swallow the urge to vomit, and she looked around the place, the left stairwell, where she'd ordered her to. It pained her every time she had to do that, knowing that Bubbles had never taken well to crime-fighting.
"Bubbles! Where are you!? We gotta go kick some butts!" Buttercup yelled.

They didn't have to search for long. They'd seen her sitting on the steps of the left stairwell, clutching her chest, her face pale, her other hand holding onto the banister as she leaned on it. There was blood where her hand was.

"Bubbles!" Blossom cried as she flew to her. "It's all my fault! I'm so sorry!"

Bubbles lifted her head with difficulty to regard her lovingly. She smiled at her to reassure her, but the fact that she couldn't even speak made it a moot effort. She was a mess. Her dress was similarly powdered with black and riddled with holes. One of her pigtails had come undone, probably ruined by a stray bullet through the ribbon.

Blood was spreading over the chest of her baby blue dress.

"Bubbles! What did they do!?” Buttercup came up next, appearing concerned despite her earlier revelry in destruction.

"Duranium bullet…” Bubbles uttered. "One of them had it. We- we have to go." She tried standing up, but pain shot up in her chest, where she was shot. Her face scrounged up in pain when she tried to move. The bullet hadn't gone in deep owing to her protective bubble, but it was still the mother of all pain. With few things being capable of penetrating the Girls' flesh, whenever something did, it was almost certain to be excruciating.

"Bubbles - just sit down, Bubbles. You can't go on like this," Blossom gently lowered Bubbles back down to the step she was sitting on. Looking at her, she didn't think that Bubbles could continue deeper into the Lombardi mansion. They had fought hard right at the beginning, but there was still more to be done. Knowing the Amoeba Boys and what they had done, the guns they had brought to bear on them was only the beginning. There were harder foes than a bunch of ordinary criminals in there - Blossom was certain. It would be an uphill battle to clear their name and bring justice to the right people, but it had to be done. The wailing of police sirens catching up to them told them so.

"Blossom, we need Bubbles to keep fighting! It can't just be the two of us! Blossom!?” Buttercup said, but Blossom had sunk into herself and she could not hear.

Doubt began filling Blossom when she realized the condition they were in - the condition Bubbles was in, versus the trials ahead. The entire city was against them - but it wasn't always like that. Blossom couldn't help but to think back to the earlier days, when they were loved by all, when, for a time, they had earned their happy ending after fighting off a terrorist attack in Morbucks Industries Research Laboratory.

Reaching deep into her heart, Blossom thought back to those happier times, perhaps to find her strength there…

A/N: Didn't think Rossowinch would post the cover up so soon, so I decided to release The Powerpuff Girls: Declassified a little earlier. Well, I'd say it's a blessing in disguise because it means you guys get to read it early and I get to enjoy going full speed ahead in terms of writing the story earlier, and I honestly couldn't wait to work on it like how I used to work on Project Powerpuff: Declassified.
Chapter 1: Interregnum

Chapter Summary

Five robbers steal from a pawnshop in a safer Townsville, believing their crime to be perfectly well-executed...

Chapter 1: Interregnum


Deep within the city center, Townsville continued pulsing with activity. Cars roared down the highway and honked on the road whenever there was a jam. The citizens of Townsville strolled at their leisure on the sidewalks that stretched into the distance. Buskers played one genre of music or another, in exchange for a coin or note from one kind stranger or another. Restaurants and bars were wild with laughter and various sorts of entertainment. Trains swooped through tunnels, screaming from station to station, unimpeded.

In any other city, this would have been considered normal. In Townsville, it was a blessing. For the first time in two decades, the people of Townsville could go about their business without the oppressive fear of crime. The song of the city, for the first time in a generation, did not contain explosions and gunshots and terrified screams every other day.

Crime had taken a nosedive ever since the new year, and it was as if the city had, collectively, decided to act on its new year resolution. Official statistics from the police indicated a 60% drop in major crimes, including the activities of organized crime, and 55% in minor offenses in January compared to previous months. But everyone knew who to thank - not that they had a name for them yet. Most refer to them as The Three, though bad memories had diminished the popularity of that name. A new cult which had sprung up in the city had christened them The New Trinity. Some among the numbers of both cultists and regular citizens alike had taken to calling them the Angels of Justice. The USDO was being pressured to give an official name, but most knew to call them Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup, and most citizens by now knew which was which.

The USDO had gotten in on the act, claiming responsibility for some of the Girls' reputation. Their new media wing had been blasting out articles and advertisements to improve public relations, some of which involved the Girls. For a few times in January, they had to attend photo and video shoots.

Further away from the city center, Townsville's downtown area was quieter, but just as safe(r). At Louis Street, for instance, there was almost no activity as it was known to be a commercial street, with rows of convenience stores, grocers, bookshops and a rather successful pawnshop, all of which had closed for the night, as it was the tradition of that locale.

The night was quiet until it wasn't... When a masked man fell from the roof of Joe's Pawnshop and onto a car below, screaming for his life until the crunch of windshield breaking and metal bending took over. An alarm sounded throughout the pawnshop, however, drowning out the noise inside the building.
"Isn't Johnny supposed to deactivate the alarms from the rooftop?" a robber in a ski mask hiding behind a counter said. He had a revolver in his hand, and he was on the lookout for his friend, another thug in a ski mask, hunched over a safe as he was turning the dial.

"Don't matter. I know the code to Joe's safe," the safe-cracking robber said. "Poor schmuck's too trusting of me. We'll be gone in a minute."

"Where the hell's Johnny anyway? Shouldn't he be down here by now with Joe's stash?" another robber at a display asked. He went on to smash the glass, before greedily scooping up jewelry and expensive watches up and depositing them into a camping backpack.

"Man, I don't like this," a fourth robber said as he was packing antiques into a burlap sack on the opposite end of the shop from the jewelry-stashing robber. "What if them Threes are here?"

"Ain't no chance of that," the first robber said. "There's three of them and one big city. We stand a bigger chance of hitting the jackpot on the Townsville lottery than runnin' into them."

"Things still don't feel right, man," the fourth robber said. The first robber, who was the leader, scoffed with annoyance at his doubtful co-conspirator.

"That right? Then why don't you guard the door and make it feel right," the robber leader ordered, before feeling his annoyance double when the alarm was still ringing and the fifth member of his crew was still missing. "And where the fuck is Johnny!?"

That was when the glass doors of Joe's Pawnshop shattered as if spontaneously, and the fourth robber, who was moving to guard the door, was sent flying across the shop and behind the counter, ruining the shelves mounted on the wall and landing next to the safecracking robber there, who had just hit the jackpot when the safe was opened. He didn't wake up after his flight across the pawnshop.

It was dark, but they could see the silhouette of a small being floating, then landing on the floor, and it was no bigger than a very young child. What wasn't very normal was the piercing eyes glowing in the dark, glowing fiercely pink, sending shivers down the spine of all the robbers who had turned to look. Those who hadn't had a gun or weapon in their hands drew them.

"Your friend couldn't make it," the small being said. "I think my sister dropped him too hard." If nothing else, it sounded sincere and nice, given the circumstances. "Put the guns down and I'll go easy on the rest of you."

"It's t-t-t-the-" the jewelry robber couldn't even finish his sentence - the rest of his body, too, was as frozen as his mouth. His double-barrelled hunting shotgun shook in his hands. The robber leader, however, was a little more daring. "T-three!" The stuttering robber finally managed.

"I count only one," the robber leader said, then pointed his revolver at the glowing pink eyes, which were already burning holes into his mind. It took his all to resist the fear the eyes were put in him, but he would be remembering those eyes for the rest of his life. "You know, I doubt you're as good as they say." He cocked his revolver. "The guys on top sure love to spin stories to keep us bottom folks in line. I bet you're not exactly bulletproof."

"There's actually the three of us," Blossom corrected the robber leader, and as soon as she did, a baby blue streak of light entered the shop, followed by a light green equivalent. Two more silhouettes stood before the display windows of the shop. A pair of light blue glowing eyes and light green glowing eyes flanked the pink ones after that.
The light was flicked on - the safe cracking robber had done it, thinking that things would look better in the light. It didn't.

The light had only revealed the owners of the three pairs of eyes in their fullest glory. Blossom stood at the center, her arms akimbo. Her uniform had changed over the past month, incorporating a red skirt over her fatigue pants, topped by her usual red military fatigue top. Her SWAT armor was now issued in black, the same as her sisters. She had stopped using a helmet and a pair of combat goggles a long time ago. Her fiery orange hair flowed down her back, crowned by a red bow, now back in its original position, as opposed to being taped playfully to the back of a helmet.

Bubbles stood on Blossom's left. Owing to the rule that she would always break out in cold sweat whenever there was action, she had opted to get rid of her fatigue top for comfort, coming only with a tank top underneath her SWAT armor. She had even removed the upper arms of her armor for greater comfort. Like Blossom, her helmet and goggles were gone - all the better to air her head… and her well-brushed hair, which hung in pigtails falling on either side of her head.

Buttercup stood on Blossom's right, her arms folded. She had grown fond of her soldier outfit and removed nothing from it except the restrictive helmet. She was the only one of The Three who came with more than just a pistol. Blossom might have disallowed her from bringing her Stoner Light Machinegun along, but on Buttercup's back hung her tried-and-true MP5 submachinegun. Not that the toughest of The Three required it. Smiling maniacally at the robbers, she thought, in fact, that they were slim pickings. Hardly a challenge to warrant the use of a firearm. She didn't want to have to clean it at home.

"Shoot them!" the robber leader screamed, his voice a little high-pitched than normal.

"Bubbles, shotgun! Buttercup, with me!" Blossom ordered before flying towards the robber leader, reaching him in a blink of the eye. Buttercup followed and winded up a punch along the way before delivering it at the safe cracking robber. It sent him hurtling into a shelf of candies and cookies.

Bubbles zipped towards the third robber with the shotgun, but he was quicker with his hands, as terrified as he was. He fired a double shot, which made Bubbles' flinch and blink, but the shots went overhead, with some pellets sliding past her hair, messing them up. Jumping up at him, she sent him to the ceiling with an upper-cut in a panic, before regretting it and catching him as gravity sent him plummeting to the ground. Her heart was racing – old fears had been exhumed and given new life.

Blossom made for the robber leader's revolver. He was able to fire a single round before he could feel the enhanced little girl's small hand wrapping around the barrel. While standing on the counter, she pulled the robber out from his hiding spot and threw him out, sending him tumbling at the center of the shop, minus his revolver, which Blossom had torn from his hands. With her enhanced dexterity, she field-stripped the weapon on the spot within seconds, pulling it apart and dropping the various components all around as she did.

Turning around, she jumped off the counter and calmly walked up to the robber, who was petrified by the whole ordeal and couldn't even so much as sit up – though it was just as well that he didn't dare as it would have warranted a kick from Blossom.

Without a word, she pelted the robber leader's face with the bullet he'd fired into her hand with an annoyed frown, and just as he stared at her in disbelief – realizing that she was bulletproof after all – she knocked him out with a kick to the face.

"I just hate getting shot at," Blossom quipped before examining her hand. There was a hole in her
glove, but she thought it would be good for another firefight or two. She did hate to waste. Turning around, she had to check on her sisters. Buttercup was just about prepared to throw in her share of the casualties - which she did by dragging him over the counter like how a cat would drag a carcass before tossing him down next to the robber leader.

"That was too easy," Buttercup boasted. "Can I kill him though?"

Blossom folded her arms and glared at her wayward sister. Although Buttercup had been obedient over the past month and killed no one (as far as she knew), she would not brook any unnecessary deaths even with the criminals, nor challenges to her policy.

"I was just kidding, Blossom," Buttercup said, and on feeling a facial tic coming on from the blood drought as of late, cracked her best smile to hide it and deceive her sister. It wasn't the kind of smile to win the crowds. Blossom knew her best, and though Buttercup was the best among the three at deception, could detect that the smile was not genuine. "Why so serious?"

Blossom rolled her eyes at Buttercup before turning to Bubbles, who was leaning against the wall. Her hair was a mess, with some strands loose from her right pigtail – and Blossom knew Bubbles very well. Just like her, she had developed some obsession with her hair. She knew that something was off when she didn't put it right post-combat.

The pink-eyed girl came up to her shaken sister. "Are you okay?" she asked, putting a concerned hand on her shoulder. Bubbles looked up at her and smiled, her lips trembling.

"I'm fine," Bubbles said, even though she wasn't. She didn't want to go back to a time over a month ago when she was the team let-down, the 'coward' and the 'useless' one, as Buttercup would put it every so often. Inside, however, she was a mess. Her heart was just about ready to press the eject button, and memories of before kept flashing before her eyes. The first time she was shot – and knocked out – with a shotgun. Getting the lead pellets again at a Lombardi warehouse front. Or even eating a bullet literally when General Blackwater thought her to be a deserter and betrayer of her sisters. She had used a shotgun once, only to end up causing a stampede that injured many at a protest in front of the USDO headquarters.

Just then, a large convoy of police cruisers and SWAT vans drove up to the pawn shop front. The USDO – the United States Defence Organization – had a presence as well, though it was small compared to the Townsville Police Department whom they had partnered with to keep the city safe and relatively free of crime.

SWAT officers and USDO soldiers poured out of their vans and Humvees respectively, as police officers and security officers took up static positions behind their cruisers. It was all unnecessary with crime in the city having dwindled to more than half of what it used to be, but both law enforcement agencies were too stubborn to adjust after so many years of urban warfare and too many veterans among their ranks.

The Girls came forward to greet the men coming in to clean up; a team of SWAT officers and a squad of USDO soldiers, followed by a pair of plainclothes who brought a smile to their faces. Detective Mullens, recently promoted to lieutenant, as well as his daughter and assistant, Officer Olivia, recently made a detective.

"Hello, Girls," the older detective greeted.

"Hello, Mister Mullens," the Girls returned the greeting with toothy smiles, in unison. The old detective was smiling, but it soon became less than genuine when the Girls replied the way they did. He was still unused to the way the Girls seemed to sync their actions and words at times.
"Did you see us beat up the bad guys?" Buttercup asked in anticipation, seeking approval, which was the next best thing.

"We saw the guy outside alright," Detective Mullens said. "Hell of a welcome sign to put up."

"Oh no! Is he okay?" Bubbles gasped after remembering the robber Buttercup 'dropped', or more accurately, tossed from the ceiling.

"He'll be fine. Just a few broken bones, at least," Olivia said. "Okay, maybe more than a few, but he's breathing and stable."

Blossom turned to glare at Buttercup again, and all the green-eyed Angel of Justice could do was to flash a guilty smile back at Blossom. At the same time, it was more of a victory smile – Buttercup did not kill a man, but she got to do a bit of damage at least, even if it was just a drop of blood next to the blood bath she wanted.

"Mister Mullens?" Blossom said.

"Yeah?" the detective replied as he was watching the pawn shop robbers getting cuffs slapped on their wrists by over-prepared and overzealous SWAT cops. There were over ten of them surrounding the half-conscious robbers, with their heavy weapons pointed at them, like wolves.

"When will we get to work together again?" Blossom asked, her words oozing longing. Detective Mullens had been her friend, but they hadn't been seeing much of each other lately. She actually felt lucky to have met him so early in February when she had only seen him thrice in January – twice on raids that turned up little and once when they weren't even out fighting crime. They had actually met over milkshakes in a milk bar just to catch up, which meant that the detective was afraid of losing touch with the Girls, the greatest law enforcement asset Townsville could ever have. "I miss having you around."

"Soon, I hope," Detective Mullens said as he studied Blossom's face. He couldn't believe they were friends, after everything – considering how he had treated her poorly when they first met. Hell, they hadn't exactly worked together for very long either. There were few fellow badges he could consider his blood brothers and sisters, and he'd worked with them for years, in some cases decades, even. And half of them were busy working in their new office six feet under. Blossom was still a new kid around the block – literally – but she and her sisters' impact on Townsville couldn't be underestimated. "Bottom feeders' been running scared, and when rats are afraid, they hide pretty well. Even the big ones. Especially the cradle-burnin' big ones. Makes it hard for me to build my case and take down the big fish."

"Why not just look for them?" Buttercup suggested. "And when we find them, SMASH!"
Buttercup slammed her fist into her palm with a slightly demented smile on her face, barely repressed. It was another thing that the detective found he couldn't get used to. It was no secret that there was something… off with the green one. She was the talk of the Townsville Police Department, and it was little wonder when the crime scenes she left behind in the day tended to be… messy. The fact that that had stopped recently was an even bigger wonder.

"It's not that simple, Buttercup," the detective said, unsure of how to explain police work to the Girls. Despite being incredibly effective as heavy hitters for a trio so small, inexperienced and out-of-place, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were effectively grunts – he figured out that from the way the USDO handled them, the Girls hardly knew about the facts and stories surrounding their battles. It was dangerous, but it'd worked so far. "But this is not forever. There's a reason why they're hiding. They're preparing for something big. I know it. I just hope I- we can beat them to the draw."
And as he said this, he felt a hand slipping into his. He looked down to see that it was Bubbles, who looked like she certainly didn't like the idea of crime starting up big time again. The past month had been heavenly to her, when life had approached as 'normal' as it could be for her, when she could actually live as a normal girl could, and not worry about what could put her in the sick bed next, or who could be hurting her next, or even who she would have to hurt. Well, usually. There was always something there to keep her on her toes, and her fears alive.

Detective Mullens gave her hand a squeeze - and as with many things about the Girls, he couldn't believe how small, soft and gentle Bubbles' hand was, considering that she had the strength to kill him with a single punch as casually as one would stick a knife in a steak at lunch.

"It'll be fine," he comforted the shyest of The Three. "I'm taking the Amoeba Boys down before they can hurt you and your sisters again. That's a promise. I'm close. I can feel it."

That was when another familiar figure stepped through the ruined glass doors of Joe's Pawnshop. A muscle-bound, tall man who looked only vaguely old, wearing the USDO's SWAT gear sans the helmet, with a beret proudly showcasing the shield and eagle of the USDO. General Blackwater. He was followed by a smaller man, but one who had a presence of his own. Captain James 'Boomer' Wilbur, one of the general's best captains in charge of combating crime in the city. His appearance was deceiving - he looked like a gentleman, bespectacled with a round-rimmed pair at that that didn't quite go well with his SWAT gear. His soft appearance and dirty blonde hair gave the appearance of a scholar, not a soldier specializing in explosives.

General Blackwater surveyed the pawnshop, squinting his eyes at the mess, before looking down at Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, scoffing and staring disapprovingly at them. Two guards followed on his flanks, two nameless soldiers in black armed heavily despite the disproportionately minor crime committed on the scene.

"Hello, Mister Blackwater," Blossom greeted one of the most powerful man in the USDO, not that she was aware of the fact.

"The three of you are still walking around like a fashion show," the general growled at Blossom. He was supremely displeased, and he was going to let everyone know about it. The lack of progress in the war against organized crime and terrorism had practically come to a standstill, ironically because of the lack of major crimes committed. The rats had gone into hiding in the basement, and there was no way to catch them after they'd cleaned house all too well.

"What do you mean?" Blossom asked, immediately upset by General Blackwater's vague accusation. "Don't you like my skirt?"

"Skirt!?" the huge man gasped in disbelief when Blossom seemed incredulous. "That's the problem, you-!" He had to hold himself back from swearing at her. Despite the Girls' exposure to the harsher elements of city life, they had developed a dislike for expletives, something that Professor Utonium had no doubt inculcated in them. "You're not supposed to wear a skirt with your uniform! This is the third time I've warned you about this!"

"But it looks nice..." Blossom said stubbornly, but it seemed as if General Blackwater did not hear her. Instead, he decided to move on to Bubbles. Boomer looked on with disbelief, his eyes telling the Girls that he was sympathetic to them.

"And you!" the general scolded the timid one. She jumped at his booming voice as if a cannon had just been fired near her. "Where the hell is your top!? Where the hell are your upper arm guards!?" He was referring to the fact that Bubbles had made it a habit to wear only her standard issue singlet underneath her kevlar gear.
"I- I- get real nervous and hot and sweaty all the time whenever I fight crime…" Bubbles struggled to explain herself as her eyes went down to the floor.

"And do you think I don't!?" General Blackwater barked at Bubbles.

"Yes…" Bubbles mewedled, visibly discomfited by the general's chiding. The general gave her the death stare when she answered wrongly, and she quickly corrected herself to avoid getting more attention from him. "No…" But the general did not care to listen any further. Instead, the general turned to Buttercup, who was just as incredulous as Blossom when he did, her smile at her sisters' plight disappearing quickly.

"Woah! What did I do?" Buttercup questioned the general in disbelief.

"Where's your helmet!?!" he questioned the enhanced little girl, despite her uniform and gear being the least compromised of the three.

"I don't need it! Besides, it was blocking the view!" Buttercup defended herself a little more rigorously than the others.

"You're not Blossom," the general growled curtly. "You don't have the infrared beam excuse." Blossom had eschewed her helmet and goggles because of her occasional use of her heat vision. There was this once early in January when she had used it without removing her goggles. It melted the glass and caused a lot of pain when some of the molten glass got on her skin. The helmet had also melted around the edges because she'd looked too far to the left and right while aiming her eye beam.

Buttercup said nothing more and instead crossed her arms as she glared daggers at Blossom from the corner of her eyes. The comparison between her and Blossom had caused her mood to crash rock bottom. She never liked being compared to her leader sister, especially when it was implied that she was inferior to her. The idea that Blossom was better than her had been hanging around like a specter ever since she mastered how to walk and talk. No, she hated the comparison with a passion, and whenever it was brought up, she couldn't help but feel a little… sororicidal towards Blossom.

"Bubbles, Buttercup. I want you two in helmets from now onwards," General Blackwater ordered before turning around to leave. The lack of Lombardi-linked criminals arrested disgusted him. But before he left the shop, he stopped and turned his head to regard them from the corner of his eyes. "And for crying out loud, stop forgetting your submachineguns! Have some standards, damn it!"

Except Blossom and Bubbles didn't quite forget to bring them - they just hadn't needed them since December, especially when both Blossom and Bubbles had direct substitutes in the form of heat vision and sonic scream. In the general's mind, however, dropping the primary firearms would mean reducing tactical options - something which he would not tolerate.

With that, the general turned and left. Boomer, however, stayed behind. His face, which was incapable of hiding emotions, told everyone on the scene that he was visibly disturbed by the general's treatment of the Girls.

"I'm sorry about that," Captain James Wilbur apologized to the Girls. He bent down to stroke Bubbles in the head. "He gets like that sometimes, but he means well. He wants the city clean as much as any of you. Truth is, he cares about the three of you."

Bubbles had been on the verge of tears, but she was able to calm down a little. It helped that Boomer had been the demolitions expert who'd tried to blast her out of the panic room she was
trapped in back in Morbucks Industries Research Labs. He'd visited them after that, back when
they were still in wheelchairs after the terrorist attack.

"Really?" she squeaked as if the general was still there.

"Yeah. He's just… under a lot of pressure," the captain said. "And no way to release it when the
Lombardi wouldn't come out to play."

"BOOMER! GET OVER HERE, NOW!" like a phantom, the general had reappeared at the
entrance of the pawnshop, bellowing more harshly than a drill sergeant to a bunch of recruits.

"Yikes, gotta go," Captain James got up. "See you guys next time." He turned around and ran out
of the pawnshop, disappearing into the crowd of law enforcers outside with the general.

"Asshole…" Olivia mouthed at the entrance after General Blackwater was gone. She'd never liked
the general. The Girls, previously flushed with victory and glad to have done their part, had fallen
sullen - well, except for Buttercup, who looked like she was just about ready to discover heat
vision on her own and burn down the pawnshop.

"The general's wrong about the three of you. I've never met a more professional little girl in my life
than the three of you," the detective praised the Girls hurriedly. "How about some milkshakes at
Sal's Milk Bar, next Wednesday? My treat." The Girls beamed at him one after another.

After bidding goodbye to Detective Mullens and Olivia, the Girls took off from the entrance of the
pawnshop, first flying to the roof of the building to retrieve their jackets and flight pack before
rising into the air in their usual delta formation with Blossom in the middle. After achieving a
height that had put them above the tallest building of the area, they opened up their flight pack with
a push of the button and began flying towards home.

The flight pack had been the professor's idea. When opened, Wings would spring out from either
end of the flight pack. It helped to stabilize them especially in higher altitudes and loaned them a
degree of aerodynamics. It was also energy-saving, as the Girls would need to use less Chemical X
energy to achieve the same thing. They could even glide for a while without using their flight
ability.

"You really sure about that?" Detective Olivia said to her father back in the pawnshop, jokingly
referring to the implication that she had become second to The Three. Mullens simply smiled
wordlessly at her.
Chapter 2: After Dark

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup return home to a loving family after patrolling Townsville, getting their well-deserved rest for the day.

Chapter 2: After Dark

The City of Townsville. Sky. On the way to The House.

2 FEB 1989 (Thursday). 2033.

The Girls flew through the air, like birds, free and soaring beautifully across the sky. They even had deployable gliders that made flying even easier, though the Girls had likened them more to training wheels. Unlike birds, however, they were faster than any car at their top speed, and they drew a tri-colored line of light behind them in their formation. Having been steadily and progressively training themselves to fly faster and faster, they were now able to fly at half the speed of sound. Their speed meant lots of things. It meant that they no longer needed to be carried around in Lamborghini speed transports, and it was a change that the Girls actually disliked as it meant less time spent with Mister Blake, the commander of their convoy and also one of their closest friends.

Blake, who had been reinstated as an officer of the USDO with the rank of lieutenant after his heroic actions in the terrorist attack of Morbucks Industries Research Labs, combined with his flawless job performance as a convoy commander, had been redeployed elsewhere instead. The Project Powerpuff speed convoy had been repurposed as a speed strike force. No longer in charge of transporting the Project Powerpuff subject, General Blake had machineguns bolted to the top of the Lamborghini speed transports and sending them out on patrols and missions.

The Girls hadn't seen Mister Blake and his crew, who were friends to them too, for a week now, and they had met only a few times in the past month. Instead, all they got was…

"This is Flight Control Five to Bravo-Four-Seven, over," a female voice said on the Girls' radio channel. "Come in, over." Blossom reached for the 'speak' button on her radio.

"Hi, Blossom here," Blossom reported in. Being the leader, she doubled as the team's communicator as well, and to this end, she had also been taught radio language by both Selicia and Miss Keane. Not that she ever used them.

"Bravo-Four-Seven, what is your flight path? Please confirm, over," the flight control woman asked.

"We're flying School-Bus-Two," Blossom said, the code meaning that they were going home. It was the extent of her willingness to use code language.

"School-Bus-Two confirmed. Please adjust your heading ten degrees, left. Stop rotation. Good," the flight control woman instructed before wishing her well artificially then cutting communications: "Have a good night, Bravo-Four-Seven. Over and out,"
The infrastructure replacing the Lamborghini speed transports were more ambitious than just a few sports cars. While the Girls would fly to patrol or respond to calls, they would also be directed by a series of flight control towers placed all around the cities. They were normally found in the highest places, such as on top of a skyscraper, or the tallest apartment building. They were little more than high altitude encampments equipped with communications and surveillance devices, though there were plans to build actual control towers on top of the buildings.

Within less than half an hour, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup had reached home. Lonely though it was, it was faster to fly around the city. Swooping down and putting the end of their rainbow at the doorstep of their home, Blossom opened the door and went in with her sisters.

The professor had been sitting in the living room, with Selicia at his side. They were cuddling, with the professor putting an arm around her shoulders while they were watching the television. TNN was on the tube, and it was no surprise, as it was very often that the news channel would feature the Girls, one way or another. The TNN's viewership had soared over the past month when the Girls were actively fighting crime in Townsville, and viewers were known to treat it as a source of entertainment as much as news. The Girls had gained quite a few fans in their special delivery of justice.

On the professor's television, a special program was on, showing the Angels of Justice in action over the past month. Though they were thus far restricted mostly to suppressing small-time crime by the retreat of organized crime, the TNN's new side program had blown it up to bigger proportions with aptly-placed words, thrilling speculations and well-chosen factoids taken from both dubious and reputable sources alike. Thomas and Selicia were just happy to see the Girls on television and portrayed in a positive light at that.

The professor turned around just in time to see the Girls coming in, and Selicia was able to avoid letting the Girls see her running her lips up his neck.

"Hey Girls, how's crime-fighting today?" he greeted them as they were coming up to the couch.

"It was great," Blossom said as she was removing her flight pack and leaning it against the couch, before letting herself float so she could look over the couch to see herself on TV. "We did good today."

"Way too easy," Buttercup boasted, then jumped and plopped herself down beside Mommy. She forcefully gave her a hug. Selicia returned it, though she could feel a bruise coming up in her ribcage.

"Gentle, Buttercup," she groaned. Meanwhile, Bubbles went around the couch and sat on the professor's lap - the man was thankful that she didn't have her full gear on, or she would be too heavy for comfort on his lap.

"Mister Blackwater was being mean," Bubbles said, still a little sad, but she brightened up quickly. "But Mister Mullens offered to take us out for milkshakes. Can we go, Dad?" It had the professor worried, the way Bubbles' mood tended to swing from left to right like a pendulum. Life as a (very) special law enforcement officer wasn't exactly the right one for her, no matter how long she had been filling those shoes. The sweetest of the three would have been happiest in a world where she was normal, but it would have to be some unreachable parallel world.

"Of course you can, honey," the professor gave his permission, gladly. In reality, the Girls didn't really need his consent, considering that they were operating out there without his supervision, but the fact that they look to him for it made him happy. They loved and respected him, truly, and he loved them in return.
"Yay!" the Girls cheered in unison.

"You know, Girls, I may not have milkshakes, but how about some orange pudding?" the professor offered. The Girls beamed at him when he mentioned supper. "It's got chocolate syrup on it. We worked really hard together on it. Right, Selicia?" Thomas and Selicia pecked each other on the lips when he mentioned it.

Over the past month, the professor and the SWAT soldier had gotten really close, and it helped that the stress of having to raise children who were practically fighting a war against criminals had largely been lifted over a month ago. With nothing really threatening both the Girls and the parents (designated handlers, by USDO terms), they were able to live like a relatively normal family, and it hardly mattered when the Girls had flown off a few hours a day to patrol the skies of Townsville and get scrambled for the odd operation or so (that usually ended up anti-climactic). Selicia's abusive tendencies were kept to the minimum and the professor hadn't broken down since forever. To the Girls, who were only just over two months old, it was like a lifetime ago that things had gotten intolerably rough.

And so after supper, the Girls went for their bath, then for bedtime, but not before story time with Selicia, who kissed the Girls - Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup - goodnight. While Selicia had always favored Buttercup as the USDO-assigned mom of The Three, the tension between her and the other two had largely dissipated. There were simply no sparks over the past month to set things off between her and them.

"What happens after the princess lives happily ever after, Mommy?" Bubbles asked Selicia when she was done giving them their kisses.

"She… lives happily ever after?" Selicia said, trying to mask how unsure she was. It helped that she had just switched the table lamp off. "Just like the three of you. In fact, I'm willing to bet you three are going to be very happy tomorrow. You know why?"

"Because I get to beat up more criminals tomorrow?" Buttercup guessed. Her glowing green eyes shone in the dark, like spirit orbs of Asian myth in the night.

"We don't know that. Try again," Selicia said.

"Elodie Morbucks!" Blossom took a smarter guess. Selicia didn't like that she had taken away the right answer from Buttercup, but she was willing to let it slide. The darkness hid her change in expression well enough. Blossom's expression, as seen from her glowing pink eyes, however, was as clear as day. Pure anticipation, ignorance. Innocence. Selicia hated that about her - Blossom assuming the mantle of leadership was nothing short of a disaster waiting to happen - and it already did before. In her opinion, Buttercup would have been a perfect choice, as her innocence was half-dead right from the start.

"We're going to Princess' masquerade ball tomorrow!" Bubbles added. She could feel the excitement coursing through her body. It showed: her baby blue eyes shone brighter. "I can't wait!"

"Me neither!" Blossom added. "It'd be fun to wear a mask!"

"Boring! I'd rather spend the night flying around Townsville…" Buttercup said with a sigh. She wanted to comment further about the 'beating up criminals' part, but she yawned instead. It was bedtime, and little girls need their sleep.

"Okay, Girls, now go to sleep so tomorrow would come," Selicia suggested slyly, and the Girls
went right to closing their eyes. Bubbles giggled one last time when she imagined how she'd look in
the dress and mask Princess had selected for her, not that she knew what they were, but she'd like
to imagine.

The professor had been listening by the door. It had been his turn the previous day to put the Girls
to bed, and he was already missing it. He smiled when Selicia did such a good job. There was a
time when he thought that she was totally unfit to mother the Girls, but that time was past.

As the Girls tried to sleep, Selicia hummed a lullaby to help them along. The professor walked
away to give her a moment, and prepare for his with his assigned wife.

---

**The City of Townsville. Business District. Morbucks Industries Research Labs?**

**25 DEC 1988 (Sunday)? 2157?**

Bubbles had never been in so much pain in her life before. She had been holding up the sky for
what felt like an eternity, except the sky was the ceiling, the ceiling over the panic room that all
her friends were in. She could smell her own blood raining down on her friends. She had been
sweating and crying blood when exhaustion had given way to something worse, beyond agony.
Her wounds wept blood.

She held up the sky, and looked down at her friends, illuminated by the baby blue light emanating
from her body as she flew against the dislodged ceiling threatening to crush them all.

And she saw her friends, except they were skeletons, some huddled together, some alone, some in
pieces, all of them glaring up at her with their osteo-grin. She could easily tell who was who.
Elodie 'Princess' Morbucks still had her cancer wig with its messy buns, dusty from age (how long
had she been down here?), and beside her was her father, still in his business suit. The skeleton of
the Catholic priest was still kneeling in prayer - how that was possible, she didn't know, and she
didn't dare and care to know.

But there was something out of place. She saw herself among the bone pile - she could tell because
the skeleton was wearing her favorite baby blue party dress. And there was something worse. Her
sisters were there too, as skeletons. She could tell from the matching dresses. In fact, when she
stared hard enough, she saw another skeleton with a lab coat and a black smoking pipe still in its
bony hand and yet another in a USDO SWAT uniform and gear. Dad and Mom - how?

Bubbles screamed and cried even more - if that was possible. She thrashed against her impossible
load. She closed her eyes in an attempt to will it all away, except she had gotten what she wished in
the most twisted way possible, for when she next opened her eyes, she found herself in a tight little
box, face down. She was still holding up the ceiling, but it was crushing her too. Terror beyond
terror seized her heart - she couldn't even scream even if she wanted to. The ceiling was closing in
on her, and so were the four walls close to her.

For a moment, she could feel herself flattened.

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House?**

**3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 0511?**

Bubbles jerked awake, her eyes opening wide. There was still darkness all around her, and for a
moment, she thought that she was still in her ever-shrinking box. Sitting up quite suddenly, she
checked herself to see if she had been flattened, if she was covered in blood, and she had to will her eyes to give out light like a pair of torchlights to do it.

Nothing.

But she spotted something about her sisters that were off. Casting her eye-lanterns on Blossom, she had caught her just in time to see her turning to face her.

And she was a skeleton, though her flowing, fiery orange hair was still intact. There was still pink light emanating from her eye sockets. The Blossom skeleton grinned at her.

The walls, floor and ceiling groaned. She could feel dust dropping from the ceiling. Looking around her, she could see the walls closing in on her.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 0511.

Bubbles jerked awake, though she didn't scream. She could feel tears both warm and cold on her cheeks and cried even more when her dreams were still fresh in her mind. The exhaustion and the pain felt too real, and it reminded her of how close she came to failing and letting everyone die.

Afraid to wake her sisters up, she whimpered and sobbed silently even as Buttercup snored and Blossom turned in her sleep. She felt alone, and so she floated above her bed and flew silently to the door, opening it. Outside in the corridor, she landed on her feet and padded towards her Daddy's room. Opening the doorknob as she sniffled and wiped her tears away, she found it surprising that the door was unlocked, and proceeded to enter.

She ran towards the queen-sized bed, still sobbing silently as hard. She pulled at Professor Utonium's blanket, and when that failed to wake him up, she floated higher and pulled desperately at his arm, shaking him awake.

"Dad…" Bubbles mewled. "Please wake up, I'm scared!"

"Ooof…" the professor groaned as he turned to the source of whatever had disturbed his sleep. He struggled to open his eyes - having only fallen asleep just past midnight, it was harder than usual to attain his wakefulness. "Wha- Who-"

The first thing he saw was Bubbles' glowing blue eyes, which shone brightly in the dark. The professor gasped at the sight, having been caught off-guard by the unexpected sight - that brief moment of nothingness in his head as he was still trying to get his mind going had made the glowing eyes terrifying, but he was able to collect himself quickly enough.

It helped that he could hear Bubbles' pained whimpering, which kicked his paternal instincts in the butt pretty good.

"Oh honey, what's wrong?" the professor asked sweetly as he reached out for his sweetest daughter, switching on the table lamp with the other. He sat up and Bubbles floated up to him for a hug. He took her into his arms without hesitation.

"I was back there, Dad… In that dark hole…" Bubbles cried. "And- and- everyone…" The professor gave her a squeeze.

"It was just a nightmare, Bubbles," he comforted the little girl. It wasn't the first time this had
happened. She had been having nightmares almost every night since last Christmas, after she was forced to take on a burden too great for her little frame by Mojo Jojo, holding up a broken ceiling and rubble weighing in excess of over six tonnes when the sapient Chimpanzee had dropped it on her. The professor couldn't even imagine the pain she had felt - by the time Agent Blake's team and her sisters had dug her out, she had bled to within an inch of her life, nearly drained of Chemical X. "Everything is fine now. You're safe."

He'd said this despite knowing that there was something out there. He did not know for certain, but what he knew from the USDO council meetings he attended had convinced him that it wasn't over. All of the major players on the other side of the law were still at large. They might have gone into hiding, but it simply meant that the boogieman was going to jump out some night - it was only a matter of when.

"Go back to sleep, Bubbles," he said.

"Can I sleep next to you, Dad?" she asked. "Please?"

"Hop on, then," the professor squeezed himself closer to Selicia to make space for Bubbles at the edge of his bed. He patted the newly vacated space gently and yawned. Bubbles clambered into bed and let herself down beside him gladly, squeezing into him, enjoying the warmth from his body. He might not have her ability to lift heavy vehicles, fly and break every single window in a skyscraper with a scream, but when Bubbles slept beside him, she knew that she was safe, and loved. The professor covered her with his blanket and wrapped an arm around her. When she was all secured, he reached for the table lamp and clicked it off…

Only to hear Bubbles whimper in utter fear. He clicked it on again.

"Thanks, Dad," she said gratefully. "I'm sorry I'm not as brave as Buttercup… or Blossom."

"You were really brave that night, Bubbles. You've saved many lives and made many friends that day," he said. But Bubbles wasn't convinced. She knew the difference between her and her sisters, and it was like night and day. They were never the ones to break out in cold sweat or hesitate when it came time to help the weak and punish the wicked. They certainly weren't the ones whose heart would race like it was trying to jump ship from her chest or have breathing problems when things get hot. Every time she went out there, it was as if she had died once again.

If only that could change…
Chapter Summary

Professor Utonium lays out the science behind the Girls in his report to his USDO superiors, 11 weeks after their creation.

B-47, B-48, and B-49 W11 Report

DOC: 2 FEB 1989 (Thursday)

Created by: Professor Utonium

Title: W11 Capabilities Summary

Introduction: It has been 11 weeks since the creation of the Girls. They have grown rapidly, attaining enhancements to their abilities beyond any comprehension and scale of imagination thus far. In the beginning, we sought to create the perfect soldier - preferably a trained and combat-ready adult infused with one of the many Chemicals for higher strength, resilience, speed and other performance factors beyond baseline comparisons. What we have done in reality has gone beyond that. We have not come up with a slightly better drug to combat the usual strain of flu. We have essentially found the cure for cancer when it comes to law enforcement.

I just wish it didn't have to be my Girls who have to take on the burden of cleaning up the streets of Townsville, and potentially the entire United States if our last meeting remains relevant. And that is for good reason too. I have very good reasons to believe that they have reached a plateau and the summit of their abilities. More on this in the rest of the report.

Conventional: Under Miss Keane's guidance, the Girls have been learning very quickly the nuances of speaking, reading and writing, not to mention mathematics and even the sciences. While it will be years away (not as much for Bubbles, unfortunately) before they will attain an adults' level of understanding despite their intelligence, this is already a feat in itself considering the fact that the average human being will need about 13 years of sustained education in present-day society.

What is really disturbing, however, is the rate at which they have been doing it. Miss Keane has been keeping close tabs on their learning process, and she has noted that they have been slowing down, sometimes even forgetting what they have learned. I will need to investigate this further.

Psychology: Blossom and Bubbles remain just as vulnerable mentally as any other kid. In their current situation, I have to write that this is really bad, no matter how much I wish for them to stay as normal little girls, at least on the inside. Blossom had shown signs of cracking under the burden of leadership, and though things are better now, it is not because she has learned to cope. Things have just quietened down, but I am afraid of what will happen should things start up again as they did in the earlier weeks. Alice reported that she might be suffering a degree of anxiety disorder, but also that Blossom is the most resistant of the three when it comes to psychological trauma. I am proud of her - but it is still too much, what we are asking of her.
Bubbles remains traumatized. She is haunted by nightmares almost daily, and she had told me numerous times that she was always terrified whenever she was out there. Psychiatrist Alice believes she is suffering from several major mental debilitations, including clinical depression, PTSD and several types of phobia.

Buttercup appears to be perfectly adjusted to her duties as a law enforcement officer. However, the reason is far below ideal. According to Psychiatrist Alice, she is suffering from severe psychopathy, and this has already been expressed multiple times in the past, most severely last Christmas, at the Battle at Morbucks Industries Research Labs, resulting in over 30 Foundation dead. I may not be a soldier, but I see a lot of opportunities lost with that kind of casualty on the enemy side. That's over 30 less Foundation agents we could interrogate and reform.

I would like to request again that the Girls, as a group, be taken off duty unless there's an emergency we cannot handle, to give them time to rest and recuperate.

**Combat Proficiency:** As mentioned in my introduction, the Girls have only grown in power since their accidental creation, and this power can be linked directly to the Chemical X in their body, found in their blood and cells. Based on this metric, it can be argued that Buttercup has grown the most powerful, with 1,915 ppm of Chemical X in her cells, followed by Blossom at 1,849 ppm and Bubbles at 1,794 ppm. All figures are based on the most current measurements.

However, Chemical X blood concentration alone does not account for their performance in a hotspot. It is just an indicator of how much energy they could expend before becoming drained and nullified as a threat. Much depends on how they expend that energy – and the general rule is that the more impressive an ability they used, the more energy it uses up. A multi-ton punch, for example, could likely be executed hundreds of times a day before one of the Girls tire out. Heat vision, on the other hand, would likely drain Blossom completely after, say, 20 times. It is therefore recommended that the Girls arm themselves with weapons as they do not require Chemical X – guns and grenades, for example, no matter how much I detest those things.

With that being said, in terms of physical combat, Blossom was once best in it but Buttercup seems to have become the most proficient of the three, thanks in large part due to her misplaced enthusiasm for it. She responds best to Selicia Goodwin's training in both hand-to-hand combat as well as firearms. Blossom has not been left far behind however if my observations of their sparring is any indication. I count a 6:4 victory ratio between the two of them. Bubbles, on the other hand, does not take well to physical combat at all, but for good reason. In fact, I am surprised that Blossom does not have similar issues. Despite this, Bubbles' raw physical performance in all areas should make up for her lack of skill – and we shouldn't compare between the three.

Things are different, however, when it comes to some of their more fantastical of abilities. At this, Blossom and Bubbles seem to be most adept, with the former consistently leading the three. Blossom had discovered her ability to fly and fire infrared beams from her eyes - the former of which had to be taught to the other two, with Buttercup taking the longest to learn, while the latter seemed lost on both Bubbles and Buttercup.

Bubbles, however, had developed her voice to become what is essentially a sonic weapon. However, it works differently from the USDO's experimental sonic weapons. While her 'sonic scream', as I have taken to call it, could do the usual things as a sonic weapon does, such as causing hearing loss, vision distortion and injury of related sensory organs and even less sensitive soft tissue, her scream results in a sonic boom and further damaging effects as well. My past analysis of her sonic scream indicated that manifestations of Chemical X in the air she expels during a sonic scream can and will create a sonic boom and a pushing force, with her loudest scream capable of hurting even enhanced individuals.
Buttercup remains unspecialized and unremarkable in terms of special abilities (in technical terms and in the basis of comparison – I must emphasize that she is remarkable in her own ways). She relies mainly on conventional tactics and unarmed combat augmented by flight and her enhanced physical performance.

This brings me to a discovery I have made regarding their combat abilities. The last of their abilities was discovered more than a month ago - Bubbles' sonic scream had been the latest development, and it was dated all the way back to 25 DEC 1988 - the battle at Morbucks Industries Research Labs. They appeared to have plateaued in terms of development, with only marginal improvements in terms of Chemical X capacity and conventional techniques, made possible by relatively mundane training regimes.

There are several possibilities as to why. The most obvious explanation is that they have perhaps reached the pinnacle of their combat potential - this could be all we are ever going to get from them. However, this is merely speculation based on observation. Another possibility is that they are merely unmotivated by the relatively peaceful climate over the past month to discover new abilities. This alternative explanation is more likely in my view. Thinking back, the Girls had discovered many of their abilities whenever they were under threat or a lot of pressure. Blossom had discovered how to emit infrared beams when she was angered by Bubbles' near-death, and Bubbles had discovered her sonic scream while fighting for survival against Mojo Jojo. It is a stretch, but while Blossom had discovered flight spontaneously it seems, Bubbles and Buttercup had to learn how to fly quickly to gain an edge in their law enforcement duties.

**Statistics:** Below are some hard information pertinent to our understanding of the Girls' combat proficiencies

**Average maximum flight speed:** 331.55 miles/hour (group measurement)

Note: The Girls have so far been able to fly up to half the speed of sound. However, the faster they travel, the less efficient they are at converting the energy in their Chemical X to kinetic energy (and other forms of energy still unknown to our sciences). Waste energy consisted mostly of light energy and secondarily sound energy. Based on this fact, it is advisable not to push the Girls too hard and allow them to fly at slower speeds as long as there are no emergencies. They will quickly run out of Chemical X energy if they were to fly at top speed constantly. A cruising speed of about 200 miles/hour is ideal, less if they are just patrolling.

Their ability to fly at high speeds is what has allowed us to get rid of our convoy system and allow the Girls to roam freely. I think it's better for them, psychologically speaking. But it is to the USDO's advantage too, as their deployment time is not limited to the geography and condition of the streets, terrain, and traffic.

Their flight speed has been on the increase since Blossom first learned to fly. It has just about seen an increase of about 50% up to the current speed I measured over the month. Based on my calculations, the theoretical limits of their flight speed should be about 900 miles/hour, just over the speed of sound, which would make them veritable human jet fighters, though sustaining such a speed will likely be exhausting to them even with training and increased Chemical X concentration in their blood. Past that point, any attempt to accelerate any further will result in rapidly diminishing returns.

**Average maximum running speed:** 198.12 miles/hour (group measurement)

Note: It goes without saying that they are better off flying when it comes to speed. However, running takes less Chemical X energy. Running comes more naturally to them as well, and should
be generally preferred over flying whenever they are in an enclosed space.

The same energy conversation principle applies whenever they run. Higher speeds mean less efficiency in energy conversion, resulting in the usual X-energy contrail and sound. However, running appears to be less efficient not just in terms of energy conversion but also due to biomechanical limitations. The human anatomy is simply not built for speed, unlike that of four-legged creatures or flight-capable birds. However, the human anatomy is famous for its stamina, and this appears to have been translated in the Girls as they will be able to run for long periods of time as long as they aren't sprinting. Jogging is a better word for it, and as long as they maintain a sustainable speed, they should be able to run for a long stretch of time at one go.

They are not marathon runners, however - it would be years before they could run for hours at a stretch. Therein lies another disadvantage of running. I have tested the Girls' endurance. Buttercup currently holds the record for longest time spent running, at 42 minutes and 50 seconds at 50 miles/hour on an industrial treadmill - this is incredible for a little girl, especially at such speeds, but on the scale of trained marathon runners, poor in terms of stamina. I believe the limitation does not just exist in their stamina, but also in their psychology. They possess the minds of little girls, after all - even as it is, what they have achieved is nothing short of extraordinary. Take any normal 5-year-old kid out, and they will more likely have a meltdown within a few minutes of jogging than try to run for 40 minutes. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup cannot and should not be pushed any harder.

**Maximum lift weight (without flight):** 3.7 tonnes/3 min 40 sec (Buttercup), 3.3 tonnes / 3 min 30 sec (Blossom), 3.1 tonnes / 2min 10 sec (Bubbles)

The Girls' carry capacity has been steadily increasing over the month. This further validates my theory that the Girls' Chemical X abilities can be further honed from their baseline. Individually, they will each be able to carry a car. Together, they will likely be able to carry off most military vehicles short of a tank if they want. This, however, is just the beginning.

**Maximum lift weight (with flight):** 8.1 tonnes / 3 min 50 sec (Buttercup), 7.7 tonnes / 3 min 38 sec (Blossom), 7.2 tonnes / 2 min 5 sec (Bubbles)

After the mess at Morbucks Industries Research Labs, I have sought to find the truth behind Bubbles' ability to carry more than twice her previous record, which was about 3 tonnes for just over a minute. Under controlled experimental conditions, I discovered in the Townsville Stadium that flying adds to their lift capacity. My conclusion is that flying introduces an alternate source of force under the Girls' control, resulting in a two-pronged approach to carrying massive weights.

This, I believe, was what allowed Bubbles to handle the rubble Mojo Jojo had rained down on her, allowing her and her new friends to avoid getting crushed.

The experiment I conducted was 3 weeks ago, and Bubbles' maximum lift weight with flight as a factor measured up to 7.1 tonnes, sustained for a few minutes. The Rubble at Morbucks' lab was 6.8 tonnes in weight.

There is one more thing to note. Bubbles is noticeably under-performing in this aspect of her capabilities. My medical data and observation suggest that her mental trauma has something to do with it. Both psychiatrist Alice and I will be following up on this.

**Average maximum force (punch):** 30.1 tonnes (Buttercup), 27.5 tonnes (Blossom), 24.8 tonnes (Bubbles)

I believe this single line of data alone should illustrate the Girls' development in terms of their
abilities. Even at the beginning, they were capable of dishing out something like 20 tonnes of force with a punch. However, much of the increase since that time were effected before January and February, over December with Selicia's help.

The statistics quoted are only the surface, however. Taking into account pressure and the target should give a fuller picture, but in summary: even Bubbles, the weakest of the three, is capable of hitting harder than a truck and poking holes in steel with her fingers, and since their lower limbs are stronger, they kick a lot harder, too.

Addendum:

The Girls have many other abilities at their disposal. I have merely touched on the main ones that they have so often used or displayed. Below are other abilities that are passive, frequently used subtly or are simply not as 'flashy'.

- Damage Resistance: The Girls are extremely resistant to all forms of damage, able to withstand gunshots of any caliber, fire, and anything considered less energy-intensive, such as knives, swords, and blunt instruments. However, sharp Duranium instruments, even crudely refined and made, could damage them as easily as steel could hurt a normal human being. Bullets made of Duranium, especially those accelerated by Chemical-X-saturated propellants, is particularly dangerous to them.

- Sister Sense: The Girls seem to possess psy-links with one another, from which emotions and even thoughts could be transmitted between them to a limited degree. While the 'bandwidth' is far too limited for them to form a hive mind (which wouldn't be ideal as it would erode their identities), they seem to have a greater sense of empathy among themselves. This 'Sister Sense' allows them to synchronize their actions as well, sometimes right down to the words they say. For Buttercup, this psy-link is her only way to empathize with her sisters, and even then, it is extremely limited. There isn't a night when I wouldn't worry about Buttercup.

- Hyper-Accelerated Cellular Regeneration: The Girls are capable of healing from wounds at speeds far beyond that of normal human beings. As a perspective, skin-deep cuts will disappear after a night's sleep. Bubbles was back on duty within days after a major heart and lung operation. Even with my understanding of Chemical X, I struggle to explain this. While the Girls are able to metabolize Chemical X for energy, and they have a limitless supply of it, I have only the most fanciful hypothesis as to where they get the available materials to repair injuries so quickly. It is possible that the Chemical X in their body itself is repurposed into the necessary proteins and other bio-molecules to be used for repair.

- Hyper-Dexterity: The Girls could work with their hands very quickly and deftly. After months of training from Selicia, they are able to field-strip an XM4 rifle within seconds, with Blossom doing it in 3.5 seconds. Based on my most current theories, I believe this is possible because they are somehow able to focus the Chemical X saturating their nerve cells to quantum-tunnel signals between their nervous system and other parts of the body. Their reaction time, which is a fraction of a normal human being, seems to support this.

- Super-Acute Eyesight: Blossom has an eyesight that doubles as a pair of binoculars. Using optometry measurements, her eyesight could go up to 20/0.5 in terms of clarity. The other Girls had attained a similar skill as well, though with less 'zooming' function compared to Blossom. While Blossom is able to 'zoom in' up to 40x normal vision, Buttercup could only manage about 10x and Bubbles 5x. Based on my observations, I was able to detect faint Chemical X structures forming in front of their eyes whenever they do this, forming meta-dimensional lenses that 'zooms in' their vision.
- Bioluminescence: The Girls could emit light from their eyes, using them like torch lights. The distance has been increasing steadily over the last month. At the start of January, the distance was merely 9 yards. Now, it can go up to 21 yards. And yes, they can adjust it as well, though it does strain their eyes after a lengthy period of time. They have no other ways of producing useful sources of light as of yet.

(For a full report on the Girls' combat proficiency, refer to the research department. They have all my latest research data.)

Additional Notes by General Blackwater (Except from USDO internetwork email to House Group - Professor Utonium and Sergeant Selicia Goodwin)

The Girls have grown soft as of late, but I guess that is to be expected, isn't it? When they are little more than children? Their stubborn lack of discipline when it comes to equipment management aside, they have simplified their tactics beyond acceptable levels.

They no longer seem to plan their moves at all and does not even try to avoid detection and incorporate stealth into their operations. They are reckless, and they are lucky the Foundation and much of the criminal underground is currently maintaining a low profile. They need to realize they are successful so far only because they've been picking on the small fries.

WHIP THEM BACK INTO SHAPE ASAP BEFORE I DO IT MYSELF.
Chapter 3: Hard Questions

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup goes to school for another day of innocent learning and fun.

Chapter 3: Hard Questions

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 0617.

The professor wasn't able to sleep after Bubbles woke him up. Instead, he was lying down there in his bed, enjoying the moment with one of his adopted daughters, spending the seconds mulling over the Girls. Specifically, how he could get them out of what was essentially conscripted child soldiering. Over the past month, he had been expanding on his Chemical X Unifying Theory, fixing calculation errors, amending whatever mistakes he had in his understanding of the enigmatic cross-dimensional substance.

But he wasn't solving the mystery of Chemical X for the sake of understanding this universe or the next any longer. He was doing it for Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup. If he could understand Chemical X and all its little nuances, he believed he could 'cure' them of their Chemical X, and convince the USDO to let them go. He cared nothing for the consequences - Townsville could clean up its own mess for all he cared, and the USDO could get someone else to help them with it, and if the USDO did not fire him for rendering their only enhanced operatives inert, he would gladly come up with an alternative to the Girls if it meant that they would leave them alone.

Professor Utonium stared at his alarm clock as the seconds ticked by. Bubbles, his little bundle of joy, fast asleep under the glow of his table lamp and basking in the warmth of his body and blanket, turned in her sleep or at least tried to. Instinctively, her body knew that it couldn't, so she instead kneaded her head into his arm, which she had been using as a pillow. The sensation felt good.

06:19, the alarm clock read. Sometimes, he wished that the laws of the universe would cut him some slack, and time would freeze forever during the good times, such as when he was with Bubbles, resting in bed just before sunrise. For every day that started, there was always the probability that the peace would be shattered, and his Girls would have to answer the call to arms once more.

06:20, the alarm clock flipped a number. His waking dream was over. Professor Utonium got up. Carefully maneuvering around Bubbles, he slid off his bed and slid his feet into his house shoes. Looking at Bubbles one more time, he thought her to be a sweet little angel. Bending down a little, he stroked her blonde hair and ran his hand down her cheek before walking away reluctantly.

The City of Townsville. Pokey Oaks North. Pokey Oaks Kindergarten

3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 0947.
"I'm still really sorry about your legs, Sally," Blossom apologized to her classmate as they were solving a series of simple math problems together. The esoteric art of mathematical addition and subtraction, however, was just an excuse for Blossom to go through with her ritual of humility. It was a mere extension of what she had done last month, soon after the Battle at Morbucks Industries Research Labs.

While the USDO's intention had been one of good public relations, Blossom and Bubbles were sincere when they went around Townsville to visit the victims of the Highway 13 Incident to apologize for their mistakes and hand out gifts. Buttercup had only apologized out of fear of disapproval from Mom and Dad – in her mind, she was never at fault for anything.

"It's fine, Blossom," Sally, the wheelchair-bound girl, said. While she still held some kind of grudge against The Three, she had been told otherwise not to act on it – her family had seen what The Three had done for the city, and the parents believed that it was time to move on. "My mom said that I can still be a fashion designer…" What Sally did not tell Blossom was that she wanted to be an astronaut too, and now she'll never get the chance to either make the dream come true or grow out of it.

While Blossom was chatting with a former victim, Bubbles was drawing with a few friends at another table. The professor was right – with some time, the animosity between the Girls and their classmates had dissipated – and for good reason. Whether a few months old or a few years, a month was a long time for a little child. It took just a fraction of that after the Girls' redemption with Morbucks for them to play and laugh together once more (under the watchful eye of Miss Keane, of course). Thus, Bubbles was in good company. Better, in fact, than her own memories.

And it showed in her drawings. In her latest drawing block, she presented herself as she was in her dreams – the perfect little girl – but with tears flying in arcs from her huge, exaggerated eyes, drawn as cartoonish teardrops. She stood over a man she had killed in Morbucks Labs. While Miss Keane was walking by, she paused and looked at the drawing. She straightened her vest casually, unsure of how to react to Bubbles' development. It was unprecedented, after all, that she had been given responsibility over a trio of enhanced little girls 'working' as elite law enforcement agents who had killed and wounded varying numbers of people.

"That's…" Miss Keane tried to begin, but she couldn't even find her second word.

"I'm sorry I scared you, Miss Keane," Bubbles said without turning away from her drawing. She knew her kindergarten teacher was there from her shadow. She was just too engrossed with her futile attempt at catharsis.

"I… You didn't. Not at all, Bubbles," Miss Keane replied. Half of it was a lie. She was afraid of Bubbles and her sisters, no matter how good they were now, simply because they were incredibly powerful. But there was some truth in her voice – she was trying not to be. Realizing that she hadn't touched any of them for over a month, she reached out for her shoulder, tried to reassure her that way with some human touch. One of her pigtails brushed her hand when she did. Her blonde hair felt like silk, but they seemed tougher than that.

"I've killed a man before, Miss Keane," Bubbles opened up a little on feeling her teacher's hand on the back of her head. "He was shooting at me and I killed him."

"Are you upset that you did?" Miss Keane asked, unable to believe that she was having this conversation with a little girl – a baby even, considering that they were born late November, last year. It was terrible with Buttercup, but understandable considering what Professor Utonium had told her. With Bubbles, it was shocking.
"Yes..." Bubbles squeaked, looking like she was on the verge of tears. "I dreamed about him on some nights."

"Then that's good. It means you're a good girl, Bubbles," Miss Keane said with perfectly enunciated words as she sat down next to her. Bubbles stared at her eye-to-eye. Miss Keane thought that she had the most piercing gaze ever, what with it glowing baby blue. But she thought that it was also beautiful. Like precious jewels. Like Sapphire glowing under sunlight.

"I am?" Bubbles questioned, unconvinced.

"Yes, you are... Now how about smiling a little?" Miss Keane said. "It'll make you feel better... There you go." Bubbles had done as she was told, and she giggled after that, though it wasn't because she smiled. She was happy that Miss Keane had come around to not hating them weeks ago, and that hadn't changed. "How about if you draw something cheerful? You were good at drawing your family. Why not start there?"

Unfortunately for Bubbles, Miss Keane had to move on. With over twenty kids to look out for, she couldn't afford to spend too much time on her even if she wanted to. Next, she went over to Buttercup's table. Surprisingly, it hadn't blown up yet. Instead, Buttercup was being unusually nice and good. She was working on origami with a few other kids, including Mac, the boy who had made fun of the Girls when he found out that they had no belly buttons. Despite being nearly killed for it by Buttercup, he seemed fine with having her around.

Buttercup, Mac and another girl had been building paper frogs that could hop, but Buttercup had moved on to a simple paper airplane.

"Hiya, Miss Keane," Buttercup greeted her teacher the moment she saw her, with the sweetest smile yet, which was very uncharacteristic of her. "Do you like our paper frogs? Do you?" She stared at the teacher with those jade-like eyes of hers, expecting a reaction. Miss Keane had to physically force herself not to shrink away from them.

"They look perfectly folded, Miss Buttercup," Miss Keane laughed, and had to try to hide her nervousness at the change of tone surrounding Buttercup. Something had changed. "I'm glad you - urm - have learned to appreciate the simpler things in life."

"Miss Keane?" Buttercup had changed the tone further - starting with the tone of her voice, which had become a little more serious. "May I ask you something?"

"Why, of course, Buttercup. Ask away!" Miss Keane said with enthusiasm mustered with difficulty. She had to try to focus on the fact that she loved her teaching position, even if it had been subverted by the USDO to serve their agenda and focus primarily on the Girls.

"Can I ask you my questions alone?" Buttercup requested further. Miss Keane could not put a finger on it, but she thought it to be an odd request. Children could be shy and secretive at times, but with Buttercup in question, it could be a can of worms waiting to be opened. "I'm really shy about them."

"What could Buttercup be trying to hide from the rest of the children?" Miss Keane wondered, and she didn't like the possibilities she had thought up. Forcing herself to think positively, she struggled to believe that it could be something mundane. After all, enhanced and mentally unsound though Buttercup was, she was a child after all, with similar needs to the next child in the same room.

Maybe.
"Okay, Buttercup, you can ask me your questions at my desk…” Miss Keane agreed to Buttercup's request. Putting out a hand, at the same time restraining the urge to pull it away again, she offered it for Buttercup to take, which the enhanced little girl did. They went over to her desk, attracting some attention from both the other two Angels of Justice and some children before the kids returned to what they were doing.

Sitting down behind her favorite workspace in the world, she pulled up a chair for Buttercup. It was short enough for her to comfortably get on top of without the use of her floating abilities.

"So what is it, Buttercup?” Miss Keane asked, still aware of the irregular nature of Buttercup's request, just that she chose to hope. "Don't be afraid to ask me anything. After all, you're here to learn."

"Miss Keane… What is 'Fuck'?” Buttercup finally asked curtly. The teacher was about to take a sip of her freshly-brewed tea when she heard the word and nearly spilled her morning beverage as a result.

"Oh, that…” Miss Keane smiled nervously as she thought about what to say. The shock of hearing it from Buttercup's lips had scrambled her train of thought, though she didn't know why she would be so shocked to hear it from the roughest of The Three, whose mental condition would make her predisposed to harsh language because of the raw satisfaction it could give. She ran through her usual lines in her mind - it wasn't the first time she'd heard it from a kindergartner's mouth. The last F-bomber had been Mac, who'd asked the same question early last year. "Well… It's, um, a word that adults say when they're… angry, or in pain, or really, really upset, dear."

"Does that mean I can say it too?” Buttercup asked enthusiastically.

"No!” Miss Keane said, alarmed, before realizing that she had to get a handle on the situation calmly. "Absolutely not! Remember what I said? It's what adults say. You're not an adult yet, Buttercup. Besides, it's a bad swear word, honey. Your Mommy and Daddy wouldn't be pleased to hear it - or any other adults for that matter. Okay?"

"But why wouldn't they like it? Or allow it? They say it all the time, especially when they're shooting at me, or when I'm shooting at them, or punching them…” Buttercup probed the matter further. True, she didn't like the sound of it whenever it was directed at her, but she thought she could throw it at her enemies like a punch as if it was another weapon to be leveraged on in combat.

'She's persistent,' Miss Keane thought bitterly.

"Because they say it when they couldn't control themselves," Miss Keane explained further and patiently. She could feel her hands getting sweaty. Her forehead too. It wasn't the same as explaining swear words to Mac, somehow. "Or when they couldn't think of any other words to say Buttercup. So don't let me hear you say it, okay? I believe I've taught you many other words to use. Can you promise me that, Buttercup?"

"Yes, Miss Keane…” Buttercup agreed somewhat reluctantly. The enhanced little girl thought that there was more to say about swear words and why they should be allowed - or why she should be allowed to use it, but she knew the consequences of pursuing what was thought to be wrong. After all, she had killed when she was not supposed to. What's a little swear word compared to that?

"Now, do you have any other questions?” Miss Keane quickly asked before Buttercup could say anything else.
"Yes, Miss Keane," Buttercup said, her eyes lighting up once more. Usually, when a child had a question with that kind of look on her face, Miss Keane would be thrilled to entertain her. But with Buttercup, it was a whole different story altogether. "What does 'shit' mean?"

And she could only be glad that she wasn't holding her cup of tea, and that the other children were far away so they couldn't overhear it.

"It's a bad word, blah, blah, blah - don't say it," Miss Keane explained in a more abridged format, laughing nervously as she found her patience a little worn. Never in her career had a child dared to ask about two swear words on a single day… Until now. Even if it was Townsville she was living in. Even the more roguish of the little 'uns were smarter than that and would be dissuaded and wiser the moment she saw her smile disappear. It wasn't a milestone in her now-colorful career she cared to reach. "Do you have words to ask me about that aren't vulgarities?"

"Oh," Buttercup became downcast all of a sudden, and Miss Keane could feel guilt rising in her - had she been too tough on Buttercup? For a moment, she had forgotten that she was dealing with a little girl who had to skip the first four years of her life due to some mad science experiment on the part of the USDO, and now she wanted to somehow make up for it. But unknown to her, Buttercup had a different reason for being upset. The bad words had been fun, but the moment she remembered the real reason why she had approached her kindergarten teacher, it was as if the weight of months of sadness had gone down on her.

Miss Keane reached out to Buttercup and patted her on the back, sensing something disturbing. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Promise me you won't tell my Dad?" Buttercup pleaded with her teacher.

"What is this about?" Miss Keane asked, nothing if concerned. Buttercup was never the one to be upset over anything - her most common mode of expression was either one of an extroverted exterior or outright, aggressive meanness. The way she looked right then had overridden the fear Miss Keane had for a psychopathic outburst, though she wished that she was never given the brief on the USDO psychiatrist Alice's discovery of Buttercup's mental condition.

"Please?" Buttercup repeated her plea.

"Yes, dear..." Miss Keane promised, her own curiosity stoked as well. "Ask away."

"Why would I be called a 'subject' and 'lab experiment', Miss Keane? It sounds wrong, and what does it mean?" Buttercup finally asked, dredging up her earliest memories of when she realized something was... off, though she didn't know what. The uncertainty gnawed at her and had haunted her time and again over the months, added onto by other words used to describe her, words she had overheard when they thought she couldn't hear. It had been two months, and she still hadn't divulged the fact that she had developed a powerful sense of hearing that could be focused to listen in on a conversation far away, or that was obstructed by sound-unfriendly obstructions, something analogous to Blossom's ability to see with clarity something extremely far away, even zooming in on it as if her eyes were binoculars. "Why do they call me a lab rat, Miss Keane?"

It wasn't what Miss Keane expected, and it'd thrown her for a loop a second time around. She considered what Buttercup had asked about carefully, even as the enhanced little girl was looking expectantly at her because she knew it had something to do with the USDO and the fact that they had created the Girls in a lab somewhere. How, she didn't know for sure, but it didn't make for a regular childhood, whatever the method was.

On one hand, she was sure that the USDO would not want the Girls to know anything about their
genesis, but on the other hand… Professor Utonium and Selicia had trusted her with the job of taking care of them - and they weren't exactly just acting as their parents. She had seen hundreds of parents before, and she could tell very well the negligent from the role models, and the professor and security officer seemed to be the latter.

The Girls had implicitly trusted her - that was perhaps the most important thing, and she wasn't about to betray that.

'What do I say?' the million-dollar question continued to reverberate in Miss Keane's mind. 'What should I say?'

"Miss Keane?" Buttercup repeated her plea, inadvertently pressuring Miss Keane to make the impossible decision.

"Buttercup… It's not your mom and dad who said those things, is it?" Miss Keane probed further, buying time.

"No, teach. It's my Dad's friends," Buttercup replied. "And people I worked with when I beat up the bad guys, too."

In a way, that had been a lie. Buttercup had heard more than she let on, and some of it had come from Mommy and Daddy's mouths. She just didn't want to ruin it by asking too much from the teacher.

On the side, in her mindscape, Miss Keane couldn't help but lament the state she had been reduced to. Mere months ago, she had a perfect life and a routine going - she would have been happy being a teacher for the rest of her life. And then the USDO came and put her in charge of the Girls' education. She could take the Girls as a challenge - after all, how many teachers on Earth would ever have the opportunity to educate what were essentially superheroes straight from the cartoons or movies? The difficulties of working with an overbearing federal agency that wouldn't hesitate to burn the constitution and whoever stood in their way, however, was certainly not what she wanted to put up with.

"A lab experiment is something a scientist do to find out how things work," Miss Keane explained. "They call someone a subject when she's… I mean, he's been… uh, tested on. A lab rat is a rat used as a subject…"

She had all but given Buttercup the facts, deciding that her duty was to the children first and foremost. But with reservations. She had decided to let Buttercup connect the dots, and having worked with children for a long time, she knew that it would be a while before she could fully understand the implications of it all.

"Maybe you heard wrongly, Buttercup," Miss Keane suggested. "They might not even be referring to you. They could be talking about something else."

"Yeah, Miss Keane. Maybe you're right," Buttercup said with a flat tone; she meant none of it. She knew what she had heard, and though she vaguely realized that her memory was not as perfect as it used to be, she could remember, word-for-word, what she heard. 'I'm sorry for calling the kids subjects and lab experiments,' Wiggums had said when he visited back in early December.

'They may look like cute little girls, but they are dangerous! They are living weapons. Creatures. They're things! Not human!' Blackwater had called her all sorts of names back when Mister Blake was marched off by the big oaf with crow's feet and wrinkles on his face. With Blackwater, Buttercup understood things a little better. The words he used were simple, but they'd said a lot
about how he viewed her.

It was at the tip of Buttercup's tongue. She had the answer to the mystery of these words, she knew it! The only thing barring her from the truth was her inexperience with the way of the world.

But even she knew that if she gave it enough thought, she would be able to understand what was going on.

The City of Townsville. Pokey Oaks North. Pokey Oaks Kindergarten

3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1305.

"I knew that this would happen," Professor Utonium moaned as if he was in pain. He was sitting in Miss Keane's office, next to Selicia, his 'wife'. Miss Keane had called them for a meeting, about the Girls' development - well, mainly Buttercup and Bubbles. Selicia embraced him closely, trying to make the matter less painful. She couldn't be sure if it was helping. The Girls were his primary source of joy, even more so than she was or would ever be, and anything that happened to them were like grenades in his face, no matter how slight, no matter how inconsequential. It was a wonder he was still standing. "It's hard enough for a trained adult to keep his sanity and character intact whenever they head out there. I can't imagine… How much harder it is for the Girls."

Miss Keane had shown them the Girls' drawings in class - the ones she had kept hidden away in her 'Triple-B drawer'. The earliest one had dated back to just after the Girls' maiden mission at Townsville Central Bank. Buttercup had drawn a picture of her pulverizing a robber. After that, it was one gruesome sight after another, rendered increasingly detailed and accurate as Buttercup became better and better at drawing. Some of Bubbles' drawings weren't much better. Had Miss Keane looked at the drawings without knowing the kid, she would have thought that it came from a street kid in living in a bad neighborhood with a broken family or a young patient in a mental hospital.

And then she had told them about it. Buttercup's questions. Selicia couldn't see the big deal in it.

"And Buttercup… Jesus- Now that's exactly what she needs! Had she been a normal little girl, she wouldn't have learned those stuff just yet…" the professor lamented, looking like he was having a hard time keeping a straight face. He didn't just mean the fact that Buttercup was an individual enhanced by Chemical X - it wouldn't have mattered with that. It was her psychopathy that wouldn't be a good ingredient to mix with a load of expletives.

"Would it help if I say that it's not unheard of? For little children to ask such questions?" Miss Keane said. It wasn't the first time she had this conversation with a nervous wreck of a parent. That wasn't the problem - the problem was that they weren't dealing with normal kids here.

"Yeah, it's normal, right?" Selicia added, hoping to magnify the light Miss Keane was trying to shine on the issue. From her perspective, it was the norm for her. She had learned to swear right from the get-go, even before she went to school.

"Well, actually… nevermind," Miss Keane aborted her reply before she could do any real damage to their progress. "The point is, it's not the end of the world. Even when we're talking about… the other things. Buttercup's… um… issues and Bubbles' troubles. I've seen normal kids handle psychological issues similar to what your Girls are going through, and they turned out fine. It's part of growing up for some."

What Miss Keane did not tell them was that for every kid who turned out fine, there was one or
more who didn't. But they didn't need to hear that. What they also didn't need to hear, Miss Keane decided, was Buttercup's other questions, questions that came too close to blowing the lid on the truth about her life and existence.

After all, she wasn't about to break a promise with one of her little schoolkids. 'It's like telling adopted children that they're adopted before they're ready - not exactly something one should do.' Miss Keane rationalized her decision, and it helped with her guilt and keeping a poker face in front of the Utoniums.

In the meantime, Buttercup had been listening outside the office, eavesdropping, just like she always did, while her sisters remained none the wiser, playing their lame finger games while they waited.
Chapter 4: Rewards

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup go on a very important mission issued by Mayor Wilford himself. Professor Utonium and Selicia get into a conversation in a restaurant which is just as important.

Chapter 4: Rewards

The City of Townsville. Downtown. Rosey Park Apartment Construction Site.

3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1526.

It was the middle of the afternoon, and the Girls were near the end of another round of sky patrol. They had started after lunch with Mom and Dad after school, at Pugliesi's Siciliano Restaurant. It was awkward nowadays, going out with the family, since everyone knew what the Girls were in Townsville. Almost everyone in the restaurant was staring at them at one point or another, and the entire family had to pretend as though they were alone. It was impossible for the Girls to do so, especially when some of the stares implied dislike or anger. Not everyone had forgiven the Girls for the mistakes they had committed, but at least not everyone was bearing grudges against them. There was even once when a stranger walked past them and dropped off a 'Thank you' card discreetly. Security had to intervene and check the card only to find it harmless.

It didn't help that the Girls had to do it in uniform as the only place they could change in the proper environment was in school. The restaurant restroom would have been too small, too dirty and too public, requiring additional security in and out - the restaurant wasn't in the USDO watch list.

It would have been awkward even for an adult to sit down to a plate of macaroni in full combat gear. Grenades and law enforcement tools were hanging from their vests as they ate, and their MP5s were leaned on the chair they were sitting on with their glider packs - no thanks to General Blackwater.

But that was over and done with. They had gone out of the restaurant to take flight, and Mom and Dad stayed behind for their chat.

"This is Flight Control Three to Bravo-Four-Seven, over," this time, a male voice at flight control contacted them over the radio.

"Hi, Blossom here," the leader of The Three reported once more.

"Confirm flight path, over," the male flight control officer asked.

"We're meeting the Mayor, Mister Flight Control Three," Blossom said, with a hint of humor and playfulness in her voice. They were going to see the Mayor! It had been two weeks at least since they last did, and it was all fun and marshmallows the last time.

"Flightpath confirmed," the USDO flight control officer agreed. "You are drifting. Please turn right by 25 degrees."
"Like this?" Blossom made a turn. Bubbles and Buttercup followed, bending their three-colored line into an unsightly crook.

"Bravo-Four-Seven, this is not a game! Turn left again, 15 degrees. Not too much, over!" the flight control officer said impatiently.

"What's 'degrees' anyway!?" Buttercup rambled - she hated being told what to do. "Why can't we fly the way we want to!?"

"Bravo-Four-Eight, maintain radio silence on all non-essential chatter. Bravo-Four-Seven, your course correction is a-okay. Stay on it until you see the construction site, over and out," the flight controller said nonchalantly, essentially calling Buttercup to shut up in radio terms.

"How did they know where we're flying to?" Bubbles asked curiously, and when none of them had any idea how to answer that, the question was abandoned, and since it was uninteresting, forgotten. What was interesting, however, was when the construction site the Mayor was at came within sight. It was a new apartment building in the works that Blossom could imagine would be lovely when it was done. The Girls could only wonder why he wanted them there.

The City of Townsville. Uptown. Pugliesi's Siciliano Restaurant.

3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1535.

"This is beautiful, Thomas…" Selicia said as she smelled the flower Professor Utonium had given her. It was done subtly so – they didn't want to burden the Girls with the complexities of adult relationships. Instead of getting the flower himself, he had to make a special request through the restaurant manager to deliver the Roses after the Girls were gone. The Restaurant Manager was more than happy to oblige. Ever since they'd become regular customers patronizing his establishment every week, his restaurant had become one of the safest in town, owing to the Girls and their USDO PTF bodyguards. Business had boomed since. Selicia looked up at him, with teary eyes. "I just… Thanks for everything. I didn't think I could do this at all."

Professor Utonium reached out for her hand and took it. He smiled warmly, the stress of parenting the extraordinary Girls temporarily forgotten when it was just him and Selicia. "You give me too much credit. It goes both ways, you know," he said with a laugh. Selicia thought it was cute. "When you came along, I thought you were just there to keep an eye on me and the Girls on the USDO's behalf. I didn't think I could love anyone older than my kids again if you know what I mean. You gave me a chance at life too."

Selicia wiped her tears away and laughed. She was never one to turn on the valve and let the waterworks flow, but this time, it was hard. Ever since she'd been out in the streets in her teenage years, she knew right from the start that she wasn't exactly the type of girl a man – a decent man – would want to be with. That thought had stayed with her even as she was recruited by the USDO and gone on to serve with both distinction and notoriety. People had told her just as much, if not more than what she told herself. She had been called a skank. A tool. A gold digger. The human vibrator. She was a jailbait before and after the legal age, before and after she joined the USDO.

Their lunch came just in time after that. While the Girls were around, they'd eaten light to both avoid suspicion and reserve their appetite for their date later, under the pretense that they weren't hungry. Selicia looked at their meals and beamed at the professor widely.

"Spaghetti and meatballs. Reminds me of our first date," she reminisced. "What did we talk about on that day?"
"That day? Oh, right," Professor Utonium wondered aloud, but he remembered very quickly what it was about. It wasn't just their first date. It was the day he understood Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup better. With an almost youthful grin, he recalled the conversation, though it would be more accurate to call it a scientific lecture. "I gave you a crash course on my Chemical X Unifying Theory… About what our Girls were made of."

"And… Buttercup was the spaghetti, right? Yum, I could eat her up!" Selicia added playfully. It was all coming back to her. Well, most of it anyway - she couldn't say that she fully understood what the professor was going on about Chemical X. "How's the sciencing coming along?"

To be truthful, Selicia never had any real interest in science - but for the sake of her 'assigned husband' and the Girls (mostly Buttercup), she thought she needed to start taking a real interest in it - no matter how much it hurt her brain.

"Really good, actually," the professor said. The few words he used to describe it gave no indication of what was to come. "Three weeks ago, I submitted my theory to the Institute for testing. The results just came back." Professor Utonium was absolutely quivering in excitement. Selicia tried to be as excited as she possibly could, but she found that it was a difficult thing to do. She twirled her fork around some spaghetti and ate a mouthful.

"Okay, long story short - the scientists at the Institute were able to detect a much higher incidence of quantum tunneling in their samples of Chemical X compared to normal matter - by the order of millions of times more. This, combined with their ultra-accurate measurement of its mass and volume variance over time, has more or less confirmed my suspicions that Chemical X is unique in its ability to provoke far more quantum incidences than normal, resulting in a fluctuation of its properties. Not only that, it opened my eyes to a new possibility…" the professor explained, oblivious to Selicia's confusion as he became caught up with the numbers and facts of his discoveries. However, when he saw that she looked like she was going to have a headache, he switched gears to bring his explanation down to her level: "Anyway, Chemical X is able to rearrange itself into any kind of pattern and shape instantly by shifting its subatomic particles around at the speed of light - and even beyond! It's incredible!"

"So, it becomes anything it wants… in zilch amounts of time?" Selicia tried to make sense of it, she honestly tried. She stabbed her fork into her spaghetti once more and spun herself another ball of pasta.

"Like what you're doing with your food right now, yes," the professor explained more plainly, as playfully as he could to match his wife's speed. What he said got Selicia to stop eating and look at the spaghetti she had spun up like cotton candy. She smiled like a kid at the professor for his analogy. "But that's not all. Using some of the most precise instruments the world has never seen before, they were able to detect spatial distortions around the Chemical X samples, and their electron microscopes have taken images of particles of Chemical X emerging out of thin air. My Unifying Theory is looking as good as the images they took, Selicia!"

"Isn't it a little too easy? Cracking the secrets of the universe in just a few weeks?" Selicia questioned as she studied her 'husband'. She liked it when he was this excited. She found it cute, but disappointed that he couldn't be more excited while he was attending to matters of a more… primitive and primal nature. She took a stab at a couple of meatballs, making a short kebab out of them.

"You're right it is," the professor said. "We've only just started testing the theory. We're only on the second phase of testing if my passable attempts in my poorly-equipped lab is considered the first. It's only the tip of the iceberg. But with Chemical X - the Girls - rushed into service just like that,
we had to speed things up a little. I don't like to cut corners and jump to conclusions, but the Girls come first, and I've got to work with what I have… for Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup."

"But what can we do with your theory to help Buttercup?" Selicia asked, now much more invested when Buttercup was mentioned. The professor smiled at her but briefly - they were going into uncertain territory, which was also potentially lethal and full of deadly consequences, even if it didn't directly involve guns and explosives like what his other half was used to. He was glad to have Selicia by his side even when it was rough in the beginning - but then again, he hadn't met a single person who could master the art of parenting instantly.

"I think I'm ready to work on curing the Girls of Chemical X, Selicia," the professor said as he clasped Selicia's hand in both of his. "They won't have to fight crime anymore and get scared or injured every day, and we won't have to be afraid of any long-term effects Chemical X might have on the Girls. We'll get to be a normal family."

What he didn't expect was a change in expression on Selicia's part. Her smile had sunk into something of a cross between horror, displeasure, and anger.

"Tommy darling, are you sure you want to 'cure' the Girls of Chemical X?" Selicia said. "They're healthy, Thomas. It's not like they're suffering from the Clap or something."

"It might as well be a disease, Selicia, and we don't know what Chemical X is doing to the Girls on the biological, chemical and molecular level," the professor explained, knowing full well that it might not go well, but he had always known that doing and saying the right thing was often difficult - it's what he had taught the Girls. "Every time I see them flying out of The House, I can't help but be afraid. It's like waiting for a nuclear lab explosion every single day. They were hurt over and over back in December when it should've been the happiest month of the year."

"No, Thomas. You don't understand," Selicia jabbed at her other half, annoyance rising rapidly in her voice like an impending flood. All the science had gone right over her head. "You need to learn how to accept the Girls as they are! They're- they're special, and we're lucky to have them. Buttercup would never want her abilities to be taken away!"

"Selicia, Buttercup's not even three months old. She doesn't know what she wants, or what's good for her," the professor tried to say it the most gentle way he could. Selicia retracted her hand roughly, suddenly disgusted by the man sitting before her. "You have to trust me. Buttercup - she's not well, and her power's only going to make matters worse. Alice said-"

"ALICE SAID!" Selicia screamed madly the moment she heard the psychiatrist's name, knocking over cutlery, attracting the attention and stares of the surrounding restaurant patrons. She'd never liked the doctor, who was a quack in her opinion, a voyeur masquerading as a professional. She hated the fact that she was privy to some parts of her life she would rather forget about. "Is that bitch your wife now, Thomas!?"

Not that they were really married.

As intelligent as the professor was and in love with Selicia, he couldn't help but tremble when she blew up. Eileen, his late wife, had been too perfect and angelic a woman for him to marry - infinitely patient, gentle and loving. They were made for each other and would've been happy in each other's company until the day they die of old age until the Grim Reaper decided to get overzealous. It didn't prepare him for this.

"I- I- I- but-" he stammered as he struggled to collect his thoughts quickly, but he just couldn't. "Selicia-"
The sight of the professor so disturbed, with sweat pouring and an expression other than love on his face, however, was enough to tell Selicia something.

"No, Thomas, I…" Selicia started again, her face no longer in a grimace. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have. I was just… I can't believe I screwed this up-" And the tears started pouring, and there was enough to snap the professor out of his shock.

"Hey…” Thomas comforted her as he moved up closer to her, putting an arm around her shoulders. "You didn't screw up. It's… just this crazy world we live in. I think it's safe to say that we're the only ones on Earth who have to worry about our kids fighting crime every day and an insane federal agency bearing down on us."

Selicia was happy. 'Our kids', Thomas had said. It wasn't long ago that he'd begun saying that. Not too long ago, it'd been 'my Girls', or 'my kids'.

"Imagine a boring life - the two of us, and Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup," the man said. "Far away from Townsville. A normal two-floor house, school, and work on the weekdays, the beach on the weekends. Watching the sunset in the evening, then television at night. That would be perfect, wouldn't it?"

"Yeah," Selicia agreed. In this, they were of one mind. Selicia herself has had enough 'excitement' to last her a lifetime, from her unstable household in her childhood to her life out in the streets, and finally her stint in the Organization and when it turned into the USDO. "Just you and me, and Buttercup - and the Girls."

"I'm not giving up on Buttercup. Not ever, Selicia," Thomas said. "You have my word on that. She's my daughter too - I'd never hurt her. So believe me, taking her enhanced abilities away... It's for her own good. With some psychiatric help…" He had been careful not to mention Alice's name. "and some love from the both of us, I think she'd be okay."

"I'm so sorry I went off like that," Selicia apologized again, shaking her head at herself, though in her mind, she still had reservations about disempowering Buttercup. 'I'm a real mess, Thomas... You sure you want to love me?"

"Selicia. I didn't love you because you're some impossibly perfect woman. I love you because you're you," the professor said, taking her hand again. "Tell you what - the USDO could fake our marriage and relationship all they want - but I'm making it official. How about we register our marriage? For real? We could start with some photos next week with the Girls. I wonder how they'd look like in a family photo…"

"You mean you're not getting down on your knees and proposing marriage?" Selicia said and laughed while she wiped her tears away. Thomas reached for the fake wedding band the USDO had issued them, playing with it. The USDO had ruined it for them.

"How about when you least expect it?" Thomas said. "Better be on the lookout, soldier."

They both laughed.

The City of Townsville. Downtown. Rosey Park Apartment Construction Site.

3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1540.

Mayor Wilford wasn't too hard a man to find, even though they were grounded by the chaotic construction work going on at the site. The moment they'd reached the right place, they knew he
was there because of the black-suited bodyguards patrolling and protecting the area. When the Girls approached them, they were pointed in the right direction without any security measures taken against them - even their guns were not confiscated as they knew that it would not diminish how dangerous they were. On the other hand, even they knew that they would not be a danger to the Mayor any more than a sworn-in mayoral guard.

When Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup had finally found Mayor Wilford, they didn't expect to find him in a workman's outfit, complete with a hard hat. Miss Bellum was there beside him, similarly dressed in a jumpsuit, with her ample orange hair stuffed under her hard hat, poking out fashionably behind her. Tucked away in the construction foreman's office, they looked incredibly out of place even with their attire. They were examining a blueprint of the building, and when the Girls came up to them, they looked up and smiled.

"Why, hello Girls," Mayor Wilford greeted the Girls like the fine gentleman he was, the way he was raised since the beginning of the century. "How was your patrol today?"

"It was nothing, Mister Mayor. We helped an old lady cross the road today," Blossom reported proudly.

"Nothing is right," Buttercup complained, but the Mayor found her interesting nonetheless. "All I did today was warn a jaywalker not to jaywalk again! And Blossom didn't even let me smack him! It was boooooooring! With a capital B!" The most wayward of the Three had to suppress her facial twitch again, this time with a big frown - it was happening more and more often. She could feel herself going crazy from the lack of stimulation - and Blossom was watching her night and day like a hawk, ready to zoom to Daddy's side at the speed of light the moment she even look at something wrong.

"No, it wasn't," Bubbles begged to differ. "We helped a kitty cat trapped in a tree to get down. It's fun to help, whether it's with people or animals!"

"Attagirl. I like what the three of you are doing," Mayor Wilford praised them. "Even if they are minor things, every little bit you do for the town will go a long way in making the city a better place."

"Speaking of helping, what are we doing here today, Mister Mayor?" Blossom asked, curious as ever. She floated up to the table and landed next to the blueprint on her knees. Bubbles and Buttercup floated up as well, hovering in mid-air before standing on the table.

"It's just like last time, in the soup kitchen," the mayor said, reminding the Girls of what they had done two weeks ago. In the middle of January, they were called down to the edge of the slums, and the mayor had asked for them directly. They came in expecting a high profile operation, only to realize that it was a peaceful humanitarian mission. What was unknown to the Girls was that it was approved by the USDO, to aid in public relations. They spent a couple of hours ladling food for the poor and destitute and handing out coupons and small gifts. Indirectly, having the Girls around ensured the security of the place, as even an enhanced individual with the Foundation would think twice before attacking the soup kitchen - not that there was any reason to. The hungry and the desperate could eat in peace as a result, shielded from the outside evil, as well as the more violent among them.

Blossom and Bubbles enjoyed the change of pace. Buttercup did not. But they all did enjoy the marshmallows and hot chocolate that came after that.

"Are we going to feed the poor here too?" Bubbles guessed naively. "I saw a lot of men out there who looked really tired and hungry…"
"That's a good guess, Miss Bubbles, but those men were just tired towards the end of their shift," Miss Bellum finally spoke, diplomatic as ever. "It's different today. We'll be helping the construction crew here to build an affordable home for the poor. With your help, we could speed things up - not by much - weeks at most - but as the Mayor said: every bit helps."

"Well said, Miss Bellum," Mayor Wilford praised his USDO liaison. "How did I do without you all these decades? With this apartment complex, I'll be able to move some of the poor out of the bad neighborhoods and get them jobs. Uh, anyway... Girls - Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup - I really must thank the three of you for cleaning up my town good and proper! In fact, I have a surprise for the three of you, something that's coming soon... at least in my view. I'm an old man, after all."

"Is it another ride on your balloon?" Bubbles guessed. "I really like your giant balloon!"

"No, that wouldn't be enough for the three of you and what you've done to help the city, now would it?" Mayor Wilford said with a kindly and patient tone. "You three deserve more."

"Do we get a trip to Monster Island?" Buttercup took a stab at the nature of the surprise. She had seen the island far off into the distance before. She might not be able to see as well as Blossom, but she could make out the Ferris wheel and rollercoaster there. She'd even deviated off-course from her patrol route once to take a closer look, but she couldn't get far before Blossom and Flight Control caught up with her. They'd jumped down her throat for it.

"Now why would you want to go there? Monster Island's been abandoned for, oh, just about a decade now," Mayor Wilford explained. Monster Island had once been a thriving island amusement park that had been open since the shortly after World War II, featuring all the famous monsters Hollywood and Japan had to offer, from Frankenstein and Dracula to Godzilla and Mothra. It was closed because of safety concerns, rising crime, and diminishing interest. "So the rides won't work and it's dangerous to go there now. It's a haven for criminals and pirates, and even the police and coast guard won't own that place."

"But that's part of the fun!" Buttercup insisted – she wouldn't mind being surrounded by a bunch of low-lives just so she could tear them apart. She could acutely feel her need for violence inside her - her need to dispense her powers and see men quiver and get savaged. It sure beats playing house with Blossom and Bubbles - something her siblings had been forcing her to do for far too long; they were hoping to make her like it.

"It's too dangerous, my dears, even for the three of you," Mayor Wilford had no choice but to resort to lying. He didn't want to neglect the Girls on his watch and risk them running away for some cheap thrills to sate their misguided curiosity. "It's called Monster Island because there are monsters there too. Ones even the three of you couldn't defeat." Although to be fair, even he didn't know if that was true, considering the kind of monsters, both human and metahuman, they had to deal with just in Townsville alone. For all he knew, the Foundation could be hiding out there too, creating even more trans-human threats in their bid to sway the city to do their bidding.

What he didn't tell them – couldn't, in fact, because the Girls' understanding of the world was so limited – was that Monster Island served as a buffer zone for crime, to protect the better parts of Townsville, just like the tenement area, slums, and Gangrene Gulag, by providing a 'safe' area for criminals so they wouldn't set up shop in the better parts of Townsville. It would be a long time before he could solve these pressing municipal issues, and it would likely be his successor who would see it done.

"So... What do we do here?" Blossom asked, absolutely beaming at the Mayor. She was just glad to help. The reward for their endeavor could come later.
"I'm glad you asked," the Mayor simply said, before moving on to explain their role in the construction project. After that, he handed out yellow hard hats to them, which the Girls gladly took, likening it to playing dress-up, though the yellow safety helmets didn't go well with their black and color-coded SWAT gear.

They spent the next hour hauling steel beams up to the skeleton of the half-finished building, because the construction crew's crane was broken and out of commission for weeks due to maintenance. They then spend the second hour putting them into position so that the workers could rivet and weld them into place.

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were able to enjoy the work, as they found it similar to playtime with their toy blocks, but bigger and more awesome. The impressive size of the work they were helping with was even able to convince Buttercup to look at the job with a more positive light, as her tastes were more boyish in nature, and construction was well within her interests, just like how she had an earth-mover in her model vehicle collection. Blossom just loved putting things together, like a giant puzzle, and she couldn't wait to see the apartment complex when it was done. Bubbles, on the other hand, found it a great diversion from crime-fighting and thought they were creating a gigantic work of art.
Chapter 5: Like Before

Chapter Summary

After weeks of relative peace and nearly no action, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup was scrambled for a bigger operation.

Chapter 5: Like Before


3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1751.

The Girls were back on patrol again after the fun they had at the Rosey Parks Apartment construction site. Most of the time, they would fly around Townsville, braving the cold wintry breeze, which they had gotten used to tolerating, without any criminals to fight. Despite the fact that they had been flying the same route day in and day out, the Girls were hardly ever bored as the view of Townsville's skyline and surroundings were breath-taking. Even Buttercup could appreciate it. Sometimes, they would patrol at a different height or take a slightly different route to see the view from a different angle, but most of the flight control officers didn't mind as long as their general direction hadn't changed. If anything, the flight control officers welcomed the Girls' erratic nature and need for change, as it meant that criminals couldn't predict them easily.

"It was fun helping out the Mayor with his building," Bubbles started after there was a prolonged silence between the three of them. The construction work, the very act of creation, had uplifted her. Very quickly, however, she was beginning to miss it. "I wish we'd get to help him more often." There was so much more she couldn't even begin to express. Was this what peace meant? That friends couldn't see each other as often? Her mind drifted to Mister Blake – when would it be that she would see him again?

"I'm sure we will," Blossom tried to help her sister find solace in hope. "Besides, there's another way we could have fun today…" Blossom had purposely left what she meant open for guessing.

"The Princess' ball! I can't wait!" Bubbles exclaimed with joy, remembering the day's highlight. "I wonder what kind of mask you'll be wearing, Buttercup."

"Ugh…" Buttercup said in disgust. "The only kind of mask I want to wear is a gas mask." The toughest of The Three had spoken from experience. During one of the two bigger (and more disappointing) operations they had participated in back in January, they had to wear gas masks because of the possibility of toxins having been dispersed into the air of the building they were supposed to storm. The Foundation was reported to have a presence there, in a ranch on the outskirts of Townsville. As it turned out, there were toxins alright, though they'd found out that they were immune to it when Bubbles removed her gas mask because she felt intolerable itches from wearing it. Nevertheless, Buttercup had since thought that gas masks were cool.

The topic of the masquerade was hot between Blossom and Bubbles, at least. They could only guess at what Elodie Morbucks had got in store for them. She had been keeping it a secret - in fact, they had noticed that most people had been keeping secrets from them. Blossom thought it sweet. Buttercup felt it to be sinister at every turn. The Girls chatted about the masks that they would
wear for a while. Blossom was able to find a picture of an old masque organized centuries ago in one of the encyclopedias Daddy had given her, and she wanted one with huge plumes of feathers all around, or perhaps one that would make her look like a Raven, a bird she had taken a liking to for its intelligence, or a Hawk, a bird she liked too, because of how majestic and brave it looked.

Bubbles wanted something cute. Something that would make her look like Octi or a bunny. Buttercup's preference for gas masks hadn't changed despite her sisters' best efforts to influence her. They'd tried giving her examples of animals she would like, like lions and tigers, but Buttercup remained unswayed.

They didn't have long to talk about masks, however, when their radios crackled to life.

"This is Flight Control Seven. Please come in, Bravo-Four-Seven, over," one of the flight control towers chimed in all of a sudden. It was another female voice. Blossom found it odd. It would have normally taken days or even a week or two for them to be scrambled for an operation again - and she knew that it was another operation because they wouldn't have contacted them otherwise.

"Hi," Blossom replied. "How can we help you, Miss Flight Control Seven?"

"Uh, you need to stop calling me that. Also, I'm married," the flight control officer broke a little before going back to her routine. "Now... Bravo-Four-Seven, we have a tip-off at the industrial district. Steele's Stellar Steel. Gunshots reported, possible USDO fatality. The police report at least a dozen perpetrators. Adjust your heading by 40 degrees to the right. Do you know where the industrial district is, Four-Seven?"

"Yes, Missus Flight Control Seven," Blossom said, her name change for the lady in the control tower had forced a sigh out of the normally expressionless voice. "I've been memorizing Miss Keane's maps."

For more than a month now, Miss Keane had been busy teaching the Girls some... extra-curricular topics. The map of Townsville, under 'geography', had been one of them. While Bubbles and Buttercup were only able to remember the most obvious landmarks and roads, with the both of them being uninterested in staring at a large piece of paper full of lines that could cause eye-bleed, Blossom was able to commit much of the map to memory. While she couldn't rightly recall every tiny little street and building, she knew the different districts, zones, highways, main roads, landmarks, and the more important buildings, from the City Hall to all the major police stations in the entire municipality.

"Course adjustment confirmed. Stay on course until you see a massive L-shaped, zinc-roofed factory in the middle of the industrial district, over and out." the flight control officer said hurriedly before signing off.

The City of Townsville. Industrial District. Steele's Stellar Steel.

3 Feb 1989 (Thursday). 1759.

When the Girls finally reached the site, they could hear sirens in the distance. The police had arrived, though they weren't breaching the site yet. A special police SWAT van with a spotlight mounted on top of it was shining some light into the sky, painting a pink circle with layers of hearts in it into the cloudy skies above. There was no mistaking it: they had found the place where they were needed.

They streaked across the sky, waving at the police officers on site, some of whom waved back. Not
all of them did. It seemed that no matter what they did, they couldn't please everybody. Blossom, most of all, had wondered a lot as to why that was - shouldn't all the policemen be glad they were fighting crime?

Landing on the zinc roof of the factory, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup immediately retracted their foldable wings and dumped their flight packs. They quickly threw off their jackets, making sure to stuff them under the flight packs so they wouldn't be carried off by the wind.

"I hope we won't be late for the masquerade…" Bubbles whispered, already afraid that some sharp-eared criminal could hear them, even though it would be impossible for a normal human being to do so while they were in the middle of a wintry windy day, outside.

"Shh!" Buttercup shushed her rudely. Blossom began doing her thing, concentrating on the roof she was standing on. It didn't take much concentration before she was able to see through the roof - it was rather thin after all, even if it was made of metal.

The factory was complicated inside. There were vats of molten steel, an area where they were cast into beams and bars and various other shapes. It had its own storage area, where finished products were put in huge boxes and containers until they were shipped off by semi-trucks. It didn't take long for Blossom to find the criminals in question. Most of them were holed up in the steel-casting area, about ten of them, which was like a long hall without a ceiling where steel was poured into different casts, and they looked like they were busy packing some things. A few, three of them, were in some kind of office, and they were kicking some person Blossom assumed they need to rescue. Missus Flight Control Seven did mention that there was a possible USDO fatality. There were catwalks above, forming a second floor, and they were occupied by a couple of patrolling thugs, one with an assault rifle and another with a sniper rifle. A control room for a crane loomed over some molten steel vats, and there was one man in there with a shotgun.

The Girls' radio crackled to life once more.

"This is Mullens, you kids there?" came a most celebrated voice. Blossom answered for the team. They smiled; they liked it better when it was Mullens representing the police. It would have been a coin toss if it was any old random copper - some were grouchy while some were okay, others hated them and still others loved them, but they could never know, and what they hated uncertainty. "Looks like we got to work together after all. Have you seen how many of them are there and where they are, Blossom?"

"Most of them are in this big place with all kinds of metal stuff," Blossom reported. "But some of them are on top and there's some in the place where the adults sit and work. There's twenty of them, I think."

"Must be the office," Mullens identified the place she couldn't name. "I've got ten good men here. You know what to do?"

"Do you want it like before, Mister Mullens?" Blossom asked.

"That'd work. Ladies first, then," Detective Mullens said.

Bubbles didn't like the sound of it the moment she heard that there were twenty bad guys for them to defeat. It made it more likely that something was going to go wrong. The last time they had fought so many had been a couple of weeks ago. Neither did she like the fact that they would have to do it like the 'last time' because it meant that she would have to go in first.

Buttercup had noticed the look on Bubbles' face. She knew immediately what it meant. She could
feel quite faintly what kind of emotions were running through her sister. A faint glimmer of sympathy asserted itself. "Bubbles, you'll be fine. You were fine the last time," she said. But it was but a glimmer, temporary and fleeting. She glared at her sister when the timid one wouldn't shape up on the spot. "Don't chicken out and ruin it, Bubbles!"

"Buttercup!" Blossom scolded the wayward one before turning to Bubbles and giving her a quick, reassuring hug. "We'll be right behind you, Bubs." She returned her stern gaze to Buttercup, who'd put on a defiant front against Blossom. "Buttercup, since you've been spoiling for a fight, you'll handle the big group - but don't kill any of them! I'll save the man in the office. Bubbles, just do your thing and if the bad guys on top are still shooting, knock them out."

---

**The City of Townsville. Industrial District. Steele's Stellar Steel.**

3 Feb 1989 (Thursday). 1801.

Taking a deep breath, Bubbles floated a few yards upwards and turned herself such that she was upside-down and facing the zinc roof of the steel factory. With a sudden, powerful thrust, she busted through the metal fist-first, baby blue light streaking behind her, before finding herself in a cavernous factory. She could see them all now - men and some women down below her, packing what appeared to be boxes of metal syringes, men on catwalks just about to react to her. Guns were quickly pointed at her, at which point she sucked in some air and let out an ear-piercing scream, forcing everyone in the factory to cover their ears and collapse behind some kind of cover. Windows everywhere were broken, the glass shards exploding outwards. Some of the criminals who weren't prepared for it were caught in some of the glassy blasts, injuring them.

The police officers outside were prepared for it, having known what would happen based on previous experiences. They'd hidden behind their squad cars to avoid the glass shrapnel flying everywhere. When all was quiet once more, Detective Mullens ordered his task force to move in before drawing and cocking his own pistol with his daughter by his side, who did the same.

Blossom and Buttercup crashed through the zinc roof the moment Bubbles' sonic scream had run its course, creating an even bigger hole. While Blossom was making a beeline towards the office, incredibly concerned for the man who was still getting beaten up, Buttercup dropped down in the middle of the storage area. Bubbles zipped towards the catwalk as quickly as she could - the last thing she wanted was to get shot, and even if she couldn't be injured by regular firearms, the sensation was still deeply unpleasant to her.

Shouldering her MP5, Buttercup tapped the safety off and began firing a few shots the moment she could feel concrete beneath her boots. Blossom had said not to kill, but she didn't say not to injure, and although she knew what her glorious leader was going to say when it was all over, she decided to play dumb and live in the moment.

In the ensuing confusion when the criminals were still incapacitated by Bubbles' sonic scream, she'd knocked several baddies out of the fight by shooting them in the legs before zooming to them in a blast of green light and kicking them when they were down, sometimes scattering teeth. Gunshots resounded all around her, but she was quick to dash around the storage area, knocking down a long and tall shelf when she couldn't turn in time, causing it to fall and crush a couple more criminals - not that she cared if they lived or died. Circling around another six or so remaining targets, she focused on them, and time slowed from her perspective when she was in the zone - before taking aim and firing some choice shots, putting bullets in the shoulder of one, the arm of another, and one unlucky soul had a bullet rip through his thigh.

Letting her MP5 hang on her neck, Buttercup rushed them as they were beginning to back away
and look for a way out.

In the meantime, Blossom barged through the door to the office, finding three men savaging another quite severely. Blood had spattered the surrounding cubicle walls and the victim was screaming hell and high heaven. Two of the thugs were kicking him, sometimes whipping their pistols at him. Another was using a lead pipe, now bloody.

"Hey!" Blossom yelled to get them to turn around, and when they did, the ones with the pistols pointed their weapons at her, but Blossom was faster with her eyes. Shooting out some quick infrared beams, their paths made visible as they were lined with Chemical X, she burned the men in the hands, forcing them to let go of their now-hot weapons. Blossom shot another pair of low-intensity heat beams quickly, knocking them down. One of them hurled on the floor before passing out in his own vomit.

Stubbornly, the last thug charged at her with his metal pipe. Swinging it at the floating little girl, he expected her to go down in one stroke, only for his lowly hope to be dashed to the wall when Blossom grabbed hold of his lead pipe mid-swing and gave him a kick to his face. He went down in a single hit.

Up on top, Bubbles barrelled into a criminal marksman as he was still recovering from her sonic scream - being closer to her, it was much more incapacitating to him than it was to his criminal peers on the ground. The tackle knocked him over the railing, at which point Bubbles quickly grabbed a hold of him by the arm and pulled him up. After taking his rifle and pistol and throwing them off the catwalk, she pulled a handcuff out of her belt and secured him to the railing.

"Sorry, Mister Bad Guy," she apologized before running towards the second-floor control room. Another guard stood not far away, and his friend's knock-down had bought him enough time to aim his hunting rifle and shoot.

*BAM!*

Bubbles didn't have time to react. The rifle slug had struck her in the throat, the surprisingly powerful force flooring her. Her ears rung. Flashes of bad memory pressed against her mind, and she could feel it crack. Her vision blurred. But she remembered her mission. Her need to keep things the same.

Flipping herself back up on her feet, she charged at her second target again, and when he fired another sniper shot at her, she ducked and narrowly avoided it. Coming up to him, she flew to his chest level and seized his gun by the barrel. Giving it a twist and breaking it, she knocked him over the head with it.

Just as he went down, the third suspect on the top floor got up and fired off his shotgun, alarming Bubbles when the pellets struck her all over her chest.

'Why does it have to be a shotgun!?' Bubbles thought as she slid on the grated metal floor of the walkway, right up to the wall of the crane control room. Pressing herself against it, she could feel her breath going out of control; she thought she might faint. She hated it when this happened, and she couldn't help but to cry softly as, just as much as she was afraid, she could feel the pressure to move forward when she imagined Blossom and Buttercup glaring and frowning at her for failing one thing or another – it'd happened before and it could happen again.

The shotgun-wielding shooter in the control station had heard her weeping. He couldn't tell before, but he believed he might have shot the one they called Bubbles. Might even have wounded it.
Badly shaken but determined to get out of this alive – the boss had promised to get him out of jail after some hard time – he opened the door as quietly as he could, his shotgun still pointed forward. He circled around the control station, and lowered his shotgun at where he presumed was the bioweapon... Only to find nothing on the grated floor.

"Huh?" He uttered, wondering where he could possibly look for a little girl in such a tight walkway, only to hear, vaguely, the sound of skin rubbing against dusty concrete above him. Looking up, he was barely even able to register a pair of glowing blue eyes in the dark before the thing jumped him, knocking him to the floor. It slammed his shotgun into his face. The shotgun went off again, and it seemed to have shaken the blue one.

"Stop shooting at me!" Bubbles screamed hysterically, more afraid than trying to intimidate. The man fell unconscious after that.

Back at the steel casting area, Buttercup was charging the remaining few suspects she had left to fight. They were firing at her, but she was dashing towards them in a zigzag pattern, making it hard for them to hit her.

One of them, however, hadn't fired a single shot. Instead, he was aiming his magnum pistol very carefully. After taking aim for some time, he fired. The gun exploded, but it released a Duranium slug, which whizzed towards Buttercup. He was a good shot too, and the bullet slid across Buttercup's side – causing a graze wound, a particularly painful one at that as the slug had shredded a lot of skin. Buttercup yelled in pain and clutched her side in as she tumbled towards the criminals, knocking over even more shelves, sending rebars crashing to the concrete floor. The criminals scattered, with three of them taking defensive positions elsewhere, knowing that escape was impossible, while one of them decided to try anyway.

At the same time, Bubbles had dashed outside to help Buttercup, only to discover the mayhem and destruction. She searched the storage area for Buttercup to discover her under some shelves, clutching her bleeding side. They were separated by shelves of concrete, and men were shooting at them.

She poked her head out in preparation for dashing to Buttercup's aid, but bullets were flying in her direction the moment she appeared. Two of them had shotguns, Bubbles knew. She'd seen the guns briefly, and she even knew how they sounded, how the shotgun pellets sounded when they struck the metal surface of her fallen shelf cover.

She ducked, well, more than ducked. She was flat out cowering behind her cover, overwhelmed by the irrationality ruling her mind. Try as she might, she couldn't overcome it. Every cloud of shotgun pellets sent her way had only made it worse, as they blew yet more holes in her flimsy cover.

That was when Blossom appeared. Unlike Bubbles, she didn't need to survey the scene the moment she arrived as she had already done it with her X-ray vision on the way. Zooming in the air towards Buttercup, she pulled the metal shelf off of her, before flanking the three bad guys, flying up to their side in an instant before letting loose a flurry of punches and kicks, knocking them out.

Buttercup was bitter, really bitter about the injury she suffered. She'd seen Blossom taking down the three criminals in their midst, but she knew there was one more, and she knew where he was going. As it just so happened, he happened to be the one who had fired the Duranium bullet, and so she set off after him, over catwalks on the first floor, in between vats of molten steel. It had bent at a right angle at some point, so she'd disappeared out of view from her sisters.

Back at the product storage area, Blossom flew towards Bubbles and landed next to her. Looking
down at the blue-eyed Angel of Justice, it was clear from the look on her face and the sweat covering it that she was terrified. Jumpy. The Girls did not sweat as easily as normal human beings because of their heat tolerance - Blossom, for one, had no problem taking hundreds and thousands of degrees of heat in her face whenever she fired her heat beams. That said, they could sweat out of nervousness or fear, and Bubbles, out of the three of them, was most prone to this.

"I'm sorry I-" Bubbles said apologetically as she continued to tremble where she was, sitting, still, behind her cover with her knees going up to her chest. "I can't..." And now, she was afraid of disappointing Blossom, her dearest sister - the one who actually cared.

"Oh, Bubbles..." Blossom muttered sympathetically before stretching a hand out for Bubbles to take. She didn't dare to take it because she was afraid Blossom might blow up. She was too spooked, and now every little thing was a source of terror to her. All Bubbles did was to stare feverishly at her as she rocked herself in her place as if trying desperately, and failing, to calm down on her own.

Meanwhile, Buttercup had caught up with her morbid attacker. It was clear that he had fired the shot that injured her, as his gun hand was singed from the chamber explosion; he had to sacrifice a gun ill-suited to Duranium shells to get what he wanted. Well, not exactly what he wanted - she was still alive, albeit with some skin on her side split into two. She could feel the blood pooling underneath her vest. The pain was fast becoming unbearable, and it made her really angry.

Pulling out her pistol, she fired a few shots at him in quick succession, putting a couple of bullets into the back of his calf and thigh as he was running, causing him to collapse painfully on the grated floor of the industrial catwalk. He tumbled further because of the momentum, still many yards away from the exit. Flying towards him, she had to push aside his arm when he tried to shoot her with another pistol. Taking him by the wrist, she gave it a snap, resulting in a cracking sound. The thug dropped his pistol with a frightened, agonized shout.

With the thug's broken wrist still in her hand, Buttercup threw a look behind her, worried that Blossom might just suddenly appear around the corner to lecture her about injuring a bad guy, but she was nowhere to be seen. In fact, she could hear what was going on with Blossom and Bubbles. Sweet little Bubbles needed some reassurance from Blossom, and her dear leader was providing it.

"I'm sorry I got scared..." Buttercup could hear Bubbles and her stupid, high-pitched voice. "Please don't be mad at me... I'm sorry..."

"You don't have to be sorry, Bubbles," Blossom comforted her bluish sister off in the unseen distance. Buttercup thought her predictable - she believed that Blossom had always favored Bubbles over her. "You've been doing so well for so long... Bad things happen, that's what Dad would say."

Looking back around at her attack, Buttercup stared at him hungrily, unable to contain her need for blood sport any longer.

"Please don't-" the man begged. "All I wanted was another shot of it!"

Buttercup couldn't understand him. 'Another shot of what?' was as much thought as she was willing to give the man. Nor did she care enough to even try. With a smile that only a sick mind could make, she thrust her fist at his shoulder, dislocating it. With a foot on his side, began pulling at his arm by the broken wrist. It didn't take long for her to remove his arm with a splash of blood and the sickening crack of bone and cartilage. Buttercup thought she was fortunate when she didn't get much of it on her. One less evidence that she had done something wrong.
The man couldn't even scream as he was in shock. Tossing the arm aside, she flipped the man on his back and landed on her knees on top of his chest. Forcing open his mouth, she seized his upper row of teeth greedily and yanked, pulling out multiple teeth at once. She stuffed the bony trophies into her pocket.

Buttercup looked over her shoulder once more. Nothing.

"I'm sorry I made you go alone..." Buttercup could hear Blossom whisper to their mousy little sister. With a chuckle as she relished the opportunity, she delivered a few multi-ton punches to her attacker's face, caving his skull in and dislodging one side of his jaw. Huge and dark unsightly bruises were formed instantly on his jaw.

The thug's eyes were still open, rolling towards her. It was nothing short of a miracle that he was still alive - a fact that Buttercup would soon correct after she'd had her fill.

Getting off the thug, she began kicking at him, breaking a few ribs, puncturing a few organs, before stomping him in a lung, collapsing a part of his chest cavity. "Ew!" she cried, but with ecstasy as blood exploded outwards, covering her boot. She had even forgotten, briefly, that she was injured by a Duranium bullet, or why she was hurting the man in the first place other than the fact that she enjoyed hurting him.

He was still alive if falling into unconsciousness rapidly. Buttercup thought it strange that a man could survive such trauma, but the thought was fleeting - the pleasure of hurting was paramount.

When Buttercup was done torturing the man to her delight, not that she could do so for very long as she was afraid of being discovered by Blossom, she cracked a smile at the quivering thug, before seizing him by the windpipe. Digging into his throat, she felt around for the actual organ as the man croaked his last. When she could get a grip, she yanked it out, quickly silencing the man.

Walking around him, she put a foot on his shoulder and, with both hands clutching the jaws, tugged hard at the head. With a final yank, she was able to pull the head out along with the spine and gullet. She giggled childishy as she watched the head come off like the head of an action figure or a Lego man. She had rehearsed this for quite a long while with her toys - and her toys, so plastic and simple, could only last her for so long. More blood had splashed on the ground, though she was careful in avoiding it.

"Now where's Buttercup?" she heard Blossom wonder aloud far away, her super-acute sense of hearing still active. Gasping, she looked around the factory for a place to hide her handiwork. Flying upwards, with the thug's head and spine still in her hands, she spotted just the thing: an empty molten steel crucible, with a giant trough of molten steel yet to be transferred to it. Throwing the head anxiously, Buttercup zipped down to the catwalk to grab the body, then up again to do the same thing with it. Speeding to the molten steel trough, she tilted it by the machine handle and dumped the whole thing in. She had to bear with the pain in her side and clench her teeth all the while, as she had agitated her wound in the process of hiding her crime.

"What's that noise?" Buttercup heard Blossom say, probably to Bubbles. Dashing down to the catwalk, she sat herself down, leaning against the railing. She didn't have to act as if she was in agony, because she was. The graze wound felt like fire or acid, and it wasn't the kind that could be wiped away.

The wayward one had been on time. The moment she sat down with a whimper of pain, Blossom and Bubbles had rounded the corner, spotting her.

"Oh no!" Bubbles yelped in horror when she saw Buttercup.
"Buttercup!" Blossomed screamed when she saw her sister. Buttercup's hands were covered in blood, and the others assumed it was hers. All thoughts of curiosity and suspicion had evaporated when she saw Buttercup injured on the floor.

Blossom and Bubbles dashed towards her, reaching her within a second. In the meantime, the police had breached the factory from every entrance, including the exit just down the catwalk the thug was trying to get to.

Buttercup was a mistress of deception compared to her sisters, and shedding crocodile tears was within her arsenal. This time, however, she didn't have to act. Her face was scrunched up in pain, her tears real.

"Let me see it. Maybe I can fix it like last time," Bubbles said as she knelt down beside Buttercup and reached for the Velcro holding her vest together.

But Buttercup turned to her with a glare and pushed her away so hard that she fell on her bum, doing so both out of anger and fear of pain, as well as a form of distraction from her murderous deed.

"Don't touch me, Bobblehead!" Buttercup cried as she tried to adjust her sitting position only to feel what felt like a spike driven into her side. She gave up after that. Pointing an accusing finger at Bubbles, she lashed out at her instead: "I saw you, you crybaby! You left me there and wouldn't come out. You're a coward!"

"Buttercup!" Blossom said but could say no further. Her green-eyed sister had put her in a dilemma. She wasn't wrong at all to be angry at Bubbles, as she had been guilty of inaction and cowardice, forcing her to pick up the slack. However, it didn't make Buttercup's mean words and aggression right.

Bubbles didn't get up from the floor, instead crawling to the opposite railing and sitting there, leaning against it. 'What's the point anyway?' she thought. In her mind, her world had come crashing down in an instant, because of this stupid operation. She had always feared that this would happen, and so the month of peace she had bought for herself felt uneasy at times.

"I'm sorry…” she mewed, on the verge of tears. There was so much she wanted to say, but couldn't. There was a kind of terror in her that wouldn't let go – but trying to defend herself with what felt like a spike driven into her side. She gave up after that. Pointing an accusing finger at Bubbles, she lashed out at her instead: "I saw you, you crybaby! You left me there and wouldn't come out. You're a coward!"

"Buttercup!" Blossom said but could say no further. Her green-eyed sister had put her in a dilemma. She wasn't wrong at all to be angry at Bubbles, as she had been guilty of inaction and cowardice, forcing her to pick up the slack. However, it didn't make Buttercup's mean words and aggression right.

Bubbles didn't get up from the floor, instead crawling to the opposite railing and sitting there, leaning against it. 'What's the point anyway?' she thought. In her mind, her world had come crashing down in an instant, because of this stupid operation. She had always feared that this would happen, and so the month of peace she had bought for herself felt uneasy at times.

"Be sorry all you want, Bubbles!" Buttercup continued to whale at Bubbles with her sharp words, some of which were partly inspired by Mommy. "You're still a dirty little coward no one likes!"

That had gotten Bubbles going with her tears and crying. In the distance on the catwalk, four police officers stood there and watched – the Girls had been blocking the way, and they didn't want to get involved in what they saw as an internal dispute.

"Oh great," Blossom muttered, and couldn't help but to feel a little helpless because of her sisters. But she would have to work with what situation she was dealt with. "She's really sorry now, Buttercup. Can I see where you're hurt now?"

"He shot me here…” Buttercup said as she patted her side very gently, off-center from the wound as she was too afraid of touching it. "It really hurts."
"Here, let me see," Blossom said as she reached for her Velcro, at first wary that Buttercup might lash out at her just like she did with Bubbles, but when Buttercup allowed her to get closer, began undoing the Velcro, trying very hard to ignore Buttercup's cries of pain.

"Down on the ground!" a police officer shouted in the distance, likely warning a suspect who was still conscious.

"This is the police, drop your weapon!" another officer ordered elsewhere. They could hear some scuffles and the sound of cuffs closing and locking.

Buttercup's wound did not look good the moment Blossom was able to remove her ballistic vest. The shirt underneath was torn where she was shot. It was like someone had tried to skin her alive – the Duranium bullet had scraped itself a path along her skin in her side. She'd bled a lot from it, but at least the bleeding had clotted.

Heavyweight footsteps stomped in their direction, and when Blossom turned around to see who it was, it turned out to be Detective Mullens.

"Holy- you Girls alright?" he asked as he put away his revolver and came closer. Bubbles was still having a meltdown on the grated catwalk, while Buttercup was wincing in pain. They looked like anything but alright, so the detective did not press his question any further.

"Buttercup's hurt," Blossom said and got out of the way to show him the wound.

"Now that's not good," the detective acknowledged. "Aren't one of you the team medic or something?"

"I don't want that loser anywhere near me!" Buttercup cried. Bubbles cried even harder when she heard it.

It didn't take a detective to figure out what was going on, but Mullens did not pursue the matter. He knew that the Girls had their differences, but he thought that it was something only they could solve on their own.

"Hey, Moe! Get a first-aid kit right away!" Mullens called out to one of the police officers still looking at the Girls. Shrugging off his trench coat and hanging it on the catwalk railing, he rolled up his sleeves. "I'll patch you up real quick. I've had to do it way too many times, so I know what I'm doing."

Buttercup smiled at Mullens, not just because she was glad to receive the attention, but also because the arm she had pulled out of the thug who shot her was safely out of sight, having fallen under the catwalk over the railing when she threw it away - she hadn't planned on that, and it felt like lady luck was with her.
Chapter 6: Fresh Scents

Chapter Summary

Detective Mullens gained some new leads when it came to his mission to take down the Amoeba Boys, thanks to Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup. The Girls meet a new friend.

Chapter 6: Fresh Scents

The City of Townsville. Industrial District. Steele's Stellar Steel.

3 Feb 1989 (Friday). 1821.

"It's only going to hurt for a second, okay?" Mullens warned Buttercup. He had carried her to the storage area where the criminals she had beaten into submission were being held. It was brighter there, and there was an administrative table for her to sit on. While one of his task force colleagues had gone to fetch the first-aid kit, he went on ahead to prepare Buttercup for treatment, removing the top of her uniform, then the singlet underneath. It didn't improve how the wound looked.

He could see the muscle underneath and the skin was torn like paper. Blood was clotted all around.

"Please don't…" Buttercup was straight up crying, a reminder that he'd been dealing with a kid all along. Sometimes, he'd forget this simple fact, and now it broke his heart to see the toughest of The Three this way, even though he knew that she wasn't quite right in the head.

"I'm going to have to do it, it's for your own good," Detective Mullens said as he held a bottle of disinfectant and a gauze soaked with it. "Just hold your breath and think happy thoughts." Gently, he tapped Buttercup's graze wound lightly with the gauze, himself wincing when Buttercup outright screamed like the baby girl she was supposed to be.

Blossom could feel Buttercup's hand tighten around hers, hard. But it was over quickly, as Mullens had promised.

"There you go," the detective said. "You took it like a champ, Buttercup. You should be proud of your sister, Blossom. Don't forget to tell your father about the wound. He'd know what to do with it." With that, he grabbed a roll of bandages from the first-aid kit. Unfurling it, he began wrapping it around Buttercup's side, stomach and back. He wouldn't be running out anytime soon - Buttercup, like her sisters, was so small, being physically five - another reminder of the odd Townsville fact that the city's rising heroines were kindergartners.

When he was done, he tied the bandage around Buttercup's back. "And what do you say, Buttercup?" he asked candidly.

"Thanks, Mister Mullens," Buttercup said, her tears drying up quickly. She was the toughest of The Three, after all. And now Mullens could only wonder how Bubbles was doing. He knew that Bubbles was the sensitive one, and so he knew that facing rejection from her own sister must had been very hard to take. Nevertheless, he had a solution for that too, and it wouldn't hurt as much as the solution he dabbed onto Buttercup's wound.
The City of Townsville. Industrial District. Steele's Stellar Steel.

3 Feb 1989 (Friday). 1822.

Bubbles was still crying long after facing an angry Buttercup. As there was still work to be done, Blossom had no choice but to dismiss her, and so Bubbles ran out of the factory and sat in an alley all alone, on the snowy floor. It was cold, but Bubbles didn't care. To her, the temperature was nothing next to what she had just suffered. 'Just let her go, Blossom! She's useless anyway,' Buttercup had said when she thought that she was out of earshot - and she'd heard it clearly.

But she didn't have to be alone for long. A German Shepherd was padding up to her, and when she looked up to see who was approaching her, she saw that it wasn't a normal dog. It was wearing a canine Kevlar vest with 'TPD' clearly printed on either side, and it even had a helmet with shades over its eyes. It was larger than most German Shepherds, not that Bubbles had any basis for comparison. Oddly enough, it had a radio attached to the 'chest' of its vest with an earpiece going up to its left ear, as well as a pistol and several magazines holstered on its back - even if the dog could use them, they'd be out of its reach.

The dog came up next to her, panting. Bubbles, so curious that she had (mostly) stopped crying, pushed her legs down and away from her chest. She put her hand out and the German Shepherd started licking her fingers. Bubbles was still sniffling and tears continued to fall - and it was as if the dog noticed it. Snuggling up closer to her, it began licking her in the cheeks and nose, and it felt good - it felt as if someone cared. Just when Bubbles thought she could never do so again, she giggled and laughed as the dog continued licking.

"See? Rit's rot so bad now, ris it?" the German Shepherd said, out of the blue, out of nowhere, totally unexpectedly. Bubbles' eyes widened and she practically jumped away from it and knocked over the oil barrels she was hiding behind. "Wrrroops! Sorry! Didn't rean to scare you!"

Bubbles was completely speechless. A talking dog? How? Why? Where did it come from?

"Y-you can talk?" Bubbles stammered as she continued staring at the dog, unable to believe what was standing before her.

(Linguistic Analysis: Subject known as 'the talking dog' substitutes sounds made by the lips almost always with a growling 'R' sound, as well as adds the 'R' sound to some words. Sometimes, the 'R' sound is added at random, perhaps due to habit.)

"Ri sure can, sister," the German Shepherd said, then sat on its hind and used its right forepaw to push its shades up, revealing intelligent eyes that glowed brown faintly. "Rell, rat reast you're rot crying row."

Bubbles considered its - his words for a moment. He had intended to comfort her. She smiled at the gesture, and at how magical the moment was.

"There ryou go! Rook rat you," the dog continued as he wagged his tail. Bubbles smiled even wider. "You're reautiful when you do that, at least ras far ras huran females go. Re glad you're not rocked berind a face as rigid as rine."

"Thanks," Bubbles said, but struggled to decide how to address the dog. The fact that it could talk so intelligently had made things less clear. "Urm… Should I call you doggy?"

"Ronly ry friends call me that, not that you're rot a friend, rof course," the enhanced German
Shepherd rambled on. Bubbles thought that it sure could talk in volumes, not that she minded it. "Ahem." The dog straightened his back and peaked his ears. "Ratrol-dog Stanley Talker at your service. That is, Ri actually just graduated from the police academy, by the way. Rafter a crash course, of course. They couldn't wait to rut re rout here."

Bubbles hugged the talking dog, and as he stopped talking, gave him a squeeze and taking her time to enjoy the moment.

"Thanks, Mister Stanley," Bubbles said after letting go of the dog.

"Ront' retention rit," the dog said. "Now how rabout re get rack rinside? Rit's cold rout here. Say, ranna ride me rin? Ri'll roffer rit free this time. Rhat do you say?"

Bubbles beamed at him for the offer. The talking dog was even big enough to act as a mount for Bubbles as she was only five years old, physically. It felt like a dream come true, riding a magical dog back to her sisters, except it was beyond what she had dreamed up thus far for her drawings.

"Can I really!?" Bubbles squealed excitedly.

"Roff course you can. Rop on!" Talker said, coming up beside her so she could mount up. Bubbles floated over him before letting herself drop on top of him, and when she did, he didn't seem to feel the weight. As it turned out, the talking dog had been enhanced in physical strength as well. "Row! Ri rish ri could fly like you. Ranyway, here goes."

With that, Patrol-dog Stanley Talker took off towards the cargo bay door of the factory, proud that he had done a good job at doing what Detective Mullens had ordered him over the radio to do.

"Did anyone ever told you that you talk funny?" Bubbles giggled as the enhanced German Shepherd bounded towards the cargo bays of the factory.

"Rall the time! Huran sreech ris hard!" the talking dog explained.

"Doesn't fit ry rout!" he panted as he transported the girl, as if proving his point that his mouth had difficulty in forming the words.

---

**The City of Townsville. Industrial District. Steele's Stellar Steel.**

3 Feb 1989 (Friday). 1823.

The man Blossom rescued was in bad shape. His jacket was soaked through with blood, his skin breached by bone at multiple places. The paramedic attending to him had pronounced his chance of survival to be uncertain. While having over a dozen broken bones did not threaten his life, the massive internal bleeding and major organ damage did. While he was being brought out on a stretcher, Blossom stayed with him, feeling sorry for the man even though she didn't know him.

But Captain Caylon 'Butch' Butcher, the USDO representative who had just arrived on the scene, knew the man. As the paramedics were carrying the man out, he and his SWAT soldiers had stopped them so he could question him.

Blossom had found out then that the injured man was a USDO infiltrator working under Jackard of USDO Intelligence. The rest she figured out on her own: he was found out by the bad guys in the factory, who proceeded to beat him to a pulp, and they would have executed him too, had she been too late.
Despite the paramedics' protest, Captain Butcher had his soldiers put the man on a table to make questioning him easier. Blossom was there, and so was Detective Mullens.

"What did you find out?" Captain Butcher had asked the intelligence agent, dispassionate, distant, his voice surprisingly wispy and whispery. Unknown to Blossom, the captain was a USDO operative who had lived up to his surname - whose leadership style and combat technique was brutal even by USDO standards. He had no compunction whenever he did whatever it took to carry out his duties, even if he had to shred apart a hundred civilians to get to a single mutant freak in Afghanistan, he'd do it without hesitation. He would tear a woman tied to a chair apart one strip of skin after another, one shred of muscle after the next, if it meant finding out about the most remote and briefest of intel about a target he was hunting down. And he'd do it until she had no legs left, too. Even General Blackwater was wary of the man, and not just when it came to deploying him.

But Blossom was catching up quickly, as there was a certain aura around the man - the way he spoke, the way he carried himself, how eerie the silence was around him had told Blossom the truth about Captain Butcher.

The Infiltrator could barely even move. When he did, he'd put his hand into his pocket and took something out - even this gesture alone seemed like too much from the way the man's hand had quivered from the effort.

He was grasping a pendant of sorts, and as if the weight of it was too much, he dropped it on the table. Captain Butcher took it by the cord and brought it up to get a better view of it under the light. The pendant was teardrop-shaped, with the symbol of what appeared to be a crab claw in it. The captain turned to Blossom, who jumped when he did.

"This familiar to you, lab rat?" he asked brusquely. When Blossom wouldn't answer out of fear, he widened his eyes and contorted his face as if offended. He continued in an insultingly patronizing tone: "Does the little girl need a doggy treat before she answers?"

"N-no," Blossom answered meekly, her eyes going to the table and the severely injured operative as she couldn't bear to meet Captain Butcher's steely eyes. "It's not."

"Let me see it," Detective Mullens put his hand out for the captain to hand the pendant over, at the same time giving the captain an angry stare. The USDO officer did it reluctantly as if the detective himself was an enemy to be watched carefully. When it was in his hands, the detective did the same thing as the captain, holding it under the glow of the fluorescent lamp overhead. "The Cult of His Arm. Junior branch of The Cult of His Promise."

An unintelligible whisper interrupted the detective. Both men and Blossom turned to him. When the injured infiltrator couldn't speak loud enough, he used his finger instead, and, with his blood, wrote with a shivering hand a word on the metal table that was almost as unintelligible as his whisper.

'DRUG', the detective was finally able to make out what it said after a hard stare. Of course. He had a brainwave after that. The cults were working with the Lombardi. Why wouldn't they? While it may seem that they were just a bunch of nut jobs worshiping some invented deity in a new age religion, they were a fringe group full of outcasts. The Lombardi was a fringe group full of outcasts. It would make sense for them to be in it together. The detective had seen his fair share of dangerous cults in Townsville. Some were suicide cults that went extinct one way or another - he'd helped saved some but lost some. Couldn't prevent people from believing that they should off themselves because the apocalypse was upon them. But then there were the more dangerous kinds that only Townsville was capable of producing, and they would make Charles Manson look like a
Christian boy scout.

Yet The Cult of His Arm, and the biggest nuthouse of them all, The Cult of His Promise, seemed to exist on a totally different plane of existence altogether. He'd heard the stories, done enough cases to know that they weren't the kind of people to trifle with. There was a reason why they had continued to exist for a couple of decades, despite the rumors and cases against them, and it wasn't because they had been taking in the poor - well, unless it was because they had been taking in the poor for special reasons. Cult reasons.

The connection was immediately obvious. His Secret was likely manufactured in part or whole by the cult. At that moment, Detective Mullens believed that he had finally made progress in his case against the Lombardi.

"Hmm. I can speak for the USDO. We know about the loonies, alright," Captain Butcher said. "Looks like we have more targets in our sights."

In that instant when the USDO officer had verbally abused Blossom, the detective knew that he would hate the man with a passion, but for now, he could agree with him.

"Not yet. We'll have to do some sniffing and scout around before we pick a spot to raid," the detective said.

"I'll make sure the USDO council knows about this," Captain Butcher said, his voice still a deadly whisper. "And then it'll be extermination time soon enough."

"Speaking of sniffing…" the detective said, and as if he knew, he turned to the cargo bay doors near the storage area. Sure enough, what appeared to be a German Shepherd with the TPD's K-9 unit had come in from under a half-closed bay door, curiously without a handler but with Bubbles on its back. It came running towards them like a mini pony with a princess on top of it. Blossom stared in disbelief at Bubbles; a little girl in SWAT gear riding a dog in what amounted to canine SWAT gear wasn't a common sight. Buttercup had flown over to the men and her sister to look.

"Thanks, Mister Stanley," Bubbles thanked the dog, who was panting enthusiastically after he had done his job.

"Talking to animals again, Bubbles?" Buttercup taunted with her arms crossed, still sore about Bubbles' cowardice. The German Shepherd snapped his head towards Buttercup and growled as a normal dog would.

"Grrr… Who're you calling ranimal?" the talking dog growled and revealed its true nature. Buttercup's eyes widened with surprise. Blossom, who was previously just looking away, did a double take on the dog. Captain Butcher didn't seem surprised to hear the dog speak. Neither did Detective Mullens. Olivia was coming up to them too, and she didn't seem disturbed at all. Blossom and Buttercup looked at each other, then from one person to the next, and could only wonder what was going on.

The detective broke into a pleasant smile - it was rare seeing him like this, even after he had tidied up and sworn off the alcohol and cigarettes.

"Girls, meet the one and only talking dog," the detective introduced the German Shepherd to Blossom and Buttercup.

"Rame's Stanley Talker," the dog managed his own chosen name confidently - there were consonants that were mostly inaccessible to the dog because of the structure of his mouth, and this
time, they weren't there. He wagged his tail in anticipation - even before he'd met Bubbles, he'd known about The Three from within the TPD. He saw them as his kin - born from chemicals. Him from W, they from X. They were all from the USDO, and he assumed that the four of them had a love-hate relationship going with the USDO. "Rit's rice to reet you."

"You get to ride him, Bubs?" Buttercup said in disbelief. "Why don't I get to do that? I deserve it more!"

"Rot fror where Ri stand," Talker criticized, his eyes pinned on Buttercup as if she was prey. He knew that something was up between Bubbles and Buttercup. It became quite obvious when he saw Bubbles' human expression turning into one that meant sadness, an analogue to a dog's limp ears and tail.

"Caught any new scents outside, Talker?" Detective Mullens asked.

"Hrrr… r-no. Revery-rone's rin here," the talking dog reported as it sniffed at the air again. He then turned to the suspects being held at the storage area, who were being guarded by police officers both uniformed and plains-clothed. "Strange, some-rone's rissing. Ringering smell, rut no rore fresh scent."

The detective turned to the Girls. "Did anyone escape?" he asked.

"Not that I know of," Blossom said, then turned to Buttercup, who was panicking a little inside because of her dirty little secret, though she managed to keep it locked behind her face and teeth. "Buttercup?"

"They were all here. I fought them all," Buttercup lied.

"Then what were you doing at the corridor?" Blossom pressed her wayward sister.

"I… just needed a place to sit down," Buttercup tried to build on her lie, and she had just the thing. She turned to glare at Bubbles. "It wasn't exactly safe to sit where I was. Right, Bubbles?"

"Bubbles? Seen anyone bailing out?" the detective asked the last of The Three, but she seemed down once more, but at least she wasn't crying.

"No…” Bubbles mewled, shaking her head without looking up. The talking dog looked on, concerned.

"I didn't see anyone in a hurry outside either. No tracks in the snow. No blood, no personal effects discarded. Not so much as even a spit of saliva," Olivia, who had just joined them, reported.

"Hrrr… Could re possible some-rone left refore the Girls came rin," the talking dog suggested. "Strange rthough, recause Ri didn't catch fresh scents rof him routeide reither."

"I guess it's time I start 'interviewing' my customers," the detective said, with a dash of severity and callousness in his voice. "I guess you Girls are done here. You may go."

The talking dog, still concerned for Bubbles, had put a paw in her hand, and she held it tightly. Stanley Talker thought that it was a shame he didn't have more time to spend with Bubbles - she seemed like a nice kid, and especially in need. But their paths had inevitably separated them - he had long switched owners from the USDO to the TPD, while the Angels of Justice he heard so much about, as far as he knew, were still owned by the USDO.

"Can't I help?" Buttercup asked the detective as she subtly peeked at the suspects with bloodlust in
her eyes. "Like last time? With Marcello?"

"Nah, I'm good. Besides, you're hurt and… Don't you have some party to attend?" the detective scrounged for an excuse.

The party. The masquerade ball. Buttercup could vomit from thinking about it. The truth was, she would rather tear a man from limb to limb here - she'd done it to one of the bad guys and it felt good. The look on the man's face, his fear, the way the meat felt as she separated them - the act of discovering what was inside a man. The satisfaction and feeling of power when it came from it, the cathartic rush of adrenaline, felt so good. Once she'd tasted it, she simply wanted more.

"Alright. Goodbye, Mister Mullens, Olivia. It's nice to meet you, Mister Stanley Talker. Let's go, Girls," Blossom ordered and took flight with Bubbles waving goodbye to Stanley Talker. Buttercup followed reluctantly. She would have to find another opportunity to hurt someone and collect more trophies the next time.
Chapter 7: Smoke and Mirrors

Chapter Summary

The Girls get ready to go to Elodie 'Princess' Morbucks' masquerade ball.

Chapter 7: Smoke and Mirrors

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1904.

Blossom found the image in the standing mirror unreal. It was simply amazing what a few bits of extra cloth, stones, and some powders and liquid could do to a girl. She was standing in a sparkling, dark pink sequin dress, complete with a black choker, sash and wrist ribbon to contrast the sparkly pink. She had rings on her fingers, inlaid with rose quartz and onyx. She was paler than normal, the result of the make-up Selicia had helped apply, and it'd helped bring out the red-themed lipsticks, eyeliners, and eyeshadow. All that was left was the hair, and even without a do-over of her hair, she didn't look like some 3-month-old lab-grown bioweapon of a killing machine routinely sent to tango with the dregs of the dregs. Instead, she looked like someone as rich as Princess, and she believed that that was her Mom's intention.

She had been waiting on Bubbles, who was absentmindedly brushing her hair, still no doubt fighting off her newly-acquired demons from the steel factory. Her pigtails seemed a little lopsided, there were some strands of golden hair sticking out, and her tears were ruining her make-up. It hurt Blossom to see her like this when they were so close to Princess’ masquerade ball, something they had been looking forward to all week. Well, she and Bubbles anyway.

Coming up to Bubbles, Blossom took a silk handkerchief and wiped her tears away. Taking the brush away from her, she put it down and began undoing her pigtails, just so that she could give her hair the attention of someone less emotionally affected, and highly skillful.

"It's over, Bubbles. Those men and women were taken away," Blossom tried to calm her sister down. "You don't have to be afraid anymore."

"You don't understand. It's never over," Bubbles tried to make her understand, but what she was truly saying was lost on her. How could it never be over when it obviously was? Blossom could never understand, not with three months of life experience. Sure, she'd had her episode when Bubbles was nearly killed, but she'd mostly gotten over that when they'd chased all the monsters away back in Morbucks Industries Research Labs.

They were silent for a while, as Blossom did one pigtail then the next, making sure that her hair was symmetrical, falling beautifully like fountains on either side of Bubbles' head. Bubbles was wearing a similar dress, except with dark blue sequins. Instead of a choker, she had a necklace full of sapphires instead, though her sash and wrist ribbon were the same. Her ruined make-up had been blue-themed instead. The blue lipstick was especially unique.

"I wish I'm a normal little girl," Bubbles lamented as she looked at herself at the mirror, just imagining how she'd look like as a regular little girl. How her eyes would look like when they did
"I don't know…" Blossom said. "Normal little girls don't get to fight crime and save innocent people."

"But I don't want to fight crime," Bubbles said, trying not to cry anew. "I'm not good at it anyway. Buttercup's right. I'm a loser." Recalling what Buttercup had said to her in the steel factory and how she treated her had made not crying challenging. It was a challenge she was losing. Blossom had to wipe away the tears a few times more to prevent Bubbles' makeup from being further eroded.

"Buttercup will cool off – you know how she's like – don't listen to her angry talk, Bubbles. You were good," Blossom tried to praise Bubbles, but she had to believe very hard in her own lie. On one hand, Bubbles did take down three of the drug smugglers in the factory and she had the sonic scream to boot, which was perfect for the opening they had devised. But then again, she had cowered in a corner when Buttercup needed help - even when all it took was a few punches to knock out the remaining armed thugs.

"I was really scared…" Bubbles confessed again. When she saw that her pigtails were done, she turned to Blossom. "How are you not scared?"

That was when the door opened, and Selicia Goodwin, their Mom, stood at the doorway. She was wearing a seductive black dress with a split skirt, necklaces with some green stones in them, and lots of other jewelry and accessories with a green-black theme. Like them, she had worn make-up to make herself seem paler to contrast her everything else. Her jade eyes, like that of Buttercup minus the glow, was emphasized that way. Ever since settling down as the Girls' 'mother' and Thomas' 'wife', she had been growing her hair, and with some careful nurturing, had managed to lengthen them by two inches. Now, they were touching her shoulders.

"You Girls done yet?" she asked as she leaned against the door frame. Bubbles turned to her, and Selicia frowned when she saw what she had done to her makeup by crying. "Bubbles! I worked hard on that, you-!" She sighed, exasperated by how weak Bubbles was - after all, she had faced worse and gotten severely wounded without shedding so much as a teardrop - without so much as an ounce of Chemical X in her.

Bubbles' eyes returned to the floor in shame. It was the first time in weeks since Mommy had scolded her like that. Selicia, perhaps wanting to keep the peace as well, stopped herself before she blew up, no matter how hard it was. Years upon years of pent-up rage, discontentment and injustice were hard to put a lid on, but she knew she had to try… at least for Thomas.

"Argh! Go to mommy's dressing table and I'll do it again, alright, honey?" Selicia ordered Bubbles, her voice still shaking a little from repressed anger. It wasn't just the past, nor Bubbles, that she was angry and upset with. "Now, Bubbles. Just wait for me there, okay? I need to have a little girl-to-girl chat with Blossom."

---


3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1908.

It had been a long day, but to Garrett Mullens, it was about to get longer. To him, there was no start or end to a day. His life had just been one long day, ever since the night that marked the start of Townsville's descent into Crimesville when criminals would blatantly step in front of a police car and unload a submachinegun on it. His partner and best friend twenty years ago had died in that shooting. He'd been limping on ever since - even though his leg wound had healed completely.
He'd been hard at work behind his desk, pulling red strings from one pin to another, drawing a web of fate like a spider's, a web that was meant to trap the Amoeba Boys. He would have felt like celebrating had he been 21 years younger. He'd finally added a new polaroid to his evidence board after more than two weeks of cold trails, smoke screens, and mirrors. It was truly surprising how a huge criminal network like the Lombardi's could just disappear when they need to - it was proof that they were still rats under all that glitter of success, under all those fine suits, cigars and champagne.

The shootout at Steele's Stellar Steel had been a lucky break. Although he hadn't had the time to grill all of the suspects at the crime scene in detail yet, the cargo they were trying to ship and their names were all that was needed for him to pin it on the Lombardi and their trio of bulletproof dons. That, coupled with the pendant the USDO infiltrator had gotten, had ensured that his case, too, was bulletproof.

They had been shipping more of the strange street drug, His Secret. He still thought that the name was an odd choice. Normally, street names for street drugs were chosen for simplicity and ease of communication, to be whispered softly between dealer and user. More than a month ago, back when he was still one of those who thought that Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were more hindrance than help, more a joke than the jagged edge of the USDO, he had sent His Secret to the lab for testing. For two weeks, they'd tried to identify every component, and for two weeks, they'd failed. It'd been making the rounds from expert to expert since, but none of them could make heads or tails of the main bulk of the stuff beyond the solvent.

Shouldn't chemistry be straightforward to those guys?

Some of the suspects had links to the Lombardi. Enough to pin it on them. One of them had cracked under the promise of a dose of His Secret, that the Lombardi was working with the various weird cults of Townsville. The Cult of His Promise had a big part to play in this. The Cult of His Arm formed the muscle under the Lombardi skin this time.

That one confession had widened the playing field, brought in more players. And opportunities. And he had the cards to go all in on it. Ever since helping to detect the terrorist attack that would begin in the Morbucks labs and sending the Girls their way, the big shots (beyond his negligent police chief) had taken notice of him and what he was doing. He had been promoted after years of being in a career dead-end, and he was given the task force he needed to bring down the mob - or at least the biggest one of them all. The sideshows could wait.

Soon, he didn't know when he'd be raiding a cult compound. It wouldn't be easy, but as long as he wasn't up against a supercomputer monkey with a psychotic grudge against men in uniforms… He could almost taste the day when he could finally walk up to the Amoeba Boys, slap some cuffs on them and bring them in.

"Dad? Dad!" he hadn't heard Olivia's voice until the third time. He turned around, shocked. It was his daughter, standing behind him, looking pretty confident in her plain clothes. Finally a detective. He couldn't be prouder. The old lady would have been very proud, had she still been around. "I swear, you'll be working yourself to death if you keep this up, and then we'll have to arrest the Amoeba Boys without you. Anyway, here's a little something from the mail."

His daughter had been more right than she knew. The detective could already feel like he had a foot in the grave, a consequence of being so close to finishing something huge, or so his old man would have him believe - that was what his father had felt like when he was about to fight one of the final battles of World War I.

Olivia handed something to him, and it landed on his desk. A manila envelope, with crudely
written address, likely done so with adult supervision, judging by the poor and inconsistent handwriting. The letter was likely from a kid. Something even a green detective would have easily figured out.

"What's this?" Detective Mullens asked, genuinely surprised. "Last time I checked, I haven't had a fan mail since over a decade ago. The kids absolutely hated me whenever I hit their classrooms." He meant it in more ways than one, whether it was visiting a school to give a police lecture, or to arrest some juveniles for drug or alcohol possession. Or murder. In Townsville, even the kids were suspects.

"Open it," Olivia gently demanded, putting both hands on his shoulders. Detective Mullens did as she had requested, tore the envelope and pulled out something thick in it. It was a drawing block folded in half. He opened it, and was immediately greeted by some colorful words declaring 'Happy Birthday!' Below those gigantic letters was him, drawn as a crude cartoon character, complete with an oversized trench coat, with Blossom on his right, Bubbles on his left and Buttercup next to Blossom. There was a building resembling the milk bar they had gone to a few weeks ago, which looked a little like a trailer, now that he thought about it.

Each of the Girls had likely contributed to the drawing block card, as the styles were radically different between the different elements of the pictures. There was a police-tank-thing at a corner done in thick and heavy-handed strokes of crayon, likely Buttercup's handiwork. Some scrawling on the bottom left could only belong to Blossom, who was faster than the others in learning how to write. Despite the age of the writer, the words were pretty little curves, if hard to read. 'Thank you, Mister Mullens! Maybe we should celebrate your birthday next year!' she wrote, except there were numerous spelling mistakes. Bubbles had likely done the rest of the card as the drawings were fair and balanced - he had always known her to be artistically-inclined. Those artistic types were always the sensitive ones.

"You told the Girls?" the detective said, incredulous. He was never the kind to celebrate birthdays. It reminded him that his glory days were long gone along with Townsville's golden age, that all the best attendees of his birthday parties were long dead.

"The mail took its time, but happy belated birthday, Dad," Olivia said lovingly before giving her father a peck on the cheek.

"Sweet of them," he said, before putting down the 'birthday card', his hands shaking a little. He picked up something else. A random photograph he happened to have his hand on. "But I've got to get back to work." Olivia knew what it meant. Although she had lived apart from him for a number of years before they reconciled and came together to do police work, she knew her Dad very well. She had idolized him before their falling out, and now she'd rekindled her admiration of him. Walking away, she left him alone, smiling.

Detective Mullens' hands had been shaking, but there were no tears. The well had dried out far too long ago when there were too many people to shed tears for. Had it been twenty years ago, however, he would have broken out the handkerchief.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1910.

When Bubbles had obeyed and left the Girls' room, walking past her Mom, Selicia closed the door and audibly turned the lock. Selicia's mild chiding of Bubbles had brought back memories, things that Blossom would rather forget, but couldn't, owing to her superior memory and youthful
sensitivity. She tried to stay calm and smiled at Mommy, but she couldn't manage the same kind of innocent smile she would put up in better circumstances.

"Good evening, Mom," she greeted Selicia properly, just like how she had taught her. She thought that it would placate her, perhaps make her happy. "What do you want to talk about?"

Selicia padded up to her wordlessly, flashing her own smile, though Blossom had difficulty reading it - the past month had been better between them. Blossom could even say that she had been at ease with her, once even falling asleep on her lap in a public library, which was as close as any child could get to a parent.

Picking up the hairbrush on her dressing table, Selicia knelt down and began brushing Blossom's hair. It all felt too familiar. Far too familiar. The enhanced little girl, for some reason, recalled Christmas Eve.

"Your hair's beautiful. You ought to take better care of it. Besides, that's how you win the hearts and minds of men," Selicia simply said, brushing aside Blossom's question while she was brushing her hair, separating the odd clump of hair finely. She had a hand on the red-haired girl's shoulder, and she could feel her shaking with barely-held-back violent impulses. "You look a little tense, Blossy dear. There's a time for that and now's not the time. Calm down."

Blossom tried her best to obey. She did the exact opposite, tensing up her muscles, but at least she'd stopped the trembling.

"Here, maybe this will help," Selicia whispered into Blossom's ear before giving her a peck on the cheek. It didn't help. Not one bit.

"W-what do you want to talk about, Mom?" Blossom asked again but got no reply. It was making her nervous as she anticipated a reprisal. While they were bathing, Buttercup had to be separated from the other Girls because of her wound, and Selicia had personally tended to her by giving her a careful sponge bath. Knowing Buttercup, she had likely talked about how she was hurt, and what had happened to allow it - and she was likely to put her own spin on it too. Blossom would be lucky if she wasn't accused of something.

Selicia continued working on Blossom's hair, adding ribbons to it, an expensive looking pink-and-shiny hairclip, and the usual red hair bow, but with a glossy texture. Blossom turned to Selicia, looking eye-to-eye with her, trying to read her, expecting an answer, but Selicia took her by the chin and turned her to face the mirror.

"Aren't you beautiful?" Selicia whispered into Blossom's ear again, pressing her face up next to her as she looked at the mirror with her. Blossom kept mum. "I'm asking you a question."

"Y-yes..." Blossom replied hesitantly, wondering about many things at once - if it was just her making things out to be worse than they were, or if Mom was playing one of her games again. Selicia pressed her lips closer to Blossom's ear.

"I know what you did, Blossom," Selicia whispered into her ear, surprisingly non-violent, but she could hear every little vibration. Mommy was holding back, and the quiver in her voice that came with repressed rage was too obvious.

"Wh-what do you mean, Mom?" Blossom replied, but it was as if Selicia didn't listen.

"You remember that time when we were playing with my stun rod? How much it hurt even at the lowest setting?" Selicia recalled a training session just a month ago when she was showing them
how it feels like to get hit by a stun rod. As it was only a demonstration, she'd only used the lightest charge to shock the Girls. "Imagine it ten times worse."

"You let Buttercup get injured on your watch again, and I will hurt you badly. Do you understand, darling?" Just to drive home the point, Selicia had put her hand on Blossom's hair, and she had tightened her grip on it, enough to let the little girl feel it, and worry that she might pull hard on it. "I can't hear you, Blossom. I'm asking you a fucking question. It's only polite to answer."

"Yes, Mom, I understand," Blossom gasped as Selicia tightened her grip further… Before letting go, and gently and lovingly ran her fingers through her ample hair.

"You'll ruin this family if you keep going like this," Selicia accused, before sliding the back of her hand on Blossom's cheek. "I'm only looking out for you, Blossom darling. I'm your Mom after all, and you know what? I think we're both the same."

"We are?" Blossom said, puzzled. Despite knowing that they were mother and daughter, she thought that they were quite different, had always thought so. Selicia stroked her in the scalp as she continued looking at the both of them in the mirror.

"Of course. Why would you think otherwise?" Selicia said. "We're both beautiful, smart and independent. I've seen how you were when you were angry, Blossom. Remember what you did to your dear old Dad?"

It was another bad memory Blossom couldn't forget. It was the day she discovered her heat vision. She had gotten really mad over seeing a photo of Mojo Jojo, whom General Blackwater told her was responsible for nearly killing Bubbles. Her infrared beam came right out after that, the first time ever so she couldn't control it, and when she turned around to look at Daddy…

"I'm sorry… I didn't mean it… I'm so sorry…" Blossom apologized. It was painful, how the old wound was dug out. She could instantly remember the look on Dad's face when she accidentally burned him. She could even smell the fire burning away his lab coat and flesh, too. On some nights, she would still dream about it and then come to the same horrible thought: that she was incredibly lucky that her Dad was still with them.

"So you know how I can get when I'm angry, right?" Selicia said. Blossom nodded, afraid. "Don't try me."

Selicia finally stood up after that, walking away to the door. She unlocked and opened it, but before she left, added: "Put that brain of yours to work and add the finishing touches. You better be in the living room before I get there with Bubbles. Understand?"

"Yes, Mom."

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1915.

Blossom didn't add much to her hair. Selicia had left nothing for her to improve upon, and now she felt vaguely worthless because of it. With nothing left to do, she put on her high heels and headed down to the living room, where Buttercup was. Mom had done her up first, but her tomboy sister did not like it one bit. Buttercup had never worn ribbons or anything else on her head because she hated it, and now she had to bear with a green hairband the entire night!
But that wasn't all. Like her sisters, Buttercup was dressed in the same sequin dress accessorized with a black sash, except hers was green. Her make-up was green-themed, and her neck piece resembled a gorget, made of steel and pretty chains of various metals.

She was still pacing up and down the living room, still practicing how to walk in her high-heels - which, by most standards, weren't even that high. But despite having a week to prepare, she was still having trouble.

"Ugh, stupid shoes - why can't I just wear my boots?" she grumbled in frustration.

Blossom came up to her, walking in her heels quite ably. It helped that they could subtly boost herself with her floating ability whenever she felt she was losing her balance. It'd made things so much easier.

"You need to be more gentle, Buttercup," Blossom advised her. "Stop stomping around. We're not fighting anyone now."

"I wish we were," Buttercup said as she grudgingly tried to apply Blossom's advice - if it wasn't Mom who made her wear the high heels, she would have abandoned them straight away, maybe even chuck them into the dustbin next to the road. She began walking straight a little more gracefully, slowly. Distracted by this little triumph, she had forgotten herself momentarily, letting the silver lining in her head do the thinking - she'd wanted to thank Blossom, but when she turned around, she stumbled on the high heels and twisted an ankle. She floated immediately - it would have been disastrous had she been a normal little girl. It would have resulted in a sprained ankle.

But Blossom had noticed something else about her leg that concerned her. There was a holster just above it and a pistol. A very small one that was hidden just above the hem of her skirt, but she could see it when Buttercup flew up.

"You brought a gun!?" Blossom said in disbelief as Buttercup floated over to the couch to sit down. She straightened her sequined dress as she leaned back.

"Yeah, why?" Buttercup said casually. She then reached for the TV remote but winced as she felt her wound pressing against its bandage a little too hard. "I never got to use it when Mom gave it to me, and I thought I should bring it just in case… Don't talk like I've brought along my machinegun, Blossom. It's just a tiny backup pistol."

"We have our powers for backup, Buttercup!" Blossom lectured her wayward sister further. "and our powers are even better than any gun!"

"Yeah, whatever, sis," Buttercup simply brushed her off as she switched to the sports channel. Her eyes were instantly glued to the screen when it was a game of baseball airing on ESPN right then.

Blossom would have continued the argument had it not been for the sound of another pair of high heels coming down. She knew that Mommy wouldn't like it if she argued with Buttercup in front of her. Looking around at the stairs, she saw Selicia descending the stairs gracefully, despite the fact that her heels were taller and sharper than theirs. Bubbles walked beside her, holding hands with Mom, perhaps partly because she was afraid of goofing up and falling down the stairs. But it was unlikely, as Bubbles had learned fast how to walk in her high heel shoes.

Dad followed behind her, wearing an expensive-looking tuxedo, something he hadn't touched for many months since the last Organization function he attended as the Head of Research.

"You Girls ready?" Selicia asked Blossom and Buttercup. The tomboy switched off the television
with the remote reluctantly - she had been nursing an interest in baseball over the month, but Mommy came first, as always.

"Yes..." Blossom said obediently, but she wasn't ready at all. Quite the opposite - she was nervous. She had never attended a party of the scale Elodie 'Princess' Morbucks had described - with hundreds of guests, some of whom were so important and affluent that Townsville would struggle to run without them - and she had to attend in the capacity of a leader. Everyone knew the 'important' things about her, and her position in the trio. In fact, everyone knew more about her than she herself - that she 'worked' for the USDA, and that she was somehow created by the USDA. No one knew exactly how, of course. Some believed that she was an ordinary girl endowed with great power through some scientific procedure, while others rightly believed that she was grown in a lab, though they had no way to confirm their suspicions. Then there were others who didn't care.

Buttercup got off her couch and tried walking in her heels again, making headway towards Mom, who beamed at how she had handled herself confidently. "Very good, Buttercup. I knew you can do it," Selicia praised.

"Why do I have to go there anyway? I'd rather stay at home and watch baseball," Buttercup whined.

"Because there's really good food there?" Selicia said playfully. "I mean, I'm not stopping you from staying. You just have to cook for yourself..."

"I guess I'll go..." Buttercup muttered and made her way towards the door, still trying to impress by doing it while walking on her high heels. She needed as many points with her Mom and Dad as she could get, as she still perceived herself to be on the losing end. She winced when she accidentally rubbed at her wound with her elbow. It made Selicia concerned.

"You sure, honey?" she asked. "If you're not up to it, you shouldn't push it." she gave Blossom a brief death glare as she said this - the pink-eyed one, after all, was responsible for Buttercup's injury, at least from her perspective.

"I'm fine, Mom. I'll go," Buttercup pressed on, now determined to show her parents that she was better than either of her sisters.

The professor laughed at this display. "I just hope the three of you remember why you're going - and it's not just because of the food or the fun," he said.

"Is it because Elodie's our friend?" Bubbles ventured to answer, brightening up at the mere thought of one of her closest friends – and Elodie was a special one, different from Blake and Mullens because she looked similar to them as a child. They were both physically 5-year-olds. They were both little girls, and they were both many of the same things. The professor took her by the other hand as they made their way to the door, such that she was between Mom and Dad.

"Well, Elodie and the rest of Townsville - most of it, anyway," the professor corrected. "Friendship isn't just something you gain - it's also something you maintain."

"Well said," Selicia praised her 'husband' as she took off the Girls' coats from the coat stand beside the door. Green for Buttercup, blue for Bubbles and pink for Blossom.
Chapter 8: Masks

Chapter Summary

The Girls visited the Morbucks' family mansion for the masquerade ball, and meets Elodie 'Princess' Morbucks there, where they prepare for the 'funnest' day of their lives.

A/N: I apologize for the delay in the update. I kinda passed out while editing last night and couldn't finish it in time for release. Anyway, what was originally a gigantic chapter had to be split up, especially after editing when holes had to be filled in the narrative, further increasing the length.

Chapter 8: Masks


3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1941.

While transiting on the way to the Morbucks Family Mansion, where the Morbucks' masquerade ball was held, Professor Utonium didn't even need to drive. In an attempt to boost their public image, the USDO had requisitioned a limousine for the Girls and their handlers, protected front and back by a motorcade of humvees and even a few APCs. When they were on the way there, they were even escorted by a couple of USDO helicopters.

While they were walking towards their limousine through their lawn, the Girls had seen the men who were in those vehicles. They were all in dress uniforms like the one Mommy wore when she first met them, except with pants and for men. They were grey, and many of them had medals and pins and highly visible chevrons and marks of distinctions on them. However, since they weren't just for show, they were also armed with mainly XM4s and had belts that served to hold additional magazines.

The Girls were only thinking one thing when they saw the USDO soldiers though - they were hoping that Mister Blake and his squad of friends would be among them, only to be sorely disappointed. Where could he be all this time? It had been weeks since they last saw him. Blossom and Bubbles were missing him that it almost hurt, that it almost felt like a betrayal when he had never visited. Buttercup was feeling it too - she thought that he was a cool dude, and wanted to see more of him.

When the Girls had finally reached the Morbucks Mansion, they were wowed by its size. It wasn't the first time they had seen it, but the novelty had never worn off. The mansion was five floors high, with innumerable windows hinting at innumerable rooms. The porch alone was almost as big as their house.

The Princess herself, along with her father, Mister Morbucks, was personally there to receive the Girls in person. Having met Elodie a few times over January, they knew this to be a great honor, as any 'lesser' guests would have been received by their servants instead. Moreover, the Princess was in no shape herself to do so - that she would come out of her massive home especially to take them in meant that they were incredibly special, as it had likely taken the Princess great pains to do so, considering her condition.
The Morbucks stood in front of their porch, smiling. While Mister Morbucks had opted to be less flashy in his black tuxedo, the Princess was regal. Imperial. Her dress looked like something out of a fairy tale, golden and decorated with a purple sash around her waist. She wore purple silk gloves that reached up to her upper arms to match. The one thing that was familiar was her cancer wig, which came in the usual hairstyle: two messy buns, except this time, they were tied with purple ribbons.

When the Girls got out of their limousine, they smiled at the Princess, Bubbles, especially, who shared an especially close bond to the rich little girl as they had survived an ordeal together. Bubbles and the Princess were positively squeeing when they saw each other. While the Princess gingerly came forward, Bubbles was almost running up to her, and the two embraced warmly. When they were done, which took some time, the Princess then hugged Blossom as well, then moved on to Buttercup, who could only just barely tolerate the gesture.

Meanwhile, Professor Utonium and Selicia met Mister Morbucks. The men shook hands, while Mister Morbucks took Selicia by the hand like a gentleman and kissed it. The theme of the day had allowed it. They hadn't met much, and the only time they had seen each other was in a pre-arranged meeting, when the billionaire desired to meet the 'parents' of the children who had saved his most precious thing in the world - the only thing that money couldn't buy (in his opinion) - his daughter, Elodie 'Princess' Morbucks.

"Dad, can I take them to the dressing room myself?" the Princess asked.

"You sure, precious?" Daddy Morbucks asked, concern just oozing out of his voice. "You haven't been well at all, and it's cold out here…"

"I think the night air is soothing, Dad. Besides, Bubbles, Blossom and Buttercup are here with me - I'm always safe with them." the Princess replied.

"Alright, jewel," Mister Morbucks said, before coming up to the Girls and addressing them: "Take good care of my daughter, will the three of you?" He gave each of them quick pats on the head before turning away. In the billionaire's mind, it was a good deal, having what were literally three of the nicest bio-engineered killing machines on Earth on his side and protecting his daughter.

As the Princess showed the Girls a side path leading around the side of the mansion, her father beckoned for Professor Utonium and Selicia to follow him through the grand entrance. Curious guests standing on the porch watched them with intense curiosity and scrutiny, wondering what these newcomers in Townsville had to offer.

The Princess took Bubbles' hand as they walked, with Blossom and Buttercup coming up beside them. The path skirting around the mansion was dark, around the corners - whatever light there was had come from antiquated-looking electric lamps along the path. Blossom and Buttercup would occasionally get a fit of paranoia and light up their eyes to search the sides of the path - and the bushes and trees and the occasional security guard that lined the way forward like ceremonial guards. This was despite the fact that not far behind, a whole squad of USDO security officers was following, not just to stay in range in case of an attack but also to get into their final guard positions.

"Why are we walking out here, Elodie?" Bubbles asked, not even wary in the slightest - she had complete trust in the Princess. Their shared experience in that dark hole they nearly died in had cemented their friendship - and the few times she was able to visit her had completed it. "Shouldn't we go to the party?"

"But we're going to surprise the guests," Elodie Morbucks explained. "Besides, we still have masks
to put on, and you'll really like the ones I selected-" Before she could finish, she started coughing, and what seemed like regular coughing became a coughing fit. They had to stop for a while.

"Are you okay, Princess?" Blossom asked, concerned. The Princess had to cough for a while, still, and the only other thing she could do was to pull out a red silk handkerchief to cover her mouth when the hacking cough wouldn't stop. Bubbles patted her on the back, hoping that it would help.

"You know, we could fly you to the dressing room or whatever it is - it's faster anyway," Buttercup offered. She was getting bored with walking in a cold, dark and unexciting place at what amounted to a snail's pace. She'd even had an image of Princess in her head as a snail, royalty of the gastropod society.

"No- It's fine," the Princess was finally able to say something. Straightening up, she adjusted her dress to make sure she looked perfect, pre-coughing-fit. "I like spending this quiet moment with the three of you. If you don't mind…"

"I don't mind," Bubbles said. "It's nice, in a way."

They continued walking, but they didn't get very far before the Princess' knees buckled from exhaustion. Walking across her own mansion had been challenging enough with her disease - to go around it straight after that was really pushing it.

"I thought I was getting better…" the Princess mumbled, ashamed of falling in front of her guests. "I'm sorry. I'm a terrible host."

"How about I carry you?" Bubbles offered, putting out a hand. Princess smiled at her and took it. With a heave, the sweetest of The Three was able to pull her up effortlessly and take her off her feet without even feeling it - the Princess was practically weightless to her. Grateful, the Princess put her arms around Bubbles' neck.

"Just like before, huh?" she said.

"Just like before," Bubbles nodded. They smiled at each other. It had been more than a month since Bubbles had rescued Princess from Mojo Jojo and what seemed like certain death, but their camaraderie was timeless, the natural friendship between them struck up quickly. Bubbles and the Princess had a connection - they could relate with one another. They were both fearful, vulnerable and fragile in their own ways, even if the state of their health were like night and day, sunset and sunrise.

"I wish I could be like the three of you…" the Princess said, somewhat delirious still from her coughing fit. "I hate myself sometimes."

"But you're really sweet and nice and… great, Elodie," Bubbles said immediately, summoning everything she could from her vocabulary. They were close friends, and she wanted to make sure the Princess was comfortable, although unknown to the blonde little girl, she was really convincing herself of the same thing just as much - that she shouldn't hate herself for who she was, for being the softest, shyest and most fearful of her sisters. Everyone had said as much that it wasn't wrong for her to be this way, right? Well, everyone except for General Blackwater, and more than half the USDO and police force.

"Yeah. And you're really kind and generous too," Blossom added. She'd seen the Princess on the newspaper several times over the past month, giving away presents and visiting hospital patients just because. Being sick and home-schooled and lacking everyday companions were routinely giving her cabin fever, and it was one way for her to leave her home and do some good at the same
time. "In a way, we're trying to be like you when we went to the soup kitchen, or help with building a big house for the poor…"

"And your food and toys were great," Buttercup chimed in. "That night when we had a sleepover here? Your bedroom and washroom's awesome!"

Eventually, they came by the side door on the eastern wing of the mansion. It was still far grander than the Girls' front door. Climbing the stairs leading up to it, Bubbles let Princess down, who proceeded to slam the door-knocker thrice. The door was opened from the inside. A maid stood beside it, holding the door open.

"Evening Princess. Evening, Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup," the maid greeted the Girls formally. It wasn't the first time they'd met. The Girls had seen her before. Annie was her name, the very same maid who'd brought them their bathrobes and pajamas during their sleepover.

"Evening, Miss Annie," the Girls greeted in unison, their Sister Sense kicking in again when their mood was in sync. Annie, being the servant assigned to the Princess and her enhanced guests, had spent the most time with the Girls. However, even she could feel the chills running down her spine when she saw The Three again. Friendly though they were, the fact that any single one of them could rip a man in half with ease was unnerving enough – then there was the look of their eyes in the dark just before they came through the threshold of the side door and into the light, which reminded Annie of predatory animals in the dark, or even creatures. Monsters. Of course, the maid kept her feelings and thoughts hidden, and simply stood at attention like a royal guard.

"Will they need assistance in preparing for the ball, Princess?" the maid asked courteously.

"No, not this time," the Princess brushed her off. They continued walking down the corridor, before ascending a flight of stairs.

"Isn't that a little… rude?" Blossom said to the Princess. It wasn't the first time she had noticed the Princess doing this to Annie.

"She's cold in the first place, didn't you see how she was like the first day you met her?" the Princess replied, before coughing a little. The stairs were treacherous to her, but thankfully she need only climb a single floor. Blossom could not argue. The Princess was right. Annie was a no-nonsense domestic worker, seemingly nothing more.

"I don't know… I would have kept trying," Blossom said.

"I've tried for weeks when she came to my home last year," the Princess said. "I told my Dad I wanted her gone, but he wouldn't listen. I miss my previous personal maid."

"That must be hard. I can't imagine losing a friend like that," Bubbles said. The previous maid had been dismissed over reasons the Princess wasn't aware of. Her father wouldn't tell her.

They were soon in the dressing room before they knew it. Time seemed to pass faster whenever they weren't in a more surreal location, such as the dark, snowy path they were on.

The dressing room the Girls found themselves in was unfamiliar to them. The relatively humble size, however, suggested that it was once meant for the in-house workers. The modest furnishing, which was still generous by middle-class standards, said as much.

The Princess padded up to a wall, where three masks were hung as if on display in a theatrical production. The Princess had arranged for the masks to be introduced that way – and the servants had carried out her request without question. Everything had to be perfect – there wasn't anything
Elodie wouldn't do for her new friends. While it was good that they were Townsville's newest and strangest and most effective law enforcers, what was most important was that they seemed genuine. She couldn't remember the last time the people she called her friends were sincere about their friendship. The previous group had even abandoned her to her fate when she couldn't run as fast as them, owing to her cancer treatment and the fact that she had only just gone into remission. Had Bubbles not found her, she would have either been killed or held for ransom and probably mistreated while the money took its time to reach her kidnappers.

The Girls gasped when they saw the masks.

"They're beautiful!" Bubbles exclaimed. It didn't even matter which belonged to her. They were all stunning works of art. Blossom was equally taken by them. Even Buttercup had her interest piqued.

Reaching for a shiny silver-blue mask with what looked like tentacles that would cover the cheeks, Princess handed it over to Bubbles with both her hands courteously, beaming toothily at her best friend. Bubbles took it gladly, before holding it up in front of her to inspect it, and found that she liked it, unwise to the fact that it looked like the face of some elder god from the Cthulu Mythos.

"You really like your Octi doll, Bubbles, so I thought I should give you a mask that looks like it," the Princess said thoughtfully. "It's a good name, Octi. I couldn't have thought of it myself."

"It's really nice, Elodie," Bubbles thanked the Princess before putting it on and showing her mask to her sisters, laughing as she imitated the aquatic movement of an octopus whilst floating in mid-air. "I'm Octi! Blub blub blub!"

The Girls, including Princess, laughed. When they were done, Princess returned to her wall and picked the next mask off it. Like Bubbles' mask, the next one was shiny. Unlike Bubbles' mask, it had an avian theme. The feathers, which were as hefty as Blossom's hair such that it covered the entire forehead and more, were of a glossy light pink hue, while the beak was black in color, made where the nose was.

"You're brave like an eagle, Blossom, and Daddy said that the eagle is majestic and 'symbolizes leadership' too, so I thought it fits you," the Princess presented the mask, then handed it to Blossom, who took it gladly. It was even better than how she envisioned her mask to be. Blossom put it on immediately.

"What do you think?" the leader of The Three said from under the mask. Her glowing pink eyes shone through, completing the visage of the mask with her fierce, piercing gaze.

"It's actually awesome," Buttercup admitted excitedly - she didn't think that the masquerade ball would even be remotely fun, and it hadn't even started yet. Blossom flew next to a mirror to look at herself and liked what she saw. She raised her arms as if they were the wings of an eagle, then laughed along with the rest of them, who saw it too.

The Princess didn't wait this time and proceeded to unhook the last mask on the wall. This one was much more mysterious. It was mostly black with green highlights that were ornately designed and rich with pretty curves. The entire forehead was covered, with cat ears on top. There were whiskers left and right of the nose, though it wouldn't cover the face anywhere below the nose. She handed it to Buttercup.

"A cat?" Buttercup guessed, surprised as to why she chose the cat as her animal theme.

"Yeah, you kept mumbling about some cat in your sleep, Buttercup," the Princess explained, and when she saw that Buttercup was taken aback, quickly continued: "I'm sorry I overheard. I couldn't
sleep that night."

"I didn't know you like cats, Buttercup," Blossom said. Bubbles wanted to say something too but kept quiet as she was unsure if Buttercup would snap at her or smile at her.

"Yeah… I guess I do…" Buttercup lied. Well, it was more of a half-lie. There was one cat she liked - the one that could talk, and talked it did… with her. It had been appearing more and more often in her sleep, just watching, but running away the moment she tried to come close. She had tried digging up the dead cat in the lawn of The House where she buried it with snow; she'd tried to wake it up, but it wouldn't respond to her any longer. It was deeply upsetting, for it was one of the few things in the world that understood her need for bloodshed and violence.

"What about your mask, Elodie?" Bubbles asked, realizing that there were only three masks on the wall, and a fourth was nowhere in sight - not on the dresser, not next to the mirror or on any tables in the room. "Aren't you wearing one?"

"No…," the Princess said, before falling morose once more. "The truth is, I've been wearing a mask for my entire life." There was some pride in her, at least, for being able to understand metaphors at such an early age, but it couldn't outshine what she had been feeling her entire life. She stood in front of a standing mirror, looking sadly at herself. "So many masks at once. A girl like me can't say or do certain things in front of people. I had to act all the time. And this face… Every time I look in front of a mirror, I remember that it was different. My face used to have color - I would joke that I wouldn't need powder for my face but... It was all an act so people would like me… I... remember I used to have real hair - my wig is just fake, and I feel it all the time. I don't want a third mask."

Bubbles took her hand when she sensed the Princess' need for encouragement.

"But I have the three of you now," the Princess brightened up a little, squeezing Bubbles' hand. "The three of you can do whatever I can't and… I guess that makes me happy."

"Thanks, Elodie," Blossom said, coming up to her, hugging the Princess from behind even as she continued staring at the mirror, wishing as a child only could, that some fairy godmother would just materialize out of nowhere and give her back everything she had lost. But as a child who had suffered the cruel irony of having everything material but having nothing that really mattered, she couldn't seriously believe in such a fairy tale. At least, until three angels had entered her life. Blossom had an idea. "It wouldn't be much, but if your father would let us, we could take you out flying around Townsville one day."

"I would like that very much," the Princess said, a hard-won smile spreading across her face once more - her face, which had been a battlefield between her spirit and her disease for most of her memory.
Chapter 9: The Masquerade

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup makes an entrance into the masquerade with a bang.

Chapter 9: The Masquerade


3 FEB 1989 (Friday). 1955.

The masquerade was held in a grand hall. Massive long tables were arranged on two sides of the hall to hold an equally massive and lavish number of buffet selection. The number of guests was in the hundreds - some sat and chat behind round tables, while others stood and held stately conversations. All of them wore intricately complex masks. This time around, the USDO had taken responsibility for security and had posted guards even within the hall. Even the guards weren't spared from the dress code, and they had been issued bulletproof masks to maintain it. A live orchestra - a small group of 'just' dozens - was playing classical music composed by geniuses of ages past on a stage.

The hall was as vertical as it was horizontal - there was a flight of stairs on either side of the hall, made of expensive Mahogany, leading up to a balcony area overlooking the hall, where yet more guests were hosted. Some of them stood at the banisters, looking down on the rest. It was on the second floor where Professor Utonium and Selicia found themselves at. The professor had selected a simple silver-and-white owl mask that spared his forehead and lower face, while Selicia had picked a most alluring mask modeled after the Greek Medusa, plated with bronze.

The professor was becoming increasingly worried about the Girls. He could never stop being worried for them - even though it wasn't the first time he had seen them off to the Elodie 'Princess' Morbucks. But he didn't have to worry for long, for soon, the lights dimmed.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the time has come…" a disembodied and mysterious voice of the emcee boomed over the speakers. The orchestra stopped reciting their Mozart. "Introducing Townsville's rising heroines - the city's newest defenders - the very girls who saved the Morbucks and dozens of other important names…"

The main doors leading into the hall opened. A spotlight casting light that was similar to the heart-light Detective Mullens and Olivia had devised was focused on the entrance. Everyone could already see them, but since it was dark, their eyes were the first thing everyone noticed, provoking gasps and shouts of surprise and fear from those who weren't wise to the main attraction of the party. A pair of glowing pink eyes, blue eyes, and green eyes floated in the dark.

The Girls walked out of the doors and into the spotlight, revealing themselves in their fullest glory, with Princess standing between the two of them - Bubbles and Blossom, and she was holding Bubbles' hand as a way to calm the timid one down.

"Some call them The Three - others call them the Angels of Justice - Elodie 'Princess' Morbucks is proud to call them friends - Introducing… Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup!" the emcee went on,
then fell silent. There was supposed to be a standing ovation. Buttercup crossed her arms - she wondered what the big deal was all about, and she could only think of eating at this point, as it was past dinnertime and her stomach was rumbling.

It started slowly at first. Mister Morbucks, who was recognizable despite the golden mask he was wearing, began clapping. A few people followed, and soon, like wildfire, it'd spread to everyone else. Slow to come, the whole hall eventually erupted in applause. Blossom found it somewhat encouraging; she smiled. Bubbles actually found it intimidating. Buttercup raised an eyebrow at this.

"Wave at them, Girls, and smile," Elodie suggested to Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup. They did just that with varying degrees of willingness and success, following the Princess' lead as she waved at the crowd first. The applause grew louder. "See? They like the three of you."

"Showing the grace and beauty of angels, our dearest Princess, and her new friends will lead us off in a dance…" the emcee continued. Buttercup's jaw dropped and she froze up when she heard the word. Blossom and Bubbles' reaction wasn't any less dramatic. While Blossom and Bubbles liked the idea of dancing from what they had heard about it from the stories both Dad and Mom had read or recounted to them, and from what they had seen on the television, they knew from what the professor said about the amount of practice it would take that they weren't ready - in fact, they were caught completely by surprise and hadn't even practiced for a single second!

"D-d-dance? But-" Buttercup uttered in disbelief at what she had gotten herself into. Now, she was starting to believe that she should have stayed in bed, or the couch, watching ESPN. She hated the idea of dancing - the only kind of dance she'd ever like were the dance steps of war, to be executed in battle while music composed by death and destruction was played.

"I c-can’t…" Bubbles stammered, her face flushed red despite her makeup.

"But how?" Blossom questioned, beginning to feel awkwardness and shame unlike what she had felt before. The Girls could only be thankful that they were wearing masks.

"Don't worry, Girls," the Princess said, far too serenely calm that it made all three of her friends felt worse. Where she was sickly and unsuited to the outside world, she was a born natural when it came to the social and intellectual sphere – so natural that it was heartbreaking for everyone concerned that she was like a candle burning twice as bright… "I'll never leave my best friends hanging."

Taking Bubbles and Blossom by the hands, she led them to the center of the hall. Buttercup, having no choice as she knew enough about social behavior not to turn tail and run, followed.

They weren't alone. Two boys came up and met them in the center of the hall. The party had gone silent as if expecting something religiously miraculous to happen.

The boys were older than they were, about twice the Girls' physical age. One of them wore a matching bird mask, though it was smaller than Blossom's; he had brown hair. The other had a mask with a similar feline motif to Buttercup's, though, again, it was smaller – his hair was straw yellow. The Girls did not know it, but the Princess had made deliberate choices when it came to the boys and their masks. The boys' masks were smaller to accentuate the Girls', therefore emphasizing their importance and making them more noticeable – not that the Girls needed that kind of help. The boys involved had danced for years, having come from equally affluent families like hers, and far more strict when it came to social conduct.

"May I take your hand?" Bird Mask Boy stuck out his hand for Blossom to take, smiling. Blossom
found herself blushing a little in a way she didn't understand. "I've done this before. You're in safe hands."

With a shy smile, Blossom took his hand and stepped up. The boy wasn't much older than she was, and yet his recent prepubescent growth spurt meant that her head couldn't even reach his neck. He guided her other hand to his shoulder before carrying her off into a waltz. On cue, the orchestra began playing a relatively simple and slow-paced classical waltz for the children to dance to.

In sequence, Cat Mask Boy did the same with Buttercup. The tomboy was reluctant of course, but when she spotted Daddy looking at her – recognizing him easily even with his white-silver owl mask – she took the offer, afraid that she would disappoint him and lose out to Blossom. The boy pulled her up into a loose embrace and followed the bird pair. "Oh, brother," Buttercup groaned at her predicament.

"Don't panic," Cat Mask Boy whispered to Buttercup, who took offense to his advice. "Don't look at them. Look at me." But she took them regardless, stubborn as she was. The boy himself found it difficult to make eye contact with Buttercup because of her intimidating, glaring and glowing transhuman eyes but persevered regardless, and Buttercup found it surprisingly difficult to make eye contact with him for reasons beyond her.

"P-princess… W-who am I dancing with?" Bubbles stuttered, realizing that they were one boy short. All sorts of depressing scenarios started popping up in her head – that she had been pranked, or that there was a mistake and she would have to depart shamefully because of it. Either way, there was likely a ditch for her to bury herself in forever.

The Princess walked around and stood before her. She extended a gloved hand.

"You're dancing with me, Bubbles," the Princess revealed with her pearly white teeth showing in an expectant smile. "Please?"

Bubbles did not know what to make of it. Daddy had said that men and women would dance in a ball like this – he never said anything about children dancing, or two girls dancing together. Or she and her sisters, for that matter. But fearing rejection and awkwardness, she took the Princess's hand. The Princess guided her towards her, putting Bubbles' hand on her neck before putting her own purple-covered hand on Bubbles' waist. Bubbles blushed behind her mask – she had never done anything like this before, much less in front of a huge crowd.

"I've been practicing for weeks," the Princess reassured Bubbles, who nonetheless looked incredibly awkward and unsure of herself and the circumstances she'd been put in. "We should be fine. Just follow my steps, Bubbles."

"But why? Why me and not a boy?" Bubbles asked, trying hard not to burst into tears because of the surreal nature of the ball – she wasn't sad, just weirded out.

"I just want to dance with the girl who saved my life, that's all," the Princess admitted. "It's something I want to do before I…" a tear broke out of her left eye. She let it slide down her cheek, hoping that it would go unnoticed. But Bubbles' vision was too excellent, and she decided not to ask any more questions to avoid ruining the day.

Surprisingly, it didn't end in a complete disaster, considering that the senior dancer had only a few weeks of training experience and the junior, none. Some among the crowd took it as a good sign. Some had to hide their ire at seeing the irregularity that was two little girls dancing together. Others saw it as a living work of art.
As Princess was her friend, Bubbles decided to let it go, and allow herself and her friend to enjoy the moment.

"I'm sorry if you wanted to dance with a boy," the Princess apologized. "I just thought you'd want this too. I've been selfish."

"No, it's fine," Bubbles said as they continued waltzing their way slowly around the hall, following behind Buttercup, who kept stepping on her dance partner's shoes but was otherwise surprisingly lithe and graceful in mimicking her partner's steps. Had it been up to her, she wouldn't have stepped onto the dance floor at all, considering that she was completely unprepared. "I was just surprised. And scared."

"So was I when we were in that hole. Thanks for saving my life, Bubbles," the Princess said, still struggling to keep a lid on her emotions – being five meant nothing to her mental age, as she had already struggled more than some adults in her short time on Earth. "Thanks for everything. I've never had a friend as good as you."

"Aw shucks, don't mention it," Bubbles said, feeling flushed by the Princess' compliments. However, she could easily feel – and she knew – that all was not right with the Princess despite everything, and she wanted to make it all better for her special friend. "We're best friends forever, Elodie. I'll be there for you forever and you won't have to be sad again."

As the waltz continued, Blossom and Bubbles were beginning to get into the flow of it and enjoy themselves. Buttercup, however, was Buttercup, and she had ensured that even her 'lucky' dance partner, was becoming impatient with her stepping on his shoes. Elodie, his cousin, had spoken volumes of Buttercup – that she was incredibly cool and tough, and someone that everyone must get to know because of how she had saved the City of Townsville – blah, blah, blah – Elodie could get really animated when she was excited, which was a rare thing considering her failing health. Elodie had failed to mention how poorly raised Buttercup was!

Bird Mask Boy, however, was having the time of his life. Blossom was a quick study, and she had taken his advice to the letter, swaying and moving in sync with him. It was little wonder, considering what Elodie, his poor cancer-stricken cousin, had said about her. Something about being able to fly and dance in the air like a bird, in addition to the whole thing about her being the protector of Townsville – despite seeing Blossom on the news, he still find it hard to believe as he wasn't a Townsville local and hadn't seen it all in action first-hand, nor felt the effects it had on society at large. Now he knew - now, he was wiser.

"Thanks for dancing with me," Blossom said awkwardly and almost fearfully as they continued to spin gracefully on the dance floor, all the while watched by hundreds of pairs of eyes. "I was really scared in the beginning."

"That's how it's like the first time I danced, too," Bird Mask Boy said. "But you're jesting, right? I saw you on CNN once. You were so confident and brave when you fought those bank robbers, and that was after you got your bottom kicked in Morbucks' laboratory, from what I heard."

"Oh..." Blossom fell silent – Bird Mask Boy had managed to dig up some bad memories from that day, even if things did turn around that day when she had to face Ace and his Gangreen Gang.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude," the boy apologized formally, with his dignity still secure. "I thought it was a glorious day when you saved my uncle's lab and his friends."

"Uncle?" Blossom said, confused. She'd heard that word before from Daddy, but he'd refused to give her anything beyond what it meant. "So your mom is Mister Morbucks' sister?"
"I'm his nephew, yes," Bird Mask Boy said even as they danced away, their motions becoming second nature "How about we introduce ourselves properly? I'm Anthony Charles Morton, son of Earl Morton and Antoinette Morton. Your turn."

"Blossom Utonium… Urm… Daughter of…" Blossom struggled with her introduction. She had never found the need for such formalities. In fact, she'd realized that she had hardly ever referred to Daddy and Mommy by their names, and they were surprisingly hard to recall. Oh, the shame of it all! "I'm sorry…"

"It's fine. It happens when you're new to the scene," Bird Mask Boy said. Blossom had never felt so ashamed in her entire life before, and so many times about so many things within such a short span of time. She couldn't even meet her dance mate's eyes any longer, and so she looked to the side, only to see a most suspicious thing in the background. Across the sea of spectators, there were some men and women moving forward, discreetly pushing through the shoulders in front of them. As they were masked, she couldn't tell who they were or even if they had the looks of criminals or not.

"-especially when you've never been to a party like this-"

That was when she was forced to spin around because of the waltz, and by the time she could see the same area, those suspicious guests were closer. Quickly focusing her eyesight, she zoomed through the many stationary guests to look under the mask of one of the suspicious guests with her x-ray vision, only to find a face that looked neither familiar nor threatening. Looking down, however…

She saw that one of them had stuck a hand in his jacket, his fingers wrapped around the handle of a pistol.

"-and of course – are you listening?"

They made another turn on the waltz. Anxiety struck Blossom when she realized that something dangerous was about to happen. By the time she was able to see the suspicious guests again, they had managed to push through to the front.

The man with his hand in his jacket withdrew it, and out came a pistol. He pointed it at Blossom. "Look out!" Blossom screamed before pushing Anthony Charles Morton to the ground and kicking off to a high floating position. The masked man fired his pistol, but Blossom could not feel the shot - he must have missed. The guests of the entire hall were sent scrambling - some hiding at the edge of the hall or behind furniture and the grand stairs, while others got down where they were.

Blossom returned fire with her twin thermal beam, hitting the man and sending him sprawling to the ground. Her hawk mask was burned as a result. The fire was spreading across her face, but it could not hurt her. Neither was she distracted by it, especially when her friends were in danger.

"Bubbles, Buttercup!" Blossom issued the call to arms for her sisters urgently, but they were already in action. Buttercup had forced her dance mate to the ground perhaps a little too hard, while Bubbles was shielding the Princess by stepping in front of her with her arms out. "Go left, right! Now!" It was her primary tactic - the three-point attack, which was incredibly simple and predictable, but with all her successes, there was no need to innovate.

There were three other masked assassins who had pushed through. Bubbles flew towards a lady in an elegant red gown who had pulled a hidden pistol out from her handbag. She couldn't even squeeze the trigger when she pointed it at Bubbles. Being just as nonviolent as Blossom, she
tackled the woman to the ground, before pinning her arm to the back with the lady shouting in pain and abject fear, prying her pistol from her hand easily. Buttercup, on the other hand, had pulled her concealed pistol out from her ankle holster and pointed it at her target, who seemed to have frozen up while lifting his revolver. She would have shot the gutless, but thick-framed gray-masked assassin had Blossom not flown up to her and pushed the gun up. She ended up discharging a round into the ceiling.

"No killing, Buttercup!" Blossom chided her sister.

"I wasn't going to!" Buttercup shouted her lie before dislodging herself from Blossom's grip and charging at the huge tuxedo-wearing assassin. She winded up a punch and sent him flying yards down the hall.

The last assassin, another lady who was in a hefty Victorian-era gown, had pulled an old revolver in one hand and a fan in the other. Blossom saw her too late, and she fired the old revolver at them… Only for none of them to feel the sting of a bullet. Blossom found it odd but had no time to dawdle. She zipped towards the assassin, who just stood there, unsure of herself, before giving the back of her knee a hooking kick. When she fell to the floor, Blossom struck her in the base of her skull effortlessly to knock her out.

The Girls looked around. There were no more attackers. It felt easy. Far too easy. Perhaps deceptively too easy. Coming back together, they surveyed the hall for any other assassins, but for the life of them, they couldn't find any, nor detect other surprises. The party guests were behaving strangely in that they hadn't panicked nor ran out of the mansion as normal civilians should have - even the guards were sluggish in their duty to arrest the assassins. Professor Utonium and Selicia were on the way down from the second-floor balcony.

The Girls gasped. It was Mister Morbucks. He'd swapped his golden mask for a gray mask.

"Ladies and gentleman, give it up for Townsville's protectors - our defenders - the Angels of Justice - Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup!" the disembodied voice of the emcee boomed through the speaker once more. The Girls, confused, drifted downwards to the floor as they tried to process what was going on. They did not even know that they had touched down on the floor.

Mister Morbucks began clapping even as he winced at the bruise on his jaw where Buttercup had given him a punch. A round of applause slowly started, but when it got going, it became louder than before, when they were just dancing.

"Girls! Girls!" Professor Utonium shouted as he was running up to them. "Are you alright?"

"Buttercup!" Selicia followed behind the professor. As soon as she had reached Buttercup, she began checking her for gunshot wounds. The professor did the same with Blossom and Bubbles. In the meantime, the Princess had wanted to speak to Bubbles, but decided that it was wiser to let her best friend's family have their moment first.

Mister Morbucks was helped to his feet by some of his guests, after which he simply adjusted his tuxedo before turning around and leaving, his job in the masquerade, more dangerous than he had anticipated, was complete.

"What's going on, Dad?" Blossom asked, still confused. "I don't understand!"

"Yeah! There were no bullets when they shot at us! What gives?" Buttercup added. Her sisters
thought her observation to be on point.

"Dad…" Bubbles was upset again - she had envisioned the ball to be a haven free from guns and bullets and fighting - but she was wrong once again. Why couldn't she have her peace? The professor got down on a knee to give her a reassuring hug. The Princess could only look on, herself upset that Bubbles had been made sad once more. She didn't expect her to become upset - it was all supposed to be for the Girls' benefit, her father had said. The Princess couldn't help but feel guilty about the emotional damage she had unwittingly done to her friends.

"I think I know what's going on," the professor said angrily as he stood up once more. "Morbucks!" For a brief moment when he turned around to leave the hall, he caught sight of Princess. At that moment when their eyes met, he couldn't help but accuse her wordlessly with his condescending gaze, of being a party to the staged attack. The glare from Mister Utonium was enough to cause the Princess to break into tears. But the Girls' father knew who the real conspirator was. "Selicia, watch the Girls!"

"What're you doing!?!" Selicia asked as she scooped Buttercup up.

"I'm going to have a little talk with our host!" the professor growled as he broke into a jog, chasing after Mister Morbucks. What made him even madder was the fact that the USDO was also party to this - it was all but certain, judging by the fact that they had allowed this to happen. There were metal detectors up front and guards on every entrance into the mansion. The guards in the hall itself were even acting as they were too slow to the draw. Then, there were the guests - he knew from their relatively tame reaction that they, too, knew about this. 'Sickening voyeurs!' he screamed inside. They had even admitted their guilt without knowing it, too, by going back to what they were doing before the staged attack. He felt like he could wring some of them by the neck had the Girls not been around. It was staged - all of it. One huge conspiracy, all to watch the Girls perform like a bunch of zoo animals! Or- or- Circus animals! Circus freaks! The professor had never felt such rage ever since he was pursuing Mojo Jojo.

Professor Utonium barged out of the hall and flew down the corridor towards the faint sound of footsteps echoing in the distance and the far off figure of Mister Morbucks.

"Come back here!" he screamed in rage just as Mister Morbucks had rounded the corner. "How dare you abuse my Girls!" And when he followed, he was met with two private security officers pointing their pistols at him. Mister Morbucks turned around, still nursing the bruise on his jaw.

"You fat bastard!" the professor continued insulting the billionaire. "You'll choke on your meal for that!"

"Calm yourself, Mister Utonium," Morbucks said as he leaned against the wall of the corridor, besides some expensive painting. His legs were still shaking from what Buttercup had nearly done to him. "There was no harm done. The bullets we used were blanks. If anything, I was in greater danger than your Girls. Just look at what Buttercup did to me - and she was pointing a gun - filled with live rounds no doubt - at me. I thought I was going to die there and then."

"Good! You deserve it! Every bit of it!" the professor howled with rage. He would have gone all out on Mister Morbucks had it not been for his private security officers, who looked every bit as intimidating as he was, what with their masks.

"Come now, Mister Utonium," Morbucks tried to reason with the man, but it had only served to stoke the fire.

"Do you know how stressed out the Girls are!? Especially Bubbles!? They needed a distraction -
and I thought you were giving it to them!" the professor accused madly. "Do you know how traumatizing this will be - for them!? For her!? She's suffering from depression and PTSD, you asshole!"

"I… honestly did not think…" Morbucks' voice trailed off, but he picked himself up quickly. "Look, it was all for the Girls' good. I've mentioned to you that this is a fund-raising ball - me and my peers are going to donate a fortune to the USDO, specifically to the Girls' program. They know about Townsville's plight but they needed to see what the Girls were capable of! Before you make an investment, you have to see the product first! That's what they-"

Morbucks had reminded the professor of Silverslick there and then, who had nearly gotten Bubbles killed with his system.

"DO NOT CALL MY GIRLS PRODUCTS, YOU OVERPRICED PIECE OF SHIT!" the professor screamed hell and fury at Morbucks, who actually looked like he was cowed by the scientist despite his bodyguards.

"I was just… Look, I was just describing things from my peers' perspective. You know how some rich people are like - I can promise you that I'm an exception," Morbucks tried to keep his calm. As a sign of good faith, he gestured for his men to put away their weapons, which they did. "Anyway, doesn't matter what we say here. It's done. But whatever sacrifice the Girls have made, it wouldn't be for nothing. I estimate at least 54 million dollars going to your Girls' program, whatever it's called - no strings attached."

"You know, this fundraiser is my baby girl's idea," Mister Morbucks went on. The professor thought that every word from the ball of lard was filled with slime. "But she's innocent in both senses of the word, and so was that charade just now. Fine, blame me all you want because I planned the whole thing, but this is all for my Elodie – she really loves your daughters and wanted to help them. If you'd see things from a child's perspective you would-"

"I DON'T GIVE A DAMN!" the professor screamed in rage. The tycoon kept quiet immediately, himself offended by how lightly the professor had treated his daughter's efforts and initiative and feelings.

"You need to listen to the man, professor," Thomas could hear a familiar voice behind him. Male. Deep. Gravelly. He turned around and saw General Blackwater in his dress uniform.

"You of all people!" the professor yelled before hurling a punch at the general, who intercepted it with a grip in mid-air effortlessly. The professor tried to pull his fist back, but the general's grip was vice-like.

"This is bigger than the both of us!" the general bellowed when he delivered a low punch to the professor's stomach. He sunk to the floor, clutching his stomach. "And this is certainly bigger than the 'family' you've built around the Girls and Selicia. Get that in your head."

"Are you sure that's necessary, general?" Mister Morbucks asked, concerned despite the fierce exchange he's had with the professor.

"Yes," the general replied as he stepped past the professor nonchalantly. "He'll get it. Now, we have matters to discuss."

"Fuck the both of you…" the professor murmured as he was still on the floor, clutching his stomach. The general had hardly put any energy into that punch, but it'd still hurt like hell. The only consolation was that the general had controlled himself well enough to avoid injuring him. A
direct blow to the celiac plexus was the perfect target for temporary incapacitation - he as a doctor could recognize it instantly.

"-status of the research projects-" he could barely hear the conversation going on between the general and the tycoon, not that he cared. Picking himself up, he returned the way he came. The Girls needed him - it was all he cared about.
Chapter 10: Esperanza Lost

Chapter Summary

Professor Utonium, Selicia, and the Girls leave the Morbucks' party prematurely. What was supposed to be a fun-filled day has come to nothing, but the Girls stand to learn something from it.

Chapter 10: Esperanza Lost

The City of Townsville. Morbucks Family Mansion.

3 FEB (Friday) 1989. 2002.

Clutching his stomach with a hand on the wall of the unnecessarily long corridor, Professor Utonium was stumbling his way back to the Girls, his steps small and slow. The corridor was supposed to lead back to the grand hall, but it was taking forever. While he was still far from the doors leading in, a woman in a white, flowing dress busted through them, her angel mask white as his - though he had discarded his a while back when the party had become anything but a joyous, fun occasion.

There was something about the woman he recognized. She was a brunette. Her figure was pretty but not beautiful. And when she turned to look at the professor, he noticed that the eyes were a familiar shade of light brown. She reached for her face and removed her mask.

"Alice," the professor said in pain as he stumbled towards her.

"Thomas! What happened!? Here, let me help," she was almost shouting, but she had always been the calm one. She rushed to his side, putting his arm around her shoulders.

"Bastards planned all this," the professor said, his voice still dripping with venom - he couldn't help it. He had just been bitten by a snake. A snake covered in some of the world's most expensive scales.

"I heard about it," Alice replied sympathetically. "I ran to the Girls as soon as I realize what happened." And she couldn't stay with them for long, not with Selicia around. The Medusa was hissing hatefully at her when she tried to check on Buttercup.

"How are they?" the professor asked anxiously. A wave of sadness hit him; he felt like he'd failed them again. He should have known. What could he expect? The Girls were special - everyone's going to want a piece of them, and it wasn't just the criminals out in the streets. A normal life, with normal friends and a normal party wouldn't just happen to the Girls, would it? They were destined for 'greater' things.

"They're strong, Thomas," Alice said optimistically, ever the shrink. They were reaching the door. "It's going to take more than a little staged incident to break them."

"I just… want the best for them, Alice," the professor said, nearly driven to tears by the impossibility of his role. It was as if some god from above had decided that he was fated to fail at
"every turn. "This was supposed to be a normal party. A memorable one. Every kid's dream come true. All I've done is deliver them to a fucking zoo."

"What am I supposed to tell them?" Thomas rambled on, digging his hole of misery even deeper.

Before they went through the door, Alice leaned Professor Utonium against the wall beside it.

"Thomas… Lewis- Don't be so hard on yourself," Alice reasoned with him. She took his hand, which was larger and darker than hers. From what she knew, he was descended from a military family but had turned his back on it. But he could never turn his back from himself, how he was raised, how his psyche was put together by his parents. Like Selicia. Like everyone else. "The mind is a complex phenomenon, the brain a complex organ. It's more so with the Girls, I think. They might not take it the way you imagined it. Besides, we're still here. We can still salvage the party if we want to."

"No, we're leaving this party," the professor said. "They got what they wanted. If they're going to treat the Girls as the night's entertainment then we'll leave when the show's over."

Alice considered the professor's words for a second. Would it be healthy for the Girls? Would it be unhealthy for them? True to her own words, even she couldn't be sure - but she was sure that the professor would only do what was best for Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup.

"If that's what you think is good for them," Alice finally gave her approval, reluctantly. She had always been more comfortable being in the psychiatrist's office or a safe room with her patient. There, she was always in control. Out here, she could only analyze her peers' psyche, put in one or two touches and hope for the best. It felt too much like watching a train wreck happening in slow motion.

"It is," the professor said as he pushed himself off from the wall and went through the doors. Alice, however, not wanting another confrontation with Selicia, followed him only to disappear into the crowd.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Alice had said before she departed.

As the Girls waited for their Daddy to come back, they had found themselves seats near the stairs leading up. Buttercup was missing. She had gone elsewhere on a volition only the enhanced little girl knew about. Blossom sat alone, beside Mommy, untended and looking pretty upset.

Bubbles got to sit in Mommy's lap, hugging her, needy - it was too much for her that a night that was supposed to be all fun and relaxation had just turned into another 'operation', even if it was staged. It'd reminded her of… everything. Once again, bad memories forced themselves to the surface, like gunshots and grenade explosions, and her untrained and undisciplined mind had no power over it. Her make-up was smudged again.

The Princess wasn't far away, but she was unsure of what to do with her own gloved hands, unsure of even what she should do. The Girls' father had all but told her that she was guilty of the deception, even if she hadn't planned the whole thing. She had unwittingly helped to put the Girls where they needed to be just so they could give her dad's friends a demonstration - that seemed enough to implicate her, to bury guilt into her heart. For a brief moment, Bubbles and Princess' eyes met, but it wasn't like before when they were dancing together. There was a certain distance now.

Professor Utonium didn't take long to find them despite the crowd. It was easy to spot the Girls because of the colors of their sequin dresses, make-up, and glowing eyes. He forced himself to stand straight despite the aching pain in his solar plexus, marching up to them.
"Girls, we're leaving," the professor declared, then realized that there was something wrong with
the picture. "Where's Buttercup?"

"Right here!" Buttercup, who was already floating over to them, mumbled as if her mouth was full.
The professor turned to look. She had a plate in her hand, and she looked like she had just devoured
half of what she took. Her mouth was filthy, dripping sauce and chunks of meat. She was attracting
stares from everyone, including her family. "What? I was starving!"

If nothing else, it'd reminded the professor that dinner was supposed to be part of the party, and
they hadn't eaten anything - not even Selicia and him, who had only had a few sticks of expensive
kebab. Looking at Blossom and Bubbles, he could only believe that hunger had added to their
misery.

"We're leaving. Right now," the professor repeated himself. Reluctantly, Selicia got up with
Bubbles still in her arms, walking towards the door. Blossom followed behind her, floating
erratically, an indication of misery. Buttercup looked like she couldn't believe what was going on,
and proceeded to go through the rest of her plate messily before shoving the dirty dish into the
arms of a passing waiter.

The Princess was alarmed by this. Things weren't supposed to happen like this. The Girls and she
were supposed to be having a good time! She knew she could salvage the situation - they could
joke about the 'attack' her dad had staged! They could do other things to distract themselves!

"But- but-" the Princess stuttered as she struggled to find the words to express herself. No one was
listening. She ran up to the professor, tugging at the legging of his tuxedo. "You're not supposed to
leave! The party's just getting started!"

Annoyed, Professor Utonium ignored the Princess nonetheless, hoping that the rich brat who
ruined his Girls' time would just do the smart thing and leave his family alone.

"Bubbles! Blossom! Buttercup!" Elodie screamed. "I have a table for the four of us! We're
supposed to eat together and talk and- We're supposed to have a great time and- and-" The
professor and his family walked on. Bubbles peeked from over Selicia's shoulder, conflicted as to
what to feel and what to do, but the warm embrace of her Mom had left her deferring to her
'parents' decisions. "Stop! Please! I'm sorry!"

The professor whirled around quite suddenly that Elodie 'Princess' Morbucks was shocked and had
backed away, even forgetting to keep calm as was befitting of someone like her. She was shaken by
the adult's reaction, how blunt he was towards her.

"You're sorry!? You better be!" the professor lectured the rich little girl. "I let the Girls visit you
because I thought they've met a good friend! Thanks for proving me wrong, little lady!"

The professor's sharp words had cut incredibly deep; it didn't help that Elodie's emotional defenses
were little to non-existent because of how her short life had been full of suffering, because of her
tender young age. She froze, the words still ringing loudly in her ears, in her mind. She shook with
barely-controlled, strong emotions. Barely holding back an avalanche of tears, she balled her hands
up into fists as she looked on while the Girls drifted further and further away from her - the best
friends she'd ever had, for the five weeks they'd known each other - until they disappeared out of
the door.

It was enough to snap the professor out of his rage, perhaps make him think twice about unloading
it on the little girl. Could he rightly blame a little girl for the deception her father had concocted?
Had raising Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup clouded his judgment? Horror dawned upon him
when he realized what he had done, but what was done was done.

"I'm sorry. But this is all too much," the professor said weakly while he was on the threshold, and on seeing a pair of Princess' bodyguards coming up to him, he turned around and left. The Princess did not seem to have heard him, and instead still stood where she was, trembling with untold agony in her. There was so much pain and sadness in her and it occurred to her there and then that she was better off dying of cancer instead.

---

**The City of Townsville. Downtown. Pete's-A Pizzeria.**

3 FEB (Friday) 1989. 2023.

To make up for the complete disaster that was the Morbucks' party, Professor Utonium ordered the limousine driver to take his family to one of their favorites - Pete's-A Pizzeria. No words were exchanged between them, no discussions and no consensus. None of them wanted to be there, but all of them were going there. Selicia kept silent - he knew how people could get when they were angry, as she had a first-hand example in herself. Blossom was too confused to ask questions. Bubbles was too upset. Buttercup was endlessly throwing out words and questions at first, but when no one answered her, she too eventually fell silent.

When they entered the Pizzeria, the place was as depressed as they were - empty of customers, with half the staff gone and half the lights off. The animatronics were powered down. When they settled down to order their pizzas, the dog suit waiter, who reminded Bubbles of Stanley Talker, informed them that they were closing in half an hour.

They stayed silent as they waited for their consolation meal. It was awkward, as the entire family was seated in a booth. Professor Utonium, Blossom and Bubbles were on one side and Selicia and Buttercup were on the other.

The pizzas came after that. Their appetites weren't whetted by the garlic bread and neither did their sparkling sodas lighten up the mood. The professor thought the pizzas tasted like rubber and plastic, as lifeless as himself right then - but he couldn't blame the restaurant. He'd lost his appetite and taste the moment Mister Morbucks revealed himself to be one of the fake shooters.

Even Buttercup wasn't pigging out on her slices of pizzas, and it wasn't just because she'd snuck some food into her during the party.

"Girls, we need to talk about what happened..." the professor finally said, each word harder to spit out than the last. But it had to be done. He couldn't stand seeing his family looking like a bunch of rejects being cast aside. Looking out the window, he saw the only people he and his Girls had left for company was clinical and cold - a convoy of USDO soldiers 'protecting' them. "Blossom, how are you feeling?"

"I'm confused... Why would Mister Morbucks trick us? And in his own party? Why was everyone acting so strangely?" Blossom rambled on. She hadn't touched her pizza at all. "It was supposed to be fun tonight..."

"Eat your food, dear. It'll get cold if you don't," Selicia said to the little girl, who obeyed and mechanically picked up her slice of pizza and nibbled on it.

"It was supposed to be a party..." Bubbles added. The professor knew it would happen. His sweetest adopted daughter had taken it the hardest. Alice had warned him about Bubbles' condition, which would be easily triggered - even a random loud noise could set it off. It was worse
when it came so unexpected when her guard was down and she was with people she'd trusted. It was definitely worse when those people she'd trusted had broken that trust.

"I wish there were more of them though," Buttercup said as she took a bite out of her pizza. Her appetite, too, was diminished because the staged attack had reminded her of what she truly craved for, and the fact that she wouldn't be able to satisfy that craving. "It's stupid! I wish it was real so I can beat the snot out of them!" And more - of course, Buttercup did not mention the fact that she wanted to utterly ravage them, then kill them. Blossom had, as usual, stopped her from even taking a fraction of that.

"Now, now, Buttercup. That's not very nice," the professor said to his most overactive little one, then turned to the others. Selicia scooted up next to Buttercup and snuggled with her. Picking her up, she placed her on her lap and began feeding her more pizza. The professor sighed. "You see, Girls, some people in that party were curious about what you could do whenever you're fighting crime. They wanted to see it."

"Can't they see it on the TV?" Blossom said, ever the smart one. "Or hear about it on the radio?"

"Yes, but you see, it's different when it's happening in front of you," the professor went on to explain. "They were wrong to trick the three of you. So next time, Girls, don't let anyone treat you like clowns. It means they were being disrespectful to you. Okay?"

"Okay…" the Girls agreed in unison.

"I'm sorry I brought the three of you into this. I didn't know what they were planning," the professor said, the pain in his voice at being unable to protect his own children quite apparent.

"I don't blame you, Dad," Blossom said, and took his arm and slipped it around her.

Bubbles, however, remain conflicted. She'd seen how the Princess looked on her way out. Elodie wouldn't have wanted them to be upset, would she? Neither did she need to see what she and her sisters could do - she'd witnessed it first-hand on that day when she had nearly died because of Mojo Jojo. For the past month since that battle, Elodie Morbucks had been nothing but nice to her and her sisters, inviting them for an afternoon at her place, and even a sleepover that had been fun and memorable.

"Dad, they didn't mean to hurt us, did they?" Bubbles asked as she was looking down at the Cthulu mask Elodie Morbucks had given her, clasped tightly as if it was some priceless treasure. "Elodie… She... She's our friend. She couldn't have wanted this."

"Maybe they didn't, but they should've known better," the professor maintained his stance. "Good friends know better. The bad ones don't. They're not good. The 'Princess' wasn't a good friend."

"But we've made mistakes before," Bubbles said. "Townsville forgave us. The mayor forgave us. So did everyone else." At least from her point of view - there were still many who bore grudges and even hatred against them, just that they were either not very close to the Girls, or they were simply just strangers. All of them wouldn't have made it known to the Girls.

The professor blinked at her when he heard what she said. It was incredibly insightful - and such things would normally come from Blossom. It'd caught him there - she was right and he was wrong. In his near-insane fit of rage, he had let himself become utterly hostile, forgetting that he was surrounded by people. While he couldn't forgive the likes of Mister Morbucks and General Blackwater - the ones who were, overall, responsible - he knew he couldn't maintain the same anger against Elodie 'Princess' Morbucks, or even the other guests of the party - did all of them
knew exactly what was going on? Did they even know that the Girls were in the dark? For all he knew, they could have thought that the entire thing was staged with the Girls' permission.

"Are we still friends with the Princess?" Bubbles asked. "I still want to be friends with her. She looked so sad when she was all alone there at the party." She'd seen the poor cancer-stricken little girl just before she went through the front door while she was in her Daddy's arms. It was as if the Princess had lost her soul because she couldn't see it in her eyes. It was as if her very blood had gone completely cold - was gone, period. It was as if she had died on the spot even when she was still standing.

"I don't know, we'll see," the professor simply said.
B-47, B-48 & B-49 Psychiatric Session 02041989

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup goes for their weekly therapy session.

B-47, B-48 & B-49 Psychiatric Session 02041989

The following is a transcript derived from an audio recording created by Doctor Alice of the USDO's Psychiatry and Social Services Department.

DOC: 4 FEB 1989 (Saturday).


-TRANSCRIPT START-

Doctor Alice: Hello, Bubbles. We're going to try something different today.

Bubbles: Are we going to play a game, Miss Alice?

Doctor Alice: You can think of it as a game if you want. (sound of ruffling in a bag) Here, put this on, it'd help you focus.

Bubbles: But I've never needed the blindfold. Isn't it for Buttercup?

Doctor Alice: Yeah well, it's especially important today that we do this well. Now, put on the blindfold and lie back on the couch.

Bubbles: (Whimpers) I don't like that I can't see.

Doctor Alice: (sound of sofa crinkling) Hey, Bubbles, it's fine. Do you want to hold my hand?

Bubbles: Yes…

Doctor Alice: You're safe with me. You can trust me.

Bubbles: (sound of cloth folding and cord snapping. A sofa crinkles, presumably when Bubbles lie down) What are we going to do, Miss Alice?

Doctor Alice: We're going to talk about that night, Bubbles, when you saved dozens of lives in Morbucks Industries Research Labs. Now, why don't you clear your thoughts - don't think about anything else. Let yourself drift. Good. I want you to go back to that night when you were in that panic room. What did you feel that night?

Bubbles: (pained) lots of pain. It hurts real bad. I was scared, not just for myself too. I was really scared for my friends. I… I was afraid I couldn't save them.

Doctor Alice: What else?

Bubbles: It was dark. The lights went out, and all that was left was the blue light coming from me.
It made it worse… I was so scared and I couldn't see my friends as well anymore and looking at them… helps me…

Doctor Alice: What else? Tell me.

Bubbles: It was worse when I couldn't see because it made things felt like they were going on forever. The pain… so long… I couldn't… Miss Alice?

Doctor Alice: (sound of a hand sliding on hand) It's okay, I'm here.

Bubbles: I couldn't breathe… And it went on for so long… I felt so helpless.

Doctor Alice: Tell me what you felt when the ceiling finally opened.

Bubbles: I couldn't see, because it was so bright outside. I felt pain in my eyes… Pain everywhere, even when I had nothing left to carry. I felt woozy and… I fainted, I think.

Doctor Alice: Did you feel anything good?

Bubbles: I don't know…

Doctor Alice: Try.

Bubbles: I… felt relieved, I guess.

Doctor Alice: Anything else? Try to remember.

Bubbles: Safe too? But it didn't last very long because I fainted.

Doctor Alice: What did you feel after that? When you woke up?

Bubbles: I felt happy.

Doctor Alice: Why?

Bubbles: Because I saved lives and made… friends.

Doctor Alice: Why the pause when you mentioned 'friends', Bubbles?

Bubbles: I don't know…

Doctor Alice: What were you thinking when you said 'friends'?

Bubbles: I was thinking about yesterday.

Doctor Alice: Oh. I was there. I saw what happened. I'm sorry, but we need to go back to what we were doing, alright? We can talk about that another time. Try to remember, Bubbles - what did you feel when you had one of those nightmares about the panic room? Did you feel the same way as you did back when you were in the labs?

Bubbles: (pause) Yes.

Doctor Alice: Do you feel more terrified or less?

Bubbles: I don't know… Less, I guess.

Doctor Alice: Why?
Bubbles: (cries) Because I had Daddy with me.

Doctor Alice: Do you think it is because you know it was a nightmare, too?

Bubbles: But it felt so real… (sobs) and… Yes… (cries)

Doctor Alice: Would you like me to stop?

Bubbles: (sobs) Can I have a hug?

Doctor Alice: Sure you can.

(Audio recording stopped before starting again)

Doctor Alice: (From a distance) Thanks so much for this. (muffled sound of a little girl talking) No, she's fine. (muffled sound of a little girl talking) Don't worry about it, Blossom. (muffled sound of a little girl talking) That's nice. See you later, okay? (muffled sound of little girl replying before the door closes)

(Footsteps coming towards audio recorder. The sound of something being put down on a table)

Doctor Alice: Hey, Bubbles. How's that marshmallow?

Bubbles: It's nice. What's in that box?

Doctor Alice: Oh, don't worry about it. Let's continue talking about your fears, okay?

Bubbles: Do we have to?

Doctor Alice: You've been a brave girl, Bubbles.

Bubbles: (sullen) I'm not…

Doctor Alice: Believe that you are, Bubbles. No one else in Townsville could have saved those people but you did.

Bubbles: Blossom and Buttercup could have.

Doctor Alice: Other than them, I mean. Anyway, it's through talking about your fears and reasoning with them that you learn to overcome them. Do you feel that way, Bubbles?

Bubbles: I guess…

Doctor Alice: Now, we've talked about the many bad things you felt when you were in that hole and when you had your nightmares - how scared and helpless you were. It's easy to feel that way when something happens. But Bubbles, you said it yourself - there were other things you felt, can you tell me what they are again?

Bubbles: Relief and pride? I was safe with my father… I was happy when it was over.

Doctor Alice: Every time you get into something bad, focus on that. Bad things will always happen, Bubbles, but they don't last. Did any good things happen in the past few months since you were born?

Bubbles: Yes.
Doctor Alice: Do you have an example?

Bubbles: Like the Princess' sleepover? When we played house before that? When Blossom was with me and things go well when we were fighting crime… My first week's birthday. Going out with my family…

Doctor Alice: You see what I mean, Bubbles? I asked for an example, but you've given me so many. You see, Bubbles, when something bad happens, we tend to hold on to it and forget about the good things because that's what our brain does.

Bubbles: But it's my brain. Why does it have to be mean to me?

Doctor Alice: (laughs) Yes, it's your brain, Bubbles. You can control it. It holds onto bad things because it's how we learn right from wrong, what is good and what is bad. It's why we cherish what's closest to us. Your father, for instance… (pauses) But it can go overboard sometimes, and that's when you have to tell it to stop and start smelling the Dandelions.

Bubbles: It feels good talking to you.

Doctor Alice: I'm glad it does.

Bubbles: So what's in the box?

Doctor Alice: It's a briefcase, honey. I was just about to show you. Now, don't be alarmed, alright? Nothing bad's going to happen. Do you believe me?

Bubbles: Y-yes… What's in it?

Doctor Alice: (sound of tabs unclasping and a briefcase opening.)

Bubbles: (alarmed) Alice! No!

Doctor Alice: (sound of metal clattering) Hey, Bubbles! Calm down! Nothing's going to happen. Trust me.

Bubbles: B-but why did you bring t-that shotgun in here? It's dangerous!

Doctor Alice: I just wanted to show you something. (the sound of shotgun pumping) That you're in control. (shotgun was triggered, but it was a dry fire. Only the sound of clicking could be heard) Here, take it.

Bubbles: I don't wanna…

Doctor Alice: Remember what I said, Bubbles? We need to talk and reason with your fear so that we may conquer it. Now, it's time you take action. We've talked about it last week. These guns may cause pain to you, but they're harmless.

Bubbles: But some of them are harmful…

Doctor Alice: Those are special, they're not counted. Now take it, Bubbles. (sound of metal shifting on flesh)

Bubbles: But they could hurt people like you.

Doctor Alice: And that's why you're out there stopping it. Take it, Bubbles.
Bubbles: Okay…

Doctor Alice: Now, I'm going to be with you throughout this exercise, okay? (sound of sofa crinkling) Here, hold it properly.

Bubbles: Okay…

Doctor Alice: Remember, Bubbles. You're in control. You're holding the shotgun now, and you're in control. There's nothing to fear from a gun - as long as you're in control.

Bubbles: But what if the bad guys control it?

Doctor Alice: Did that ever stop you from beating them up?

Bubbles: N-no…

Doctor Alice: No. Exactly. And if it ever did, you could easily stop them. Pump the shotgun, Bubbles.

Bubbles: I… Okay… (sound of shotgun pumping)

Doctor Alice: Pull the trigger. (sound of shotgun dry-firing and clicking) Very good. Now keep doing it. (repeated sound of shotgun pumping and clicking on empty, the pace getting faster and faster) Good, very good. How do you feel?

Bubbles: Better… I guess? You're right, Miss Alice. I was in control. But… I just feel… scared when I see it. I can't explain it.

Doctor Alice: That's because you had a bad day back at that bank, Bubbles. It was a really bad first impression, but you know what? It doesn't have to be bad all the time. Like now - nothing bad's happening with the shotgun, right?

Bubbles: I believe you…

Doctor Alice: Good. I'm glad you do. If you were any other kid, I wouldn't have encouraged this, but… Do this every day, alright? Show that shotgun who's boss. Pump it and shoot it every day. It'll help clear your head. That shotgun belongs to Blossom, by the way. I've talked to her about it, and she said she'll let you keep it since she no longer uses it - eye beam and all that.

Bubbles: No wonder it looks familiar…

Doctor Alice: Well, I guess we're done for today. It's great working with you, Bubbles.

Bubbles: Miss Alice?

Doctor Alice: Yes?

Bubbles: Thanks… I don't know what I'll do without you.

Doctor Alice: Hey, don't mention it.

Bubbles: Can I kiss you?

Doctor Alice: (laughs) Sure (sound of lips smacking) You're a sweetheart, you know that? I can see why the professor loves you so much. Now run along - I'm sure your dad's waiting for you. (sound of wind whooshing and door opening and closing)
Doctor Alice: Results seem optimistic. While we've only worked on some of the problems plaguing her, I think we're making progress. While it'll be a long time before her claustrophobia and haplophobia are completely stamped out - if it is at all possible, in which case minimized is a better word - I'll call it a breakthrough and a win today. Her depression and PTSD, however, is another matter. While all her mental disorders are no doubt linked, I have consulted with Professor Utonium and discovered that there are genetic factors at play with Bubbles' mental conditions. This will severely limit the job I'm doing - to one of management rather than cure. Permanent… rather than temporary. I hope I'm up to the task.

I will need to consult with the council on this. Bubbles can't keep going out there, or it'll be back to square one every time she did. I… want to remain professional at all times but… It hurts me every time I see her on my couch with her mental trauma reopened again - and widely too.

I don't think they'll kill her for it this time. Most of the council had swung around in Bubbles' favor. But neither are they going to give her any kind of vacation. We're still at war with the criminal underground, and I doubt it's going to end any time soon. If only there's someone to substitute for Bubbles…

**Timestamp: 2042**

Doctor Alice: (Door opens, she speaks in an excited way that borders on acting) Blossom! Hey! It's nice to see you!

Blossom: Hi, Miss Alice! It's nice to see you too! (sound of wind and sofa crinkling) May I have one?

Doctor Alice: Ever the nice and polite one, I see. Sure, have as many marshmallows as you want.

Blossom: Thanks. They're really nice.

Doctor Alice: You sure you want just one? Why not take a few more?

Blossom: My Dad says not to eat too much of this stuff. Should I lie down this time?

Doctor Alice: No, you don't have to. Listen, Blossom… We need to talk.

Blossom: What are we talking about, Miss Alice?

Doctor Alice: It's Bubbles. I'm worried about her.

Blossom: (Sad) Me too…

Doctor Alice: I've been speaking to her, and we need to talk about your leadership, how you've been using her in your missions.

Blossom: (defensively) And how have I been using her, Miss Alice?

Doctor Alice: (shock) I- I'm sorry - that sounded wrong, the way it came out. I didn't mean that. I was talking about the strategy you've been using that involves her.

Blossom: (still defensively) Did I do something wrong?

Doctor Alice: Blossom, I'm not blaming you for anything. You trust me, right?
Blossom: (pause) Yes.

Doctor Alice: I've been speaking to Bubbles and, um, I've been looking at security footages of your fights and I think you need to stop putting Bubbles on the front lines so much.

Blossom: (softly) You're blaming me…

Doctor Alice: (talking over Blossom, and have likely missed what she said) You ordered her to rush criminals with shotguns - regularly - and just yesterday, you ordered her to fly into the sights of twenty criminals alone. She had to fight alone after that. It's not the first time, either, Blossom.

Blossom: You don't understand!

Doctor Alice: Blossom, you do know that your sister's suffering from a fear of shotguns, right? That she's very sensitive and suffering from certain mental illnesses?

Blossom: (agitated) But we're all afraid and getting shot hurts all of us-

Doctor Alice: Yeah, but Bubbles most of all-

Blossom: (agitated) Bubbles needs to realize she wasn't the only one who's afraid!

Doctor Alice: Honey, it's not that simple! You-

Blossom: (hysterical) WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO?!

Doctor Alice: (shocked) There, there, Blossom, calm down-

Blossom: (screaming, sound of glassware sliding rapidly and breaking on the ground) YOU WEREN'T THERE, ALICE!

Doctor Alice: Blossom!

Blossom: (shouting) MOM SAID I CAN'T LET BUTTERCUP GET HURT! AND YOU'RE SAYING I CAN'T LET BUBBLES GET HURT! (Heavy breathing) WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO!? (heavy breathing)

Doctor Alice: Blossom, just- stop!

Blossom: (screaming) Let go of me! (high-pitched screaming) NO! (sound of impact on a sofa) Stop touching me!

Doctor Alice: Argh!

Blossom: You said you weren't blaming me! YOU LIED! (sound of coffee table crashing into a sofa)

(Sound of door opening with a loud bang and X-energy burst of sound. Blossom's wailing and crying fade into the distance.)

Doctor Alice: Blossom! Wait! Shit… Ouch…

Doctor Alice: (crying) God damn it… I can't believe… (takes a deep breath) That wasn't good at all. It seems that she's been badly affected by her position of responsibility. But that can't be it. Anxiety could only be a symptom. Something must have set her off. She mentioned something about 'mom'. Fucking Selicia must have done something, but yesterday's masquerade party is just
as much likely to be affecting her.

The main cause, however, remains simple - there's a damn good reason why we don't put a gun in a kid's hand and ask her to pull the trigger on someone. Blossom's been doing that, in a way, with Bubbles and Buttercup, God knows how many times. It's what all leaders do - military leaders, especially. They - Blossom had to point her finger and send her sisters into battle repeatedly, knowing they could get hurt.

That's not to mention the fact that she's fighting people - and while there are very few fatalities in the past month, there were numerous last year. Is guilt another factor leading to her meltdown?

In any case, I won't be finding out for a while. Will she even be willing to see me next week?

---

**Timestamp: 2055**

Buttercup: Whoa! What happened here, Miss Alice?

Doctor Alice: Don't mind me, I was just cleaning up. (sound of table screeching back into position)

Buttercup: Should I help? The couches look too heavy for you.

Doctor Alice: No, it's fine. I'll move those later. You don't mind the room being a little messy, do you?

Buttercup: No, Miss Alice. I'm not like my sisters - they're completely crazy! Who needs everything to be perfectly neat? We're just going to take them out anyway…

Doctor Alice: I guess it's good to be tolerant of imperfections… (nervous laughter) Have a seat, Buttercup.

Buttercup: What are we going to do today?

Doctor Alice: Oh, just the usual stuff. How was yesterday's patrol? I bet nothing happened, right?

Buttercup: You bet wrong, Miss Alice! We busted up a bunch of bad guys, and I was able to beat up all of them myself! Bubbles was just being her usual scaredy cat self and Blossom was missing most of the time! It was awesome - I guess my sisters do need me after all.

Doctor Alice: Hmm. And the party yesterday? I heard from your father that you got to dance that night? Did you dance well?

Buttercup: Of course, Miss Alice. It was easy - too bad my sisters kept stepping on their dancers' shoes. There's nothing I can't do, even if I hate dancing…

Doctor Alice: Well, it's good that you were having fun yesterday then, Buttercup. (ruffling of cloth) Here, wear the blindfold and lie down.

Buttercup: Aw, do I have to?

Doctor Alice: Yes, Buttercup. You don't see it yet, but it helps. (sound of cord snapping into place and sofa crinkling) Alright, Buttercup. Comfy?

Buttercup: Yep. Hey, can I have some marshmallows?

Doctor Alice: Oh… About that… I kinda dropped them on the way here. Tell you what - I'll give
you twice the number of marshmallows next week, how about that?

Buttercup: That would be nice. Thanks!

Doctor Alice: Now… Just relax and trust me. Listen to the sound of my voice. Imagine what I ask of you, and only that. Do you understand?

Buttercup: Yes, Miss Alice. (Giggles)

Doctor Alice: I'm serious.

Buttercup: Okay…

Doctor Alice: Now… I want you to go back to the last time you beat a person up. Are you there?

Buttercup: (laughs) Yes.

Doctor Alice: When was it?

Buttercup: Yesterday.

Doctor Alice: Tell me how it was like.

Buttercup: It was at the party. There was a guy in a black mask. I punched him in the face and he flew really far and it was funny. (laughs)

Doctor Alice: How did you feel when you did that? Tell me honestly, Buttercup. I'm sure you want to.

Buttercup: It felt really good, Miss Alice. I like the feel of a punch. Too bad he wasn't much of a fighter though - because a fight would have been better. I get to punch someone more and hurt him worse.

Doctor Alice: Why do you like hurting people?

Buttercup: Because it felt good?

Doctor Alice: Is there anything else?

Buttercup: I feel… powerful that way. Is that the right word?

Doctor Alice: Yes, it is. But don't you think it's wrong to hurt someone? By that, I mean injuring someone, causing broken bones and bleeding and torn skin and such.

Buttercup: No. Why should it be? They're the bad guys. I don't know why Dad and Blossom kept saying it's wrong. They deserve it! Bad guys aren't entirely bad? Pfff! They're asking for a beatdown as long as they're there!

Doctor Alice: Have you ever felt bad for anyone you've hurt? I'm talking in general – including hurting someone's feelings.

Buttercup: Why should I?

Doctor Alice: And what if it's your family and friends?

Buttercup: You mean like Bubbles? She deserves it… Maybe she'll be less of a crybaby and more
of a help that way.

Doctor Alice: Have you thought about the consequences of your actions? Like if you were to severely injure or kill a bad guy?

Buttercup: Blossom and Dad would get mad at me, so I couldn't do it most of the time. Blossom tattles on me all the time and Dad's less fun when he's mad at me. Does that count, Miss Alice?

Doctor Alice: But what about the bad guy's family? Say he's a father of three and killing him will mean three children without a father. Does that trouble you?


Doctor Alice: Very well… You're doing great, Buttercup. Now… I want you to imagine your father for me. How does he normally look like when he found out you've killed someone.

Buttercup: You mean like last year?

Doctor Alice: Yes, like last year. Tell me about it.

Buttercup: He… I don't know how to…

Doctor Alice: Try.

Buttercup: Is sad the word? I don't know, angry too? But he doesn't show it like I do. I just know that it's… inside him? He's a little scary that way - please don't tell him I said that.

Doctor Alice: He loves you, Buttercup. That's why. Now, has he ever, like, blown up at you before?

Buttercup: Once, when I took Bubbles' truck, back when we couldn't speak very well.

Doctor Alice: That's a very long time ago, isn't it? I want you to recall his face when he did. Tell me about it.

Buttercup: It was… scary. I didn't like it one bit. I cried when I saw it. It… (sobs)

Doctor Alice: Are you okay?

Buttercup: I'm fine. Sorry. (Sniffles) (Alice's note: Buttercup appears to retain perfect memory of her early days despite lacking the ability to speak or even form her thoughts in words during those humble times. It is possible her reaction is a direct result of the emotions she remembers when her psychopathy has not been fully manifested yet. I can use it as a basis for her morals.)

Doctor Alice: No, Buttercup, you didn't do anything wrong. You don't have to apologize for it.

Buttercup: I'm sorry (sobs) I don't know- (sobs) what's happening to me (sniffles).

Doctor Alice: Buttercup, it's okay to cry - and it's okay to be afraid or feel sad when someone else is sad or afraid or angry. Do you understand?

Buttercup: Sorta. (sniffles)

Doctor Alice: Here, have a napkin. (sound of paper being pulled out) But I'm afraid I'm going to have to be frank with you on this one. If you keep killing, I think your Daddy might put on that face more often. He's a good man, Buttercup, and he'll likely blow up if you keep hurting people
callously and killing them. See, a good man like him hates such things.

Buttercup: But I haven't killed anyone since Christmas!

Doctor Alice: I… didn't say you did, Buttercup, I was just-

Buttercup: I didn't.

Doctor Alice: (pause) I know, I know. I'm just saying that you're putting your father in a very bad spot and he's not going to react well whenever you do something wrong, okay? Buttercup, you know he cares and he knows what's good for you.

Buttercup: I know.

Doctor Alice: Good. Besides, if you're good, he'll be good to you too - and good girls deserve things like ice cream and presents. You like those stuff, do you?

Buttercup: Yes…

Doctor Alice: Just like how you like marshmallows?

Buttercup: Did you really drop them, Miss Alice? I really want some….

Doctor Alice: Be a good girl and you'll get plenty next week.

Buttercup: Okay…

Doctor Alice: Hmm… I think we're almost done, Buttercup. You've been great.

Buttercup: Thanks.

Doctor Alice: Just one more thing though. You kept mentioning, without fail, that you like hurting the bad guys. Tell me honestly, Buttercup - because good girls are honest - have you ever wanted to hurt the ‘good guys’? I mean really hurt them? Like breaking a few bones, causing tears and cuts and bleeding, anything of that sort?

Buttercup: Promise me you won't tell?

Doctor Alice: You can trust me, Buttercup. I'm your therapist, so I'm supposed to keep secrets.

Buttercup: Yes.

Doctor Alice: Even now?

Buttercup: Yes, Miss Alice.

Doctor Alice: Who?

Buttercup: My sisters. Some of my classmates in school.

Doctor Alice: Why?

Buttercup: Because they really annoy me. Blossom wouldn't stop ordering me around and watching me and telling on me, and Bubbles! Urgh! She's so useless and all she ever does is cry! She's killing me with her crying! She's so- she left me there and cried like a little… like a little… Argh! When I was hurt and needed help!
Doctor Alice: What about your classmates? Why would you want to hurt them?

Buttercup: Some of them are really stupid! Like, all they ever do is make paper dolls and spell and add numbers and say stupid things. They're not like me, or even Blossom and Bubbles.

Doctor Alice: I see. Is there anyone else you felt like hurting?

Buttercup: I feel like hurting you too, Miss Alice. I kept imagining how it'd sound like for you to scream. Or how you look like on the inside.

Doctor Alice: (gasps, shallow breathing) What did you say?

Buttercup: You wanted me to be honest, Miss Alice. Am I a good girl for being honest?

Doctor Alice: (hesitation) W-why yes, of course. Very nice of you. Why… would you want to hurt me?

Buttercup: You kept asking me questions, Miss Alice, and I kept giving you my secrets. You kept bringing out these… feelings in me. And my Mom told me how mean you are, too. But you seem nice enough. I wish you have some marshmallows now, too.

Doctor Alice: What's… stopping you from hurting me, Buttercup?

Buttercup: I don't know. Nothing really. Your marshmallows, I guess? Daddy wouldn't like it, and I don't want him to hate me for it.

Doctor Alice: I- Uh- I see.

Buttercup: Are you afraid of me, Miss Alice?

Doctor Alice: To be honest? Yes. But Buttercup?

Buttercup: Hmm?

Doctor Alice: I'm here for you. That's what friends are for. (Silence) Here, let me take that blindfold off. (cloth folding, cord snapping) Thanks for talking to me, Buttercup. I'll see you next week?

Buttercup: (sofa crinkling) Sure, Miss Alice. Don't forget to bring the marshmallows.

Doctor Alice: I… of course.

(The sound of Buttercup getting up and walking away, before opening and closing the door)

Doctor Alice: (sigh) That was close. Too close for comfort. Analysis: Buttercup remains a pathological liar, which is symptomatic of her severe psychopathy. However, owing to her inexperience, she is not very good at it. She had told some very obvious lies about her performance in combat in the steel factory and during the dance at Morbucks' party. I guess she didn't know that I had notes on those events. As expected, her psychopathy remains as it was before. Of all the things Chemical X couldn't do, it's getting rid of mental illnesses. (sigh) It's her less obvious lies that worries me though. I can only wonder how many people she'd killed this month.

There's some good news. Buttercup appears to have the makings of a pro-social psychopath. It was dangerous, sure, but she had outright stated that she was holding back on hurting me because of Professor Utonium. She appears to be responding to rewards, and as it appears, could reason with consequences in terms of logic, young as she is. It might not be ideal, but this path I've been
exploring is the best chance we have at a Buttercup who could function in normal society.

What concerns me the most, however, is that her duties in Townsville might not exactly bring out the best in Buttercup. It's going to be one temptation after another to do bad things, to hurt and kill. In a city like Townsville, there's going to be a lot of bad influences, stuff that could set Buttercup off in the wrong direction. As with Bubbles, I guess I'll be treating her permanently. Psychopathy isn't something that can be cured. I don't know what I was expecting. There's been too many miracles with Chemical X that I've started to take it for granted, I guess.

Timestamp: 2115

(sound of ruffling and things being shifted about as Alice packs her bag)

(There was a knock on the door)

Professor Utonium: Hey, Alice. How did the Girls do?

Doctor Alice: Splendid, actually. I believe I've made progress with all of them…

Professor Utonium: That's great. I'll definitely want to hear all about it later.

Doctor Alice: Later?

Professor Utonium: (softly) Come on, don't be shy now. She's right there. Alice and I will have to talk, honey, and then she'll have to leave.

Doctor Alice: Professor?

Professor Utonium: Stop hiding behind me, Blossom. Be brave- there you are, that's good.

Blossom: Hey, Miss Alice.

Doctor Alice: Blossom. It's nice to see you again… after…

Blossom: I'm sorry about what I did just now. I was just… I couldn't control myself… and… I just felt so angry and… (sobs)

Doctor Alice: Hey… It's okay… Come here…

Blossom: (cries) I'm sorry I got mad. (sobs) I didn't mean to hurt you…

Doctor Alice: But you didn't! Hey… It's okay… It's not your fault.

Blossom: (cries) What am I supposed to do? (sobs) It's so hard sometimes…

Doctor Alice: What you've always been doing, Blossom. (hair ruffling) You've been such a strong girl - you just need to be careful with Bubbles a little more, okay? She's... she's just not as strong as you.

Blossom: What about Buttercup? Mom hates it when she gets hurt…

Doctor Alice: I'll talk to her. It'll be fine. But for now, I guess… Buttercup's your sister too. I'm sure you already know what's good for her.

Blossom: Thanks, Miss Alice. I'm sorry I broke your bowl.
Doctor Alice: Nah, it's fine. It's just some cheap glass bowl I should have left at home anyway. I don't know why I didn't bring a plastic one.

Blossom: (sniffles) Will we speak again next week?

Doctor Alice: Of course… Hey… I'll always be here for you. That's what friends are for, right?

Blossom: You're such a good friend. I don't deserve it.

Doctor Alice: Don't be so hard on yourself. You do - you're young, Blossom. It's natural for you to make mistakes. It's how you learn - I'm not even mad at all, okay? It was nothing just now.

Blossom: I won't do it again…

Doctor Alice: I know you won't. (pats Blossom's back) Now off you go - go spend some time with your sisters, okay?

Blossom: Okay…

---

**Timestamp: 2120**

(Sound of sound recording playing on a cassette player. Blossom screams and Doctor Alice pleads for her to calm down in the recording. The recording stops.)

Professor Utonium: I've never seen Blossom like that before. (Sigh)

Doctor Alice: Neither have I.

Professor Utonium: It's getting to her, isn't it?

Doctor Alice: There's more to it than that. You need to talk to Selicia about this. I don't know what she did, but she's making Blossom's anxiety worse. You heard what Blossom said in the recording, right? 'Mom said I can't let Buttercup get hurt'?

Professor Utonium: That just sounds to me like Selicia's being protective of Buttercup. That's normal. It could just be a passing remark she made, and Blossom took it the wrong way.

Doctor Alice: Thomas, playing favoritism is one thing, but I think she's been saying or doing something to Blossom behind your back. She wouldn't have blown up like that – other factors considered.

Professor Utonium: What are you saying?

Doctor Alice: I have no specifics, but she could be doing anything from pressuring Blossom into making certain decisions to outright abusing her. I couldn't find out the truth because my session with Blossom today was cut short-

Professor Utonium: Selicia wouldn't do that. She loves Blossom. Sure, Buttercup most of all, but she loves the Girls, all of them, I know it!

Doctor Alice: It's entirely possible for someone to hurt another even if she loves her, Thomas.

Professor Utonium: Selicia wouldn't. She loves them. She knows how hurting the Girls in any way would make me feel. It's happened before, and she wouldn't do it again.
Doctor Alice: Please don't be mad at me. We have to put our feelings aside to help those we love, Thomas. Including your love for Selicia.

Professor Utonium: I'm not mad. I'll talk to Selicia about it. You're right, I have to make sure nothing's going on.

Doctor Alice: I was thinking I should do that, actually.

Professor Utonium: No, that wouldn't work. She hates you with a passion, and I mean it. She exploded on me during our date just because I mentioned your name, Alice.

Doctor Alice: And do you really love her?

Professor Utonium: Very much.

Doctor Alice: (pauses) I see. Well, you talk to her then.

Professor Utonium: How are the Girls, Alice?

Doctor Alice: (silence) Hmm? What? Oh. I think Bubbles and Buttercup are responding to me. Blossom's strong – she's suffering the least, but now I'm worried that's going to change after today. I don't have enough to go on, but I really hope Blossom isn't developing IED.

Professor Utonium: IED?

Doctor Alice: Intermittent Explosive Disorder. An anger problem. Don't be alarmed, Tom. Chances are, it could be acute and temporary. It could blow over when things calm down.

Professor Utonium: I hope so. Blossom's the smart one, the strong one. She'll be fine, right?

Doctor Alice: (Pause) Right. So now, we just need to focus on her anxiety.

Professor Utonium: What can I do to help?

Doctor Alice: The same as what you've been doing. Love her. Give her everything – a good family life, a home where she could feel safe. She's the city's guardian angel, but you're her guardian angel.

Professor Utonium: But that's not enough, isn't it? If it were, they wouldn't be this way…

Doctor Alice: That's the other thing we need to talk about. Bubbles and Buttercup. They might be responding to me, but every time they get out there, they're getting worse. I'm not sure if I can keep up, and the mind doesn't work that way – it's not a computer in which I can just install my treatments and uninstall their mental disorders. It'll add up, and if this goes on for too long, there will be a point of no return.

Professor Utonium: I know, and I have to watch them get worse every day, right before my eyes. That's why I'm working on something that could save them.

Doctor Alice: Is it something to do with Chemical X? It can't be repurposed into some kind of medical treatment for their mental disorders, can it?

Professor Utonium: No, but I can come pretty close to it. Let's call it Anti-X for easy reference. I have a pretty good idea on how to make it work. It'll nullify the Chemical X in their body and make them normal. Permanently, hopefully.
Doctor Alice: Taking them off-duty indefinitely, Thomas Lewis Upton, you're a genius! (pause) But… What about the USDO council?

Professor Utonium: I haven't floated the idea with them yet.

Doctor Alice: They won't like it. Most of them, I mean, even if the majority will vote against killing them. I'm with you in this, and so are some of them in the council but I think Director Cliff had made sure intentionally that the majority on the council is on his side.

Professor Utonium: I'll do whatever it takes to save my family, Alice. Whatever it takes. If they need something else to defend Townsville, I'll make them something else to do the job.

Doctor Alice: Something else? You're talking about another human being, Thomas. Since when did you get so cold?

Professor Utonium: I'll do anything for my Girls.

Doctor Alice: That's not who you are.

Professor Utonium: Yeah, and that's why Naga and Jojo's out there, hurting my kids. My creations, my weakness.

Doctor Alice: That's different.

Professor Utonium: I'm doing this.

Doctor Alice: I guess I can't stop you. But Upton – Thomas – don't forget who you are. You're a good man, and you shouldn't let anything change you. The Girls look up to you, Tom, and if you break and become something else, so will they.

Professor Utonium: I know…

-TRANSCRIPT END-
Chapter 11: A Quiet Sunday

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup enjoy a quiet Sunday before a new week starts with renewed criminal activity...

Chapter 11: A Quiet Sunday


5 FEB (Sunday) 1989, 1017.

"-And if you don your spiritual armor, you'll be able to stand against the forces of the Devil-" An old, venerated bishop preached on the pulpit of one of Townsville's grandest Catholic churches. His eyes would occasionally turn in the direction of this Sunday's most special guests: none other than what the citizens of Townsville had blasphemously taken to calling The Angels of Justice, and the apparent Adam and Eve who had spawned such… creatures. Said creatures were sitting near the front, a few pews removed from the first row, dressed finely in flowing dresses likely woven by Lilith herself, matching their infernal eyes. The parents – one of whom was in a sinfully sultry black flowing dress and another in a deceptively handsome suit - didn't seem to mind their otherworldly appearance.

The Catholic and Christian world had mixed views when it came to Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup. Some saw them as demons, as heralds of the apocalypse, the spawns of Satan himself. Others, still, believed them to be true angels, although either birthed from a human womb or created by human hands - the USDO had kept the world in the dark - were actually sent down by God in the same manner that Jesus was birthed through Mary. A small minority had more rational views. The Pope himself and the Vatican Council, however, were still hesitantly deliberating on the matter, far removed from Townsville. However, word had spread that they would soon be issuing an official statement within the next few days, all in the name of shepherding the flocks of God in one direction rather than seven or more.

In recent times, those who held the extreme belief that Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were God's angels sent down from heaven were excommunicated from the Catholic Church. In Townsville itself, more than a thousand were thrown out by the Pope himself for foolishly making such blasphemous statements without his divinely-ordained approval. Unknown yet to the Girls, the priest Bubbles had saved in Morbucks Industries Research Labs had been an archbishop, and now one of those who had turned heretic and gone on to form a Catholic cult known as The New Trinity. Their membership was growing rapidly, drawing members from both the orthodoxy of Catholicism and the less religious of Townsville citizens.

Selicia Goodwin had made sure to carefully navigate the Catholic world she had left behind years ago to find the right church to put Buttercup - and her sisters - in. She had called the Catholic churches in advance to propose their visit to the church, and after eliminating a few churches that had taken offense to the idea, she'd narrowed it down and chosen the best out of those that remained. The Cathedral Basilica of The Most Pure was one such church which was willing to tolerate the Girls, with the majority of the attendees and priests there under the belief that they
were God's gifts. It was, in truth, a slim majority, and they had made sure to avoid excommunication by making no official proclamations.

Blossom was listening intently to the bishop, taking in his every word, finding it all fascinating, and the bishop's claims of a spiritual world bizarre, but not unbelievable, considering what they had already seen and experienced. Bubbles thought the bishop's stories to be funny and interesting at times if a little boring during other times. Buttercup was barely staying awake, much to Selicia's chagrin. She had hoped that putting Buttercup in a church would 'tame the Devil in her' and, in more modern terms, keep her psychopathy in check by instilling some Catholic morals, backed by her love, into the troubled and wayward child. Professor Utonium was scribbling on his lecture pad, pretending to be taking notes about the bishop's whimsical and colorful presentation on the spiritual, but he was actually working on his calculations and chemical theory for Anti-X, which he thought was the true solution to the Buttercup problem.

All around them, people were secretly peeking at them. Some were less subtle and were outright staring or even glaring at them. It'd only subsided to an extent as the day wore on for the Girls. What did not subside was the huge berth the congregation had given the Girls. Those that believed them to be the Devil's work or the blasphemous production of humanity's hubris and arrogance had made sure to sit far away from them. The more tolerant had made no exceptions to their sitting arrangements. Only a few had chosen to welcome them and sit closer to them so as to not ostracize the new sheep to the flock. A kindly old woman, a middle-aged couple who looked like they came out of American Gothic and a few others.

The Catholic mass was one tiring ritual after the next, and they were really far from done. Next, they had to go through the Procession of Faith, which Buttercup, again, found to be meaningless, but Blossom and Bubbles found to have some meaning as they renounced their sins. Baskets were passed around after that, and Selicia had given each of the Girls a generous sum of money to donate, which they did, but it was a gesture none of them understood.

A few Catholic hymns later, the bishop announced that a special prayer was to be conducted before the usual: "May Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup come forward, before God and his humble speaker?" the bishop had requested. Blossom was stunned when she heard it. Bubbles was surprisingly excited at the prospect of participating more in the mass. Buttercup had to be woken up.

When the Girls were stuck to their seats, Professor Utonium decided to act, not out of religious conviction (as his was in the negatives) but to make sure that they didn't have to suffer another social disaster and the fallout from the resultant shame of it all. Taking Blossom and Bubbles by the hands, he led them down the long, red-carpeted aisle and towards the front. After wiping Buttercup's drool away, Selicia picked her up and followed behind the professor. In the meantime, the bishop, who was an old man in his seventies, descended from the pulpit to the front to receive them.

The congregation watched in morbid silence and even more interest than during a regular mass. The Girls stood before the railing separating Chancel from Crossing. They thought the bishop to appear formidable in his priestly garb and tall hat. He seemed serious and his venerable age, which had carved at his flesh as nature would a statue, gave him natural authority. He gazed down on the Girls as though they were unworthy, studying them as if looking for signs of the Devil's work.

The professor returned the bishop's look with interest, with silent derision and cynicism. Selicia, for once, was at peace as she looked up to the bishop. Buttercup decided to let herself float from her Mom's arms at this moment with a dim burst of green light, managing to extract a few gasps from the normally stoic congregation. She landed next to Blossom. The bishop watched the
wayward of The Three with supposedly divine-approved judgment in his eyes.

"Spawns of Satan from the pits of hell or Angels of God from the very gate of heaven, I do not
know what you three are - my continued prayers to God may yet yield some answers. But for the
time being, I have faith that this is all part of a great plan - God has brought you before me either
way. Spawns of Satan or Angels of God, I will recite a prayer with you, and if you're the latter, you
will be blessed with the gift of your creator's wisdom and morality-" the bishop said eloquently,
almost poetically. The professor had almost barked at the bishop for his insanity - after all, he was
the man who had created his Girls, even if it was by accident. "Now, kneel down and put your
hands together in prayer." He gestured before him.

The Girls did as they were told and knelt before the bishop. There were special pillows put down
there just for them and their comfort, so that they would be raised to the right height, too. Putting
their elbows on the railings, however, they did not know what to do with their hands. One after the
other, the bishop put their palms together in sacred prayer. The bishop then instructed them to close
their eyes and they did as they were instructed, though each of them did take a peek when they
thought the bishop wasn't looking, expecting something, only to shut their eyes once more,
disappointed.

"I am going to teach you a most simple prayer," the bishop declared. "Repeat after me, as you see
with your mind the splendor of God: Dear Lord."

"Dear lord," the Girls repeated.

"They're going to be well-behaved little cherubs, I can feel it already," Selicia whispered to
Professor Utonium as they watched from a fair distance away.

"I awake and see Your light," the bishop recited.

"I awake and see your light," the Girls repeated.

"I don't know," the professor replied with serious doubt in his heart, and rightfully so. "I think the
key to their salvation's in science and parenting. Not… this."

"For You have kept me through the night," the bishop recited.

"For you have kept me through the night," the Girls repeated, amazingly without a pause or
mistake.

"Oh, Thomas," Selicia said lovingly as she put an arm around him. "Have a little faith, and even
then, it doesn't hurt to try."

"To You I lift my hands and pray," the bishop recited.

"To you I lift my hands and pray," the Girls repeated, still following, each with their own reasons to
do so.

"We haven't tried everything yet," the professor said, careful not to offend Selicia at this critical
"Keep me from sin throughout this day," the bishop recited.

"Keep me from sin throughout this day," the Girls repeated.

"So we've got to start somewhere," Selicia said playfully.

"And if I die before it's done," the bishop recited.

"And if I die before it's done," the Girls repeated.

"Still, don't you think it's a little…" the professor attempted to find the right word for what he was about to say. "out of place for the our Girls - the result of cutting-edge science ahead of its time by decades, if not centuries - to turn to religion - the result of humanity's superstition that started almost two thousand years ago?"

"Save me through Jesus Christ, Your Son," the bishop recited.

"Save me through jesus christ, your son," the Girls repeated.

"I get what you mean," Selicia said, mildly amused. "bioweapons' and 'enhanced individuals' and all that. Still, I think we both can agree that they're little girls. Our little girls, right?"

"Right," the professor said.

"Amen," the bishop recited.

"Amen," the Girls repeated.

"And this was how I was raised," Selicia recalled. "And despite everything - my parents and the streets and the USDO, I didn't turn into a complete mess. I was a partial mess, I know, but at least it wasn't complete."

"Open your eyes, children," the bishop said. The Girls obeyed. "repeat this prayer every morning, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will lead you down a path of righteousness."

"Why not thank Aunt Martha for that?" the professor suggested. "Or your friends in school?"

"Thanks, mister," Blossom said to the bishop.

"Yeah, that was fun," Bubbles added.

"Mom's going to be glad we did this," Buttercup added too.
"Well, I'm thanking the church too," Selicia countered her other half in a good-natured manner.

"Don't thank me. Thank God," the bishop said to the Girls, not rudely. In fact, he'd even cracked a faint smile.

"You have me there," Professor Utonium said. "Still… This is completely different."

"Should we get the Girls baptized?" Selicia asked.

"Absolutely not," the professor rejected. Selicia smiled, and although she had every reason to be, wasn't offended.

"Will the parents of these fair children come forward and receive the blessings of our God in heaven?" the bishop asked for them.

"We'll speak later," Selicia said as she came up to the bishop. The bishop turned to look at the professor, wondering why he wasn't with his 'wife'. The professor raised his hand and gave the bishop a 'no' gesture as Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were returning to him. Eyes were immediately set on the professor as if he had committed a grave crime or uttered a blasphemous remark most foul.

"Why aren't you meeting the priest, Dad?" Bubbles asked, somewhat elated. "It was nice when we did that prayer thing." The professor wasn't quite sure how to explain himself and make Bubbles understand at the same time. All he did was to scoop her up and carried her in his arms while he waited for Selicia to be done with her prayer.

The professor would later explain at home to the Girls that he didn't believe, and cautioned - behind Selicia's back - not to believe everything they were told. The only thing he mentioned in favor of Selicia's religious affiliation was that Catholic rituals and habits could bring comfort, hope, and contentment to some and that they were welcome to try them if it helped them.

However, before that, the Girls were given an audience with a priest at the confession booth. Blossom had gone in first. Thomas and Selicia had excused themselves as Blossom's sisters waited. There was still much to talk about, things that were swept aside when the professor had decided to take the family out to the mall to repair the damage the Morbucks had caused.

"We need to talk about Blossom, Selicia," Thomas said as they selected a pew that was isolated enough from the straggling members of the congregation.

"What about her?" Selicia said, trying her best not to sound defensive. Her eyes were on her dear Thomas', and it looked like he might not have noticed. "Is she okay?"

"You know about her meltdown yesterday, right?" the professor asked.

"Yeah, what was that about?" Selicia said, too well aware that she was ignorant of Blossom's state of mind. Too well aware that it would bite her in the ass.

"You tell me," Thomas returned the question to Selicia, though he was at his wit's end on how to execute this. Being a professor in multiple fields, he had no trouble navigating calculations and theories and huge oceans of knowledge. People were the greater mystery to him, though with social consequences being all too real, it could end up becoming trouble too. "Blossom mentioned you. Something about you saying that she 'can't let Buttercup get hurt'?"

"Thomas…" Selicia murmured her lover's name, sensing anger in him, and she was right on the money.
"I know you love Buttercup more than Blossom and Bubbles, Selicia," the professor said. It wasn't new information. It wasn't the first time they had talked about this, and the professor found the fact painful and hard to swallow. It felt like something he would have to deal with for the rest of his life - and he loved the Girls, all of them, and Selicia. "What did you say to Blossom, Selicia? What did you do to her?"

"Oh, Thomas…” Selicia murmured, making sure to exaggerate the pain and sadness in her voice. Instinctively, she wanted to escape this. The loving Thomas she knew had faded away, and someone else was in his place. He tended to get like this when he was truly angered - and the fastest way to enrage him was hurting his adopted daughters. The fact that he was holding back was miraculous enough. "I know it's wrong to play favorites - I swear I wasn't… You know what General Blackwater said…”

In the next instant, Selicia was able to string together a convincing narrative. It was a skill she had mastered a long time ago, back when she wasn't a teenager yet. It was all for a good cause, she thought - if she stayed in the family and remained on good terms with Thomas, she could do more good, even to Blossom and Bubbles.

"I was just afraid for Blossom…” Selicia lied. Her tears were half-real. "She's held responsible for everything - I just want her to succeed, and be a good sister to Buttercup. I'm sorry. I didn't think that…"

Thomas couldn't resist her convincing tears. Holding her, he gave her a hug, at once regretting his accusations and even wondering why he made them in the first place. After all, there were a lot of possibilities as to what had caused Blossom to blow up - and he now believed he had made the mistake of choosing the wrong one, the worst one that implicated his 'wife' and wife-to-be when he shouldn't have.

"I feel guilty every day knowing that- that- the Girls had to go out there every day," Selicia cried, and she was victorious.

"It's so difficult!" she sobbed. "I'm the one who had to train them and- and- knowing every second that I'm preparing them for something they shouldn't have to go through!" It was perfect - it was exactly what the professor would want to hear.

"I know… I'm sorry," Thomas said.

"And when Buttercup was shot…” she continued murmuring sadly, at the same time trying not to attract too much attention – the fewer people involved, the better. "I was really afraid and it really hurts and- and- I can't imagine how it'd be for Blossom…”

"I was just trying to teach her everything I know…” Selicia said, finally drying her tears – there was no more need for that. She had won. "So she won't make the same mistakes I did."

"You've always been looking out for my little babies," the Professor said, nodding, touched by Selicia's self-professed sacrifice and altruism, none the wiser that half or even most of it were lies selfishly told to cover her ass. "Thanks. I didn't realize how hard it's been for you, having to act like a villain for their own good. I can't imagine doing that with them. I'm sorry."

As Selicia hugged the professor, she smiled even as she was still tearing up - she had done it, and it seemed that a couple of months of conventional nuclear family life hadn't damaged her ability to plot and plan and deceive.

When it was Buttercup's turn in the confession booth, it didn't take long at all. There was a shout
from the inside from a man and the door from the priest's side burst open. The younger member of
the clergy responsible for the confessional sprinted away as if chased by the Devil himself,
hyerically screaming incoherently all the way.

The bishop who was walking down the red carpet in the center of the cathedral stared
disapprovingly as the frightened priest ran across the church and disappeared into a door leading
into the Sacristy. "Paul, wait! What's the matter with you?" the old bishop had asked aloud,
confused when it happened. He then turned to Buttercup, who had just exited the booth, and she
flashed a guilty smile back at him.

"What did you do, Buttercup?" Selicia asked as she and her 'husband' went up to her.

"Nothing! He asked for my deepest, darkest sins and thoughts, so I gave it to him," Buttercup said,
though she made no mention of the fact that one of her deepest, darkest thought was the urge to
break through the grilled window in the confessional booth and tear the priest apart. The colorful
descriptions of her various massacres had been enough to put the priest on edge.

"Oh, my sweet pie," Selicia said, slightly exasperated but with a smile on her face. She then
laughed.

Out in the corner, the bishop was frowning at them, fuming mad.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

5 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1543.

Despite the little mishap at the church with Buttercup and the priest, the day had been great. They
had gone to lunch after that, then shopping, mainly for larger-sized clothes and more toys in
anticipation of the Girls growing bigger, and finally home. He liked it whenever the Girls were
smiling and laughing innocently once more. It meant that he had done his job, and made them
forget their worries at least for the day. As much as he hated to admit it, the time they spent at the
Catholic church had done as much good in making them forget. It was the only thing that mattered.

As he was undoing his tie while on the way to his master bedroom, the phone – the regular one –
rang. The professor picked it up.

"Hello?" he answered it dispassionately.

"Mister Utonium. Morbucks here," a deep male voice on the phone said. The professor hung it up
immediately and walked away, but before he could retreat into his bedroom, the phone rang once
more.

"Mister Utonium, please, you have to listen to me," the billionaire on the phone begged. The
professor hung up on him again. He couldn't be bothered with the bastard who ruined his
daughters' Friday. Neither did he want him to ruin his Sunday. There was only one way he would
listen to the man – he'd have to be begging on all fours before he'd even be willing to listen. Selicia
would call it 'grilling' or 'sweating' the suspect. Speaking of Selicia, she was waiting for him, no
doubt in the shower with most of her clothes gone and her hair, which she had grown to shoulder
length, flowing down her-

The phone rang again. The professor let it ring for ten seconds out of spite, then twenty, before
picking it up with a near-sadistic smile on his face. He knew that Morbucks' time was worth more
in financial terms than his, and he enjoyed the idea of pissing it down the drain.
"Professor Utonium, please!" Mister Morbucks was practically begging desperately on the other hand.

"What do you want, Morbucks?" the professor made sure to sound as insultingly bored and dispassionate as possible. "My Girls aren't available. How about you ring up the city circus for your next party? I'm sure they won't cost you and your cronies an estimated $54 million."

"It's my daughter, professor, please!" Mister Morbucks was nearly driven to tears.

"And since when is your daughter my responsibility?" Professor Utonium said coldly. "I'm sure a rich man like you could find her some other friends, am I right? Just toss some money in the direction of the city and stop bothering me!"

"You're a doctor too, aren't you?" the businessman said. "You can't leave my daughter to die like this!"

"Isn't that being a little melodramatic?" the professor barked into the phone – oh, how some people would say anything to get their way!

"It's not! My precious Elodie- She- ever since that day, she wouldn't eat… she wouldn't sleep… She- she wouldn't stop crying," if Mister Morbucks wasn't grilled enough then, he was now. He was practically weeping and barely able to string a sentence together. "I had to call in the family doctor to sedate her and put her on an IV drip but- he- he warned that with Elodie's health already unstable as it is, she- she might even have a relapse like this! She needs the Girls! They're the only people who could save her!"

What Mister Morbucks said had given the professor pause. But on remembering what he did to the Girls, he could only do one thing.

"I'll think about it," the professor said without meaning it, making sure to pump as much venom into his voice as he could. "I'll get back to you in three business days - is that how a big shot CEO like you talk?"

"Don't you dare hang up on me!" Mister Morbucks screamed into the phone when he realized what the professor was about to do. "Please, help my daughter! Help her! PLEEEEASE!"

"JUST LIKE HOW YOU HELPED THEM!?" The professor screamed madly into the phone and hung up. And when the phone wouldn't stop ringing, he unplugged it and knocked the phone off its pedestal, and when the ringing wouldn't stop in the other parts of the house, he started unplugging every regular phone in The House too. He'd even expected the USDO hotline to start buzzing, but it didn't.

All was quiet once more. As a Sunday should be.
Chapter 12: The Rotten Core of the City

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup has been called up for an operation that seems to promise a routine victory...

Chapter 12: The Rotten Core of the City


6 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1107.

Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz! The clown phone rang, the first time in ages, but this time, it didn't ring in the Girls' room. This time, it'd issued its call to arms in the Girls' classroom in Pokey Oaks Kindergarten. The rude and loud buzzing had interrupted the silence, just as the little kids in the class were about to slip into their sleeping bags for a nap. It was tiring for the little ones, having to learn words related to camping and the wild and apply mathematics to hypothetical camping situations.

"Girls, the phone!" Miss Keane called out to the Girls as she was helping a girl out of her jacket when the zip was stuck. Buttercup growled in displeasure at having to miss nap time, but then smiled when she realized it meant punching time. Bubbles gave a helpless sigh while she was halfway into her sleeping bag, before sliding out again. Blossom stared at the phone with determination. Despite her limited experience, she knew that things were changing. Had this been weeks ago, it would be another week or two before another call was issued from the phone.

She flew to the clown phone, then picked it up. "Hello?" she greeted whoever it was on the other end.

"Hey Blossom," the voice on the other end sounded familiar. It had been a long time since she last heard it. Weeks, since it was as if he had disappeared from the face of the Earth.

"Mister Blake!" Blossom yelled into the phone in surprise, quite loudly that the whole class could hear it. Bubbles and Buttercup flew up next to her.

"Woah there, cowgirl!" Agent Blake said with a pained voice from Blossom screaming into his ear, but he could only be glad that it wasn't Bubbles. "It's nice to speak to you again."

"How have you been, Mister Blake?" Blossom asked lovingly, all the while tolerating her sisters' noisy insistence in the background that they be given a chance to speak to their USDO agent friend.

"I've had worse," Agent Blake admitted. "Listen, we need you at an operation soon. Can you Girls make it down to 55 Rhody Street in the tenements in... 20 minutes?"

Blossom searched her mind for the address; she had memorized the entire map of Townsville down to the streets. Miss Keane and her Mom and Dad had helped narrow down what she should remember, making it easier for her. She closed her eyes, and in her mind, she saw herself flying
across Townsville at the speed of light, searching for Rhody Street. Her sisters' pleas had all but disappeared as she traveled through the speeding highways of her neurons until…

"Yes, we can," Blossom said confidently, with a determined look on her face. "And we'll be there in half that time, too."

It was then that her sisters' ceaseless demands and jumping got to her. Caving into them, she held the phone out to them.

"Hi, Mister Blake! We missed you!" Bubbles and Buttercup yelled into the phone in unison, fighting for a dominant position over the handheld speaker and receiver.

"Yeah… Haha… I miss the both of you too," Mister Blake replied, and even Bubbles could hear it, but it was loud and clear to Buttercup because of her secret ability to hear incredibly well. Blossom repossessed the phone before her sisters could break it. "So, see you there. Listen, I really want to stay on the phone and chat, but I gotta run. See you Girls in 20, okay?"

"Bye!" Blossom bade farewell over the phone before turning to her sisters. "Let's go, Girls! We have a city to defend and Mister Blake to meet!"

After seeking permission from Miss Keane, the Girls flew out of the room as their fellow students watching them fly away with their trails of light in their wake. They had to enter another room to get changed for law enforcement.

The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. 55 Rhody Street.

6 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1121

It didn't matter that it was tiring. It didn't matter that they were draining the precious Chemical X in their blood - it wasn't as if they would need all of it in a fight anyway. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were finally going to see Mister Blake and friends, after weeks of being away. When they had finally arrived at the exact address they were given, Blossom had practically flown into the arms of the man, with Bubbles and Buttercup hugging his arms, and they had done it in full view of his men, other USDO personnel and the TPD officers and SWAT cops they were working with. And Agent Blake hugged her back, as he had missed the kids too.

"You can let go now, Blossom," Agent Blake finally said after enough time had passed. He could see that everyone on the scene was looking at him, some smiling while others were shaking their heads in disapproval. "It's nice, but you're heavy. Have you been gaining weight?"

"No, the number on the weighing machine hasn't changed," Blossom said as she let go. "It's just the stuff I'm wearing." As usual, the Girls were decked out in their tactical uniform and combat gear, but with the usual personal touch - stubborn as always, the only concession they had made were the MP5s that only Buttercup seemed to love. Huge guns had ceased to become a necessity with Blossom and Bubbles due to their unique X-abilities.

"Hmm. I guess that's nothing," Agent Blake muttered. Reaching for his aviator sunglasses, he removed them to take a better look at the Girls - it wasn't too sunny a day, what with the winter still stubbornly clinging onto the country, so his shades weren't necessary. As if sensing his intention, the Girls floated up before him. "Look at the three of you, all confident and happy. How's Townsville been treating you? Things have gotten better, right?"

Bubbles couldn't quite agree. Despite knowing the facts, that there was less crime, especially major
crime, to fight, just by being out there was enough to put her on edge. To her, something was always about to happen, something evil, just as it always did.

"Yeah! Everyone likes us now!" Blossom said, knowing full well she was exaggerating, but she didn't care. Here was Mister Blake and she was going to impress him as much as she could. As if the police officers in the background had heard her, they turned to stare at her with some of the coldest and accusatory looks she had ever seen. There were always some she couldn't please, some who would never forgive nor forget. "It's really great!"

"Where have you been anyway all these weeks?" Buttercup asked roughly, her arms crossed.

"Yeah, we really missed you," Bubbles added, before floating up to Mister Blake and hugging his arm.

"I'm sorry I had to go away - patrol duties, doing my bit to suppress crime and help the cops," the agent explained. He thought that it was pretty coincidental how the Girls could miss him all this time while he and the Girls were both out, patrolling Townsville, but then again, there were no coincidences - command probably put them on different paths. He'd been watching the outer reaches of the city while the Girls were resuscitating the dying heart of the city and doing a good job at it. "But at least business has brought us together again."

"What are we doing today, Mister Blake?" Blossom asked as she landed and walked beside her security friend, taking his hand. They came up to an opened manhole in the middle of the street, which was blocked off by yellow police lines, barriers, and vehicles. Police officers and USDO soldiers swarmed the area.

"I believe I can answer that," a male voice said. Blossom turned to look. It was Detective Mullens, with his right hand and daughter, Detective Olivia. On his left hand was the talking dog, Stanley Talker, whose tongue was sticking out and lolling about as he walked. Blossom smiled. So did her sisters. "Hey Girls. Another day, another batch of bottom feeders in cages, am I right?"

"Detective Mullens," Agent Blake greeted.

"One of those men you caught at the factory talked, kids," the detective said. "There's a whole drug network all over town. Some of them are underground, down in the sewers. We're busting one of them. We'll get them to spill and add more years to the Amoeba Boys' prison sentence."

"The sewers?" Blossom said in disbelief. She went up to the manhole, intimidated not by the darkness underground as they had their eye-lanterns trick for that, but by the smell. Bubbles, too, took a sniff and immediately backed away, pinching her nose. With her, it seemed that the darkness wasn't her only concern.

"Ew!" she cried as she waved away the smell.

"Oh, yuck!" Buttercup shouted, affected as well.

"I'm sorry, Girls," Detective Mullens said. "But that's how low some criminals will stoop but we'll have to stop them all the same."

"Just raccept the srell as part of nature and you should re fine," Stanley Talker finally spoke. "Ry nose's sharrer - stronger - rut I rhave no troule with re srell…"

"But… H-how are we going to do this?" Blossom asked, still staring into the gaping black hole leading down to the city's underbelly.
"We have a map of the sewers. I'll guide you through the radio," Agent Blake explained. "The drug runners are holed up in a central junction area. They operate only at night, so they are undermanned during the day. They won't be expecting us since all our units are a fair distance away from the central junction."

Blossom could barely even understand half of what he's talking about, but she knew enough - Agent Blake would guide her, the bad guys, few in numbers, would be taken by surprise.

"Are we doing it now? Can we, can we!?" Buttercup squealed with excitement at the prospect of another high-profile operation. In her mind, she couldn't wait to find another opportunity to dismember a human being for kicks.

"Mmmm…” Bubbles mewedled in fear as she clasped her sweaty hands. She really didn't want to go down there, where it stunk to high heaven and was far too dark - anything or anyone could be lurking down there, and Bubbles' imagination was rife with all sorts of things to fill in the blanks. Sensing her intense fear, Stanley Talker returned to her and rubbed himself against her body. Bubbles ran her hand along his fur.

Blossom noticed, and she remembered what Psychiatrist Alice had said.

"We'll go together, Bubbles," Blossom said gently and held her hand. "Just stay close to me - you don't have to go alone this time, but I need you to fight when you need to."

"Okay…” Bubbles agreed, even if she didn't want to go. She didn't want to disappoint everyone, now that they were here: Blake, Mullens, her sisters. Daddy. Mommy, who she didn't want to make angry. Buttercup couldn't help but laugh at her sister's weakness, as it made her feel powerful.

"You're sticking close to me too, Buttercup," Blossom turned to her and ordered as they stood at the edge of the manhole.

"But I don't need to stay close to you!" Buttercup objected.

"You got hurt the last time you were alone," Blossom reasoned, even if it was likely something that would fall on deaf ears. She really didn't want Mom to come down on her once more - she could still remember, with crystal clarity, Mom's threat. She really didn't want to find out how much pain a stun baton could cause on maximum setting.

"Fine…” Buttercup reluctantly agreed, and only did so because it allowed the possibility that her sisters might take the bullet for her the next time.

"Are you Girls ready?" Agent Blake asked.

"No…” Bubbles mewedled, still petrified by the great unknown just underneath the city's streets. How could anyone tolerate such a smell? What could even produce such a smell? Were there monsters in there that made the smell? She would have asked the adults what was going on with the smell had she the time and space for it.

"Of course!" Blossom and Buttercup chorused together, for once, as the both of them wanted to make a positive impression with Mister Blake when they'd finally had time with him.

"We'll be right behind you," Detective Mullens said. "I just need the three of you to clear the way, but if there's any real trouble, just give the word."

"Yeah, and re'll come running!" Stanley Talker declared.
"Thanks, Mister Mullens. Thanks, Mister Stanley," Bubbles said gratefully. The talking dog started licking her hand again, and Bubbles caressed the dog in the snout.

"No problem. We got your back. Right, Blake?" Mullens said.

"Right," Agent Blake agreed.

The Girls floated through the manhole and into the sewers after sucking in one final mouthful of clean, fresh air. The moment they did, they made a circle and their eyes began shining brightly like lanterns. The sewage tunnel had immediately split into a T-junction, giving the impression of a maze right from the beginning. They waited for Mullens, Olivia, Blake, and Talker to descend using the ladder after informing them by radio that it was safe to go down. They'd done so quickly, wary that spending too much time in the sewer could lead to their surprise raid being discovered. Even the talking dog was quick on the way down - due to his intelligence, he was able to learn how to use a ladder.

All around the area's sewer central junction, police officers and USDO soldiers were doing the same thing, encircling their drug dealer targets, closing in the trap.

"Ew… Ew… Ew…" Bubbles squeaked constantly as they flew at a slow and steady pace in the sewers, stopping at every split or junction.

"What's down here that could smell so bad?" Blossom questioned over the radio.

"Yeah, who would walk here if it's so smelly?" Buttercup added. At the very least, it had distracted her from her bloodlust, not that she wanted it, and neither did Blossom and Bubbles know just how deeply compromised Buttercup's mind was.

"Well…" Agent Blake's voice trailed off on the radio as he was unsure if he should tell them the truth. "I'm not sure if the three of you should know."

"My Daddy said that knowing things is always good," Blossom paraphrased her Dad innocently.

"Do you know where the water goes when you flush the toilet?" Detective Mullens said over the radio.

"No…" the Girls replied on the radio, too innocent to even guess what was coming next.

"Dad, I don't think we should-" Olivia cut in on the radio, only to be cut out.

"They should know it now rather than find out later when it isn't convenient, Olive," Detective Mullens. "Girls, whatever you flush down the toilet ends up here."

The Girls stopped where they were, more sensitive than ever about their positioning in mid-air, about the air they took in, their very being in the sewers.

"EWWWW!" The Girls exclaimed in disgust.

"And I was standing in the water, too!" Buttercup said, unimpressed by how late she was informed about the underground 'river'.
"Good thing your boots are waterproof then," Agent Blake remarked. "Take all the time you need, Girls. We'll continue with the operation as soon as you're ready to go on."

"I'd rather just keep going," Blossom said over the radio. The faster she got out of the sewer, the better.

"I agree with you for once," Buttercup admitted, though what she said had done just as much to remind Blossom that she could go rogue at any moment and end up snapping someone's neck.

Bubbles was silent. All she could do was concentrate very hard on trying not to freak out. The smell was one thing, but the darkness was bringing out the worst in her. She could feel her heart thumping faster than it would have while she was running after a sports car – and she could attest to that too, as they were called upon to chase a hit-and-run case a week ago. Memories were flashing before her eyes; actual pain and lethargy erupted throughout her body.

"Bubbles? Are you okay?" Blossom asked and Bubbles had only heard it the second time. She'd even missed her sister's hand on her back. Buttercup glared at her from the front, definitely not appreciating her slowing down the advance. Her angry, sociopathic eyes shone clearly in the dark, contrasted by Blossom's concerned eyes, pink with care.

"I… I'm fine," Bubbles replied, tried to be as brave as she could. Doctor Alice's advice came back at just the right time, but with the weekends so far behind them in time and space, the only thing it had made her do was to wish that Alice was beside her again.

The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Under 23 Edgar Street.

6 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1137.

"Oh yeah… Yes… Finally…" a haggard-looking man in an even more haggard-looking army jacket mumbled to himself as he was sitting on a crate, tying a tourniquet around his arm. "If only I know His secret, I'd make my own Secret… Now, this is the good stuff…"

When he was done, he pulled something out of his jacket. A metal syringe with 'His Secret' written on the side, in white markers. Slapping his elbow to gain a vein, he pierced his skin with the thirsty tip of the syringe and it bit him like the proboscis of a giant mosquito. Pushing the plunger, he emptied the content of the syringe into his blood and gasped with stimulation and a rush of pleasure. Visions clouded his eyes, visions of ecstasy and paradise and success.

"Don't get too used to it, druggie," another man scolded condescendingly, his voice much clearer than the first. "You're not getting your next needle until you complete tonight's shipment."

The drug addict did not seem to have heard his apparent supervisor but continued to lie back on the crates he had been hauling and protecting, in a state of pure pleasure and relaxation, his mind filled with stolen but false victories and rewards.

"I know," the haggard-looking man finally said. He'd barely heard. The sensations he was feeling at the time was far more important than reality. Than even his next payment in drugs.

"Where's Hilda anyway? She's taking way too long to piss even for a woman," another drug dealer guarding the crates in the middle of sewers said. "I fucking swear, if it weren't for her sweet bod, I would've dumped her sorry ass."

"She took a hit like ten minutes ago," yet another drug dealer said - he was clearly the boss with his necklace and cigar and clean coat and AK-47. "Probably passed out somewhere out there next to
her piss - and everyone else's. Should be fine - inspection's two hours away and the next shipment's fuckin' after dinner."

The drug dealers' comments had attracted raucous laughter from the rest of the criminals. There were about the ten of them in all, mainly drug dealers and their hired muscle. There were movers - most of whom were addicted to His Secret and were working for the dealers only for their next dose of His Secret.

The drug lord was more right than he would have wanted to be. Moments later, Blossom had flown up to the missing drug addict while she was squatting by a river of city sewage and knocked her unconscious with a simple chop to the back of the head. But what Blossom couldn't intercept was the drug addict's terrified scream.

Men and women with guns shot up from their makeshift seats, cocking their weapons. Most of the movers, too, started either picking up anything that could be used as clubs or pulling out their modest weapons: knives and blackjacks, shivs and batons.

They didn't have long to decide between fight or flight when three streaks of light were drawn in the dark tunnel and what appeared to be three little girls floating in mid-air appeared before them.

No words were exchanged between them. The drug lord and his immediate inferiors raised their weapons. The drug runners and hired muscles who were the furthest away didn't even think of fighting and scattered. Some of the menial laborers started taking off. Some of them started ripping open the crates and greedily taking handfuls of His Secret syringes before scattering as bullets started flying – they knew how it was going to end. There was only one way it could go.

Blossom zipped foot-first like a bullet into the drug lord who could only get a few shots in. One of the drug lord's right hand pointed a pistol at Buttercup, but she was able to push it aside faster than he could pull the trigger. She gave the gunman a right hook, knocking him out instantly. The drug runner next to her was able to fire off a burst of rounds from his machine-pistol, however, not that it did anything - Buttercup gave him a spinning kick, knocking the machine pistol away, before pounding him with a simple straight punch. Bubbles tackled another drug runner at high speed – discarding skill in favor of painless expediency.

There was no resistance after that, much to Buttercup's disappointment. The splashing of sewage water attracted their attention to the various tunnels around the junction.

"They're getting away!" Buttercup shouted, pointing at the main group of runaways. But there were a few who were smart enough to split from the main group and go down different tunnels. Blossom looked from the main group to the individual mavericks, for the moment paralyzed by indecision. Mom and Alice's words were burned into her mind, frozen in place like boulders blocking the way to the right decision, impossible to dislodge.

"Bubbles, with me!" she finally made a compromise as the voice of the running criminals and their footsteps grew ever fainter. "Buttercup, go after the rest of them, any of them!"

It was the only way. Bubbles would be less fearful in her company and Buttercup was less likely to be injured by the loners she must pursue. Blossom could only trust that Buttercup remained faithful to her, and avoid hurting her feelings by killing.

Blossom flew after the main retreating group deeper into the sewers, and the foul water there were noticeably higher. Bubbles took a deep gulp before speeding after her sister.

Flying into the tunnels, following the frightened panting and voices of the criminals, it didn't take
long for Blossom to land her fists on one, causing him to fall face-first into the filthy muck. As he was getting up, gasping for air and horrified that he literally had piss and crap in his face, Blossom took him by the collar and smashed him against the subterranean masonry, hard enough to knock his lights out.

Bubbles wanted to do similar, except her target had turned around and fired shots at her. The bullets bounced off her arms as she covered her face before she threw a punch at her attacker, all the while with Alice and her desensitization exercises in mind. The woman was dashed against the wall, even as Bubbles felt her heart racing and her arm throbbing in harmless, but barely-bearable pain. But she was still moving. Picking her up by the hair, Bubbles slammed her head against the wall, mimicking her leader sister.

There were still four of them. Two of them were oddly stationary, prying open corroded metal bars in the dirty water. The other two had foolishly continued running straight down the tunnel.

"Bubbles, go for the men on the ground!" Blossom ordered quickly before shooting straight for the foolish runners, thinking that the stationary men were easy targets that Bubbles could handle.

But the stationary men were quick. After pulling off the iron bars blocking their escape route, the men slid down the tight chute leading deeper into the sewers, and by the time Bubbles had darted up to the opening, the second man was already gone. Shining her eye-light into the opening, she could see the men sliding down - sewage water was rushing down the opening, and soon there was a splash and the second runner was knee-deep in stomach-turning foul water.

Although Bubbles was smaller and thus had no problem fitting through the chute, she would still have to basically bathe in the sewage, and the smell was worse down there, and she didn't like the idea of being alone below in the dark either. The timid one froze, unable to act, unable to think.

Blossom, in the meantime, had made short work of one of her runners with a quick kick to the back and a tap on the base of the skull. The other was knocked unconscious by a point-blank non-lethal blast of her heat beam, which caused the man to collapse, vomit everything he had in his stomach and fall unconscious.

The leader of The Three smiled, thinking that the operation was clean and executed flawlessly, but when she turned around, it faded when she saw Bubbles leaning against the sewage tunnel wall - and there were no subdued criminal anywhere near her. Shock and alarm reverberated through her being when she realized that her sweet sister might have let some criminals go.

"Bubbles! What did you do!?!" Blossom questioned as she flew up to her most vulnerable sister.

"I can't… I just can't…" Bubbles mewed sadly, knowing very well what she had done. But she just couldn't - goosebumps were already rising just by her stepping in the water, and Agent Blake was right; her boots were waterproof. "It's really dirty and smelly and dark down there and…"

"You can't just let the bad guys go!" Blossom scolded, more out of urgency than anger, before promptly sliding down the sewage chute Bubbles refused to take. However, by the time Blossom was down in the lower levels of the city sewers, the men were gone, and there were even more tunnels going in all directions. Focusing her eyes, she tried to look through the walls of the sewage tunnels, but she couldn't see very far with all the concrete, metal and tightly-packed soil in the way. The criminals were long gone; fear had given them wings, apparently.

When there was nothing left to be done, Blossom had to fly back up through the sewage chute, getting dirty. She emerged out of the hole quite suddenly, and Bubbles jumped when she did it with a splash of filthy water and questionable muck.
"That was very disappointing, Bubbles!" Blossom expressed immediately and had to consciously stop herself from growling and going all out on her sister. Bubbles could only stare at her boots, head lowered and back hunched in shame.

"But I was scared!" Bubbles exclaimed.

"Being scared is one thing!" Blossom couldn't help but chide her, no matter how much she wanted to hold back. No matter what Alice said. "I don't like getting wet down here too! Urgh! Now, look at what you made me do! And for nothing, too!"

---

The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Under 23 Edgar Street.

6 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1141.

Buttercup had caught up with her latest victim easily enough, catching her before she could throw herself down a slope in the tunnels. She pinned the hired muscle to the floor, and when she produced a pistol and let off a shot right in her face, snatched it away and crumpled the gun up like paper before tossing it away. Taking the mercenary's gun hand, Buttercup slammed it against the wall, breaking many of the bones in it, causing the woman to scream.

"Please- I surrender- Don't kill me!" the hired muscle pleaded with Buttercup, who straddled her chest and had a hand on her throat.

Buttercup threw a look over her shoulder to see if Blossom or Bubbles were approaching. They weren't. In fact, she could hear them now, and Blossom was busy lecturing Bubbles. Bubbles was doing what she did best - crying like the little wimp she was when she couldn't do even the most basic things in combat.

They wouldn't be stopping her anytime soon.

Looking back at the unscrupulous mercenary she had cornered, she began walloping her in the face - going with her left fist, then the right, then the left, rinse and repeat, making sure not to strike the woman too hard as it'd end the fun too quickly. At some point, one of the bad woman's eye had popped out with bloody tears going all around, and she'd broken her nose as well as sending teeth flying in the usual, predictable fashion. One thing that was quite new, however, was when Buttercup had struck the woman in the mouth the wrong way, and buried the poor woman's teeth inside her own jaw.

Buttercup giggled at her new discovery - and thought to herself that she should do it more often.

"Pleeeeeeease…" the woman continued to beg, somehow defying the odds and still living.

Buttercup did not listen. She was enjoying it too much. Instead, when she began to hate the way the mercenary was looking at her, with her one functioning eye and even with the eye that had popped partially out of its socket, she drove her thumbs into them and squeezed with her hands on the woman's head.

Blood pooled in the sockets before they flowed out like eruptions of water geysers. Then Buttercup had other ideas as the woman screamed weakly, nearly dead.

Pressing her hands against the woman's head, she exerted all her strength into it and before she knew it, the woman's head was crushed like a fruit. It sounded like it too. Blood like juice came out as the woman's skull was shattered. Brain matter spurted out from openings in the woman's scalp and various orifices old and new when the pressure became too much.
Buttercup looked behind her once more. Nothing. No little beads of glowing pink and blue. Her stupid sisters were still at it. She could hear them right then.

"-I'm sorry-" Bubbles was sobbing like the baby girl she was.

"-those criminals will continue to hurt others and it's going to be your fault and I promised Alice I'd keep you close to me and yet-" Blossom had continued her tirade regardless, obviously upset and disappointed.

Buttercup didn't care, but she'd had her fun. Removing her hands from what remained of her victim's head - which was now little more than pulp, she started collecting more teeth for her secret teeth jar before scraping up the mess she had made and throwing them into the sewage water.

It was time to put her toys away. Standing up, she braced herself against the dead body she had made and pulled an arm off before stuffing it into a small inlet. She did the same with the other limbs, shoving them into other similar hiding places. The torso was more of a challenge, however.

"-don't know how I am going to sleep tonight and honestly, how do you even sleep at night after everything you've done wrong? Do you even care? Because it seems that you don't, and it's not just this time-" Blossom went on in her lecture while Bubbles went on being her crybaby self, completely distracted from what Buttercup was doing out of sight, out of mind.

"I'm sorry…” Bubbles continued her pathetic whimpers.

With the torso, Buttercup had resorted to flying further into the tunnels in search of a larger secret place to hide her misdeed. As luck would have it, she'd found an opening leading into another tunnel large enough for the torso.

The footsteps and barking of K-9 unit dogs prompted her to act quickly, hurling the torso so far into the adjacent tunnel that it disappeared into the dark, and the foul water did the rest, taking the evidence of her murder to some far away place.

Flashlights shone on her just as she was done, and she shouted her identity at the cops so that they wouldn't be an inconvenience.

---

**The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Under 23 Edgar Street.**

**6 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1145.**

By the time Detective Mullens, Olivia, Agent Blake, and Stanley Walker had gotten to the secret drug junction, the Girls had already cleaned up the place real good. The drug dealers and their muscles responsible for the area's drug distribution were scattered, which Detective Mullens thought would cripple the drug trade in the Tenement Area, as other drug dealers would no doubt hear about how their 'peers' had disappeared from work.

The Girls had missed a spot though. A haggard-looking man with hippy hair and facial hair, wearing a more haggard-looking army jacket sat up, still halfway through the pleasurable parts of his stupor. On noticing who he was looking at, he clumsily pulled a revolver out of his jeans pocket.

"Ri got this!" the talking dog launched forward at a blinding speed before jumping the haggard drug addict, biting his gun hand and forcing him to release his weapon before dragging the drug addict to the ground, who screamed as if he was living his last seconds.
When the slow-thinking mover was subdued, Stanley Talker withdrew himself and kicked away the revolver the addict had dropped on the ground with his front paw. The talking dog growled at the druggie to warn him.

"Prrrf! Rrrr… You taste disgusting!" Talker insulted the man, who stared at the talking dog wide-eyed, wondering if he was still hallucinating. The dog spat some saliva out, some of which fell on the man. "Rorrff!"

---

The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Under 23 Edgar Street.

6 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1155.

When Detective Mullens and his task force had gotten to Blossom and Bubbles, Blossom had long switched gears and moved on to console her meek sister, feeling a little guilty about lecturing her continuously and making her cry.

"I'm sorry, Bubbles, for the things I've said. I just wanted to protect our new friends, that's all," Blossom would say as she hugged her sister closely

"I wanted you to be happy like before, Bubbles, when you've made some new friends by saving them," Blossom would add.

"You can't keep going like this and I just want you to change for the better," she would then say, but none of her half-hearted apologies and rationalizations had made Bubbles felt better. If anything, it'd made things worse. It'd made Bubbles wish she was never one of the so-called Three, The Angels of Justice. It'd made her wish there was an easy way out.

"Did any of them get out?" Detective Mullens would ask when everyone was gathered around the drugs they had seized. Bubbles had paid no attention to the meeting when it commenced as she didn't want to be reminded her of her failure again. Blossom nudged at her with her elbow, thinking that Bubbles should do her due diligence and report her shortcomings honestly.

"There were two of them…" Bubbles mumbled softly.


"She said there rere two rof rhem," Stanley Talker repeated Bubbles' statement - he'd heard her loud and clear, owing to his superior sense of hearing compared to the average human being. The dog was concerned about Bubbles again, about how upset she was. Padding up to her, he began licking her hand once more, even though it was filthy.

"Will you be able to track them, Talker?" Agent Blake asked. Stanley, for some reason, turned to the agent aggressively and growled.

"Yes, but Ri'm rot doing rit for you," Stanley said aggressively, suddenly hostile. Blake knew the reason why the talking dog had gotten all bitey and teethy. He hated anyone to do with the USDO, owing to his experience.

"We're not all like that, you know," Agent Blake tried to reassure the dog.

"Ronly rafter Ri eat you!" the talking dog growled at Agent Blake. Bubbles took him by the neck.
"Mister Stanley, don't," Bubbles said, more upset that her friends were now fighting among themselves. The dog backed off on her word and whimpered when he realized he had contributed to his new friend's misery. He returned to licking Bubbles and rubbing his snout on her after that, taking in her scent.

"I'll follow Talker and bring a couple of guys with me," Olivia volunteered. Her father reluctantly agreed. "I'll be fine with our good ol' canine friend here."

"Ri'm rot that rold - ronly two years rold," Stanley corrected.

"Haha, alright," Olivia laughed as she stood up to pat the talking dog.

"Any other missing drugsters?" Detective Mullens opened the floor to the rest of them.

"Nope," Buttercup answered confidently, lying as always, though this time, it wasn't a straight lie. After mutilating her victim and getting identified by the cops, she had taken great pains to speed through the sewers to nap a few more criminals to cover her tracks. She couldn't take all of them down though.

"Just a few more," Blossom added, and couldn't help but look at Buttercup suspiciously. "They were running everywhere."

"My boys should be rounding them up even as we speak," Detective Mullens said. "Good job, Girls."

"I'll inform General Blackwater the three of you are taking the rest of the day off. It wouldn't do for the three of you to patrol the skies looking and smelling like this," Agent Blake said. "It's not healthy, not that I've ever heard of the three of you getting sick, and it's not something you'd want."
Chapter 13: The Purple Man (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup are scrambled to hunt down a newly-discovered individual enhanced with Chemical W.

Chapter 13: The Purple Man (Part 1)

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

7 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 0802.

Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz! The clown phone rang during the most convenient of times - just when the Girls were about to leave for school. Blossom flew over to the USDO hotline and picked up the receiver.

"Hello?" Blossom answered the phone. "Is that you, Mister Blake?"

"Yes, Blossy," Agent Blake said over the phone. "Looks like we'll be seeing each other more often. This one's much more serious…"

"What is it? Is it Naga? Or… Mojo Jojo?" Blossom guessed, and couldn't help but to develop a lump on her throat. Naga had been hard enough to deal with - it was only with the help of her friends, Mom and Dad and her infrared beams that she was able to force Naga to run back out into the snow and leave Buttercup alone. Mojo Jojo was worse - the Chimpanzee had sliced them up with laser the moment they saw him, and they couldn't even get close to him. Furthermore, the crazy monkey had nearly killed Bubbles - twice!

"What about the Gangreen Gang?" Buttercup suggested when she flew up next to Blossom and guessed what the phone call was about.

"Please don't let it be another attack on the Morbucks Labs…" Bubbles hoped as she floated anemically towards her sisters. Agent Blake had heard everything as the other Girls were pressing themselves up really close to the phone that Blossom had to physically push them away.

"It's none of them, Girls," Agent Blake said. "He remains unidentified. But this isn't the first time we're pursuing him. Remember the Purple Man Case?"

The Purple Man Case. Blossom remembered it clearly, clearer than she could remember yesterday's sewer drug raid. It had been right on the threshold of 1988, mere days before the new year.

The City of Townsville. Outskirts, North. Exxon Gas Station.

28 DEC (Tuesday) 1988. 2135.

"This is Sergeant Blake. Be careful, Girls. We don't know what we're up against," the Girls' favorite USDO agent warned on the radio. The man himself was taking cover behind the Girls' Lamborghini speed transport along with several of his men. "Get in there carefully. We still have
the New Year to celebrate."

"Are we going to watch the fireworks together?" Blossom asked over the radio. Several men laughed lightheartedly. Despite being pulled away from her police friends, Detective Mullens and his daughter, Olivia, while they were showing them the heart matryoshka spotlight on the TPD police headquarters no less, Blossom felt at home with these guys.

"That would be fun," Bubbles agreed on the radio.

"Fireworks… sounds like a blast," Buttercup agreed too - it was one of the few things she would agree with her sisters.

"Sure, if your father lets us," Agent Blake answered quickly so that Blossom could concentrate on the task at hand. "How about we finish this first so we can talk about the New Year sooner?"

"Yes, Mister Blake," all three sisters concurred simultaneously.

"Convoy-1, flank around the right of the gas station and provide support there," Blake continued to relay orders. "Convoy-3, flank to the left and provide support there."

The Girls flew into cover behind a gas pump. Blossom had her Serbu shotgun out, though it would be one of the last days she would be using it – by the New Year, it would be left in the walk-in closet indefinitely. She was peering out from the right of the pump while Bubbles peeked out from the left with her stockless XM4 Carbine. Buttercup was perched on top of the gas pump with her machinegun at the ready.

"Girls! Get away from that pump immediately! It's explosive!" Blake shouted over the radio. Blossom, terrified, practically flew to a nearby car. Bubbles and Buttercup followed.

"Convoy-1 in position, over," one of Blake's men reported.

"Convoy-3 is in position, over," another of Blake's men reported.

"We're going in," Blossom said as she adjusted her helmet. Sprinting up to the gas station's store rapidly, she hid behind a concrete wall next to the glass wall by the cashier counter. Once she saw that the coast was clear, she jumped through the glass and then on top of the cashier counter. Her sisters followed.

The sight within the store was terrible to behold. The darkness and flickering light within did not serve to hide the mess so much as made it worse to look at. The Exxon cashier was torn in half and left on the floor with his guts lying in a bloody heap. His partner, a store attendant, was ripped apart limb from limb. One of her arms, which still had bright pink painted nails, had been thrown into a shelf full of candy bars. The rest of her limbs were nowhere to be found.

There was a security guard in that heap of body, and the only thing that indicated his occupation was the tattered remains of his uniform and the revolver still held in a dead man's grasp. His face had been ripped apart, his body a broken wreck. There were customers in the gas station store when whatever force of nature that had utterly devastated the place struck, but they were little more than a carpet of flesh and bones and viscera on the floor, one mass hardly distinguishable from the next.

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, too, were retching. It was like nothing they had ever seen before, not even after everything they had been through. It was even worse than Buttercup's handiwork, and the tomboy was actually inspired as much as physically disgusted by it.
"Hey, Girls, Blake here. Anything inside?" their friend said over the radio. He was running up to the store, switching from cover to cover with his second-in-command and Corporal Rutherford.

The Girls were going down the store, each of them taking an aisle, looking for survivors or enemies or both. There were just more dead bodies. None of them dared to speak a word for fear of alerting something. The store's redecoration with human body parts wasn't exactly fun and sunshine for them.

"Everyone's… dead, Mister Blake," Blossom said, was tearing up when she saw that a girl, not even ten, was one of the casualties – all mangled up and left to rot on the floor, alone. "It's bad."

She was just emerging out of her aisle when she heard something kicking up a can of paint close to her, in the direction of the freezers. Panicking, Blossom turned in the direction of the freezers and fired a quick pair of heat beams, blowing up a glass door and creating a cascade of fizzy drinks – and nearly hitting Buttercup.

"Hey, watch it!" Buttercup yelled, but Blossom did not hear: in her panic and lack of forethought, she'd fired her heat beam through her goggles, burning the edges of her helmet as well. The accident with her power had resulted in a lot of glass, plastic and Kevlar goop in her face, and she was furiously trying to wipe the hot mess away as she tried to run away, only to knock into shelves and send food and merchandises crashing down in her flight. Bubbles from another aisle had to fly up to the ceiling to see what had happened.

"Blossom!" she screamed in shock and immediately ditched her rifle and flew down to tend to her beloved sister.

"Blossom's hurt!" Bubbles screeched into the radio in her high-pitched voice, hurting the ears of everyone involved.

"All units, converge on the store!" Agent Blake ordered in the radio, and as Bubbles had sat a panicking Blossom down on the ground and was helping to wipe the melted goop in her face away, every door in the store was busted open, and USDO soldiers began a search-and-destroy protocol. Buttercup flew up to her sisters, shaking her head at how pathetic they were.

But there were no hostiles to be found. Whoever had massacred the Townsville citizens here was long gone.

By the time Blake had found Blossom, most of the hot stuff on her face was cleared up, but it took her some time to calm down from the terrifying and painful ordeal of having molten glass, plastic, and Kevlar in her face even though she wasn't injured. It was from that night onwards that Blossom had stopped wearing her helmet and combat goggles. Her sisters would follow her example not long after.

And all they had found for their trouble was a wisp of purple fur on the scene of the crime and some security video recording of what had happened. The Girls, of course, were spared the content of the video.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

7 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 0803.

"He's back?" Blossom said into the clown phone. The trail had gone cold over a month ago – the perpetrator of the massacre at the gas station had disappeared into the woods of Pokey Oaks
The Purple Man had been a subject of speculation and horror stories among her and her sisters since. She'd even have a nightmare about it once, running away from the purple-furred creature while there was more molten goop in her face than she remembered.

"Yes. And we need your help with taking him down," Agent Blake said. "It's different this time. We might need to stay the night in the woods since it's going to be a manhunt. You'll need your forest gear, and bring along everything you got – we don't know what we're dealing with. You remember where that gas station is?"

"Yes, Mister Blake," Blossom said. She'd visited that gas station one other time, a few weeks ago, to purge the demon she had gained that frightful night. It was actually helpful and therapeutic for her to see the same gas station up and running again, as though nothing horrific had happened, but at the same time disturbing. "I know where it is."

"I'll see you in 30 minutes?" Mister Blake said and went on when he detected something in Blossom's voice: "It'll be fine. Time flies, and it'll be over before we know it."

It reminded Blossom of the promise he made and the watch he gave her.

"Promise, Mister Blake?" she asked, smiling, audibly in a better mood.

"It's a promise," Blake said on the other end.

"Thanks," she said. "See you soon." She hung up the phone.

"What was that about?" Daddy asked, his smile disappearing. He knew what it was alright: it was his Girls going out there to lose more of their innocence again. He had to work harder to make it stop!

"Mister Blake said that we're going to find the Purple Man, Dad," Blossom said.

"Oh no…" Bubbles mewled. She'd seen the results of the Purple Man's mayhem in the gas station. It wasn't pleasant.

"Finally! I want to see how much tougher I am compared to him!" Buttercup exclaimed, ever the good sport.

"I'll call the school and tell Miss Keane – um, how long would that take? Half the class?" the Dad asked.

"Mister Blake said we might need to spend the night in the woods, Dad," Blossom said, a confusing cloud of emotions running through her – more than what she was capable of processing. She had experienced it before, but it was only recently that she had realized it – that she could feel so many things at once… and she didn't want to. "I've never been in the woods, Dad. I'm… um… I don't know how to say it. She was scared. Curious. Happy to see Blake and happy to discover a forest. And she was terrified of the Purple Man.

"T-the woods?" Bubbles exclaimed in fear, but she'd tried to find the bright side of the thicket: "Will there be a fairy godmother there too? Or- or- dwarves and princesses?"

"Pfff! We're going jungle-fighting!" Buttercup scoffed at Bubbles before giving her own idea a boost. "That's all we'll ever need!"

"You mean that's all you ever need, Buttercup!" Bubbles countered.
"What's the matter? Are you scared, Bobblehead?" Buttercup taunted.

"You're being mean!" Bubbles cried.

"Bubbles, Buttercup, quit it!" Blossom ordered. Buttercup pouted at her while Bubbles looked at Blossom, feeling maligned. "We need to get changed now!"

"Oh, Girls… A whole night at the woods!" Professor Utonium gasped. Blossom flew into his arms for a hug.

"I'll miss you, Dad," Blossom said. "I'll think of you every second I'm there."

Bubbles and Buttercup hugged their Dad as well, echoing similar sentiments. Buttercup then moved on to Mom, and Bubbles did the same. Blossom, however, kept her distance from her.

"Aren't you going to give Mommy a hug, Blossom?" Selicia beckoned for the smartest of The Three to come to her, with arms outstretched. Reluctantly, Blossom floated into her arms, but when Selicia enclosed her arms around her, she couldn't help but feel trapped. Like a fly in a spider's web.

"Remember what Mommy said or you're going to get it from me," Selicia whispered into Blossom's ear, so softly that no one else heard except for Buttercup, who smiled at Blossom's plight behind her leader's back. She then said aloud to Blossom, for the entire family to hear: "No pressure, okay? Mommy's proud of you. All of you."

Despite the bad taste in her mouth, Blossom had no choice but to move on. Flying back up to her room, she began changing into her uniform alongside her sisters. They had to get into some special uniforms this time, ones that were largely splotches of white and grey all over, with only small strips of their favorite colors remaining. The tactical gear they wore were a shade of white, rather than black, this time. Largely because of their enhanced dexterity, they were able to get suited up at speeds that even full-fledged marines could never match.

This time, they had to bring out their survival backpack, which had only been issued to them late in January, as well as put on their winter ghillie suits, something they had never used until now. The Girls, except Blossom, had to bring their heaviest weapons and similarly sheathe them in winter camouflage. Selicia had trained them for this, and though they had never put the skills into use until now, they remembered it all well enough due to their enhanced memory.

They flew out of the circular windows of their room after that, but before they sped away into the horizon, turned to wave goodbye to Dad and Mom, who had gotten out into the lawn to wave them goodbye, exchanging tears and a final look before they headed off.

"I must work on my Anti-X faster," Professor Utonium said to Selicia when the Girls finally disappeared into the vast horizon. The moment the Girls were gone, it'd felt like he was had slipped from his rope while abseiling down a building. And he had done such a thing before in his youth, and in his Organization basic training. It'd felt as though it was the last time he would see them, every time.

---

**The City of Townsville. Outskirts, north. Exxon Gas Station.**

**7 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 0828.**

The morning air was cold and the wind chill was worse as the Girls sped through Townsville to get to Agent Blake. They did not have their jackets on, but despite this, they felt warm enough as their
ghillie suits had a thick layer of fake vegetation on them.

The journey there was silent. Only the sound of the wind howling, their ghillie suits fluttering and their flight-pack glider wings flapping could be heard. Bubbles could not believe how things were unraveling right before her eyes - it seemed like a distant memory when things were quiet and peaceful for her. Then the factory happened. And then the party was ruined. The sewers destroyed her after that, and now… It was the forest's turn to swallow her whole.

Blossom would have agreed with Bubbles if they had actually spoken to each other on the journey, but she was in deep concentration as she led her sisters towards the outskirts of Townsville. Things were beginning to go wrong, and she could feel the pressure of having to perform crushing her. Her failures were mounting once more, as it used to do so before the new year. Buttercup was injured at the factory. She had been tricked into unwittingly performing for a party at Morbucks'. She had allowed Bubbles to let a few criminals run free in the sewers, and now… It was the forest's turn to swallow her whole.

Buttercup, on the other hand, was having the time of her life. Things were finally going her way - it had been boring for the past month or so, and Blossom was to blame for all of it! It felt as if the last few days had been more fun than the entire month of January put together. At the factory, she got to hurt a lot of people and finally kill one too, in the most deliciously brutal fashion possible. The party served to whet her appetite for the next big one when she took apart a woman in the sewers and now… The Purple Man was her next target, and she believed that she'd finally have a proper fight on her hands, considering what she saw at the gas station out of town.

"There, the gas station! We've finally made it!" Blossom said to her sisters, breaking the silence and contemplation among them when the Exxon sign that rose to break the horizon became visible. As they got closer, it became easily apparent that she was right - the Girls' old speed transports were there, along with several humvees and APCs. This time, it was a fully USDO operation, and the only TPD presence on site was a single police cruiser. As the Girls descended, they were each dismayed in their own way that they wouldn't be seeing Detective Mullens, Olivia and Talker this time, as the people who got out of the police cruiser were a pair of uniformed patrol officers.

They could recognize Agent Blake and his posse from afar. They just had to aim for the guy with the aviator shades and greying crown, who just so happened to be pointing at them and smiling. This time, however, he was dressed in winter camo uniform, along with the rest of his men.

"Good morning, Mister Blake," the Girls greeted him in unison, their troubles temporarily forgotten.

"Hey munchkins," Blake greeted them back, before gesturing for them to follow him. "I have something to show you three."

"What is it, Mister Blake?" Blossom asked.

"Are we really going to find the Purple Man?" Bubbles asked out of fear. At this point, she was hoping that all of this was just a set-up for a prank, that the Princess would just jump out of one of the humvees and give her a hug.

"Are you going to give me some marshmallows?" Buttercup asked – she'd been secretly craving for those sweet treats since Saturday.

"No marshmallows, I'm afraid," Agent Blake led them to his USDO Lamborghini, and what was put on the hood answered their questions for the agent.
There were photos on the hood. Agent Blake swept the snow that had fallen on the collection of Polaroids with his hand and pulled them closer to the edge of his car. The Girls gave themselves a boost by floating up to see them.

Grisly scenes were depicted on the photos, and the quality wasn't very clear as they were stills from security footage taken by security cameras. The content, however, was clear enough, despite the faint coloration: it was the Purple Man.

And he was very purple. And big. And angry. And terrifying. The Purple Man's eyes were like silver orbs on camera, inhuman and soulless, and whatever facial expression that wasn't masked by his fur was one of intense rage and hatred. He was wearing nothing but a pair of patched and old denim pants, which gave the impression of simple and brutal barbarism. He was in the process of tearing someone's arm off. Blossom recognized who the victim was: the store attendant at the very same gas station she was standing outside right then, the very same person whose limbs, except for a mangled arm, were nowhere to be found.

The picture alone was enough to cow Bubbles. Her hands had gone up to her mouth as she stifled a scream. Blossom forced herself to study the monster in the pictures despite a similar fear enclosing around her heart – how sharp his claws were, the innumerable fangs he had. How thick like tree trunks his arms were. How a barrel wouldn't even begin to describe his chest. He was frightening to her, sure, but as with Naga, there had to be a way to beat even a fearsome person like the Purple Man.

The Purple Man had even given Buttercup pause. She knew that for all her powers and enhanced abilities, she had no claws and teeth and a big body like the Purple Man. Despite being rarely expressed, her imagination wasn't sterile - and for a second, she believed, truly believed, that she was going to be ripped and torn apart in the forest like how she tore apart her latest victims on Friday and Monday. But, after sucking up a lungful of fresh air, she told herself that she was the one who was going to do the ripping and tearing.

"Don't be afraid of it," Agent Blake reassured the Girls. None of them felt any better. "It has an obvious weakness. Can one of you tell me what it is?"

"Urm…" Blossom's mind was jammed by the question - and it was rare that she couldn't come up with something - anything.

"Uh-uh…" Bubbles shook her head and gave up right from the start.

Buttercup's arms were folded as she was floating in midair. An idea - or half of it - presented itself in her mind only to fade away while she was halfway from putting up her hand, at which point she retracted it.

"Simple. Look at its fur. Do you know what color it is?" Agent Blake hinted at his answer.

"Is he pink?" Bubbles answered. "Isn't he?"

"It's purple," Blossom corrected.

"Duh, that's why we call him the Purple Man," Buttercup added, meant as a jibe at Bubbles, and the latter girl had detected it all too well. Bubbles gave Buttercup a death stare before returning her attention to Agent Blake.

"Yes, it's purple. It's not going to be able to hide very well in a snowy forest," Agent Blake said. "We, on the other hand, will look like the forest. It'll never know what hit 'em."
Bubbles wanted to believe him, but she could never bring herself to. Blossom thought Blake's tactical assessment to be reasonable. Buttercup thought he was cool, and that was enough.

"One more things the three of you should know before we head out," Agent Blake continued. "We aren't the first ones in. Captain James 'Boomer' Wilbur and a squad of twenty men had entered the woods three hours ago. They never reported back. That is why we're going in. We'll have to try to find them as well as this… Purple Man."
Chapter 14: The Purple Man (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

As the Girls venture deeper into the woods in Pokey Oaks County, things start to go horribly wrong... and creepy.

Chapter 14: The Purple Man (Part 2)

Pokey Oaks County. Pokey Oaks Woodland Reserve

7 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1115.

Just when the Girls thought that law enforcement in the City of Townsville was hard work, they quickly learned that they hadn't seen hard work yet... until now. Searching the woods for a fugitive was backbreaking labor, and words could never do it justice.

In a forest, the Girls soon found out that their ability to fly at high speeds was useless among the trunks and canopy of the woods, not just because they would likely bump into hard wood or get caught up in the snow-locked and endless sponge-like canopy whenever they tried to zoom through the forest, but also because they had to search every little crack and crevice for some guy with purple fur, or any sign of the lost tac team of Captain James 'Boomer' Wilbur. Not to mention, it was painful whenever the branches and leaves brush past their faces if they even so much as fly at any appreciable speed.

The woods were deep - many times wider in area than the City of Townsville itself, and much harder to traverse even with flight. For almost three hours, the Girls had been scouting ahead for Agent Blake and his forty or so USDO soldiers, but they had turned up nothing - and they were only scratching the surface of the ocean of trees.

But as much as it was tiring, it was also the first time the Girls had truly been in a forest, not counting the last time when they were driven through one as they were taken to a USDO outpost. Every sight, every sound, every feeling, thoughts and emotions they experienced in the forest was new, and it was the only thing keeping them from collapsing in a heap of misery and exhaustion. Blossom enjoyed finding the many different kinds of plants and animals in the forest, while Bubbles enjoyed the scenic sights most of all, such as the mountains and the valleys, all filled with trees and life. But most of all, she was always hoping to bump into a fairy godmother, or a dwarf, or an elf, or some other fairy tale creature. Buttercup had read stories and seen illustrations of soldiers in the woods, and she thought it was cool to live through the experience.

Pokey Oaks County. Pokey Oaks Woodland Reserve

7 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1229.

After venturing ever deeper into the woods, the Girls had still turned up nothing – not even a shred of cloth, not even a spatter of blood or scattered expended rounds. Despite flying slowly at not even a quarter their maximum velocity, they grew tired. Maintaining a constant state of alertness and fear and thrill and apprehension had worn out the Girls. Despite having fought no one in the past
four hours, it was no different from fighting through a grueling battle.

When their stomachs rumbled for the umpteenth time, groaning for food one too many instances, it was the last straw. They radioed Agent Blake vehemently for lunch.

It was because of them that the USDO presence they were scouting for had set up camp. Otherwise, they would have done it only a couple hours later. While the Girls had rations packed into their backpack, they were never trained for survival and Agent Blake had to teach them how to start a fire and warm their meals over it… With varying degrees of success.

Somehow, the Girls were able to find joy in their miserable and freezing conditions, huddling around their campfire as they cooked their bland combat rations in their little mess tins. It was like going camping - or at least as far as they knew from their Daddy's descriptions.

"I hope we find the Purple Man soon…" Blossom remarked as she watched her meal sizzle in boiling water over the fire. "I don't want to spend the night here."

"Yeah, I sure hope we find him," Buttercup barged into the conversation. "Because I'm going to bust his teeth in for putting us through this!" Even Buttercup has had enough of the forest and this 'soldiering' business.

Bubbles was staring into the fire, mesmerized by the dancing blades of the flame. It was the only thing in the forest that was of any joy to her - her interest in the forest was worn out by the constant terror she felt, knowing that the Purple Man could be somewhere out there, that he could spring at them from any direction, from anywhere. As long as there was a hole or a ridge or a tree, he could be there. The fire reminded her of The House's fireplace in the living room, how she used to sit beside it even before she could speak. It'd made her wish she was home, with Dad and Mom.

"Bubbles? You okay there, buddy?" Agent Blake nudged her gently.

"Wha-? I'm… fine," Bubbles lied - she didn't want to be the weak one. The man handed her her tin of rations and she took it. She stared at it with not a single trace of appetite for the content of her mess tin. The thinly-sauced macaroni and shriveled strips of chicken were a far cry from what her Dad could do in the kitchen. "I wish I'm home…"

There were so many things she could wish for. She wished that everything in the past few days had never happened. She wished that she had stayed at Princess' party instead of surrendering herself to her Mom's whims – the utterly depressing look that the Princess had put on when they left the party prematurely had been haunting her since that day. She wished that she was a normal little girl. Not that that was ever going to happen - so the most she could wish for was Blossom's awareness and wits, and Buttercup's bravery and tenacity, just so that she could survive in this harsh world she was born in.

Agent Blake knew that something was not right with Bubbles, but he knew he shouldn't dig any deeper and risk wounding her emotionally or destroy his rapport with her. Getting up, he stroked her hair lovingly before walking away to check on one of the squads he was commanding.

---

Pokey Oaks County. Pokey Oaks Woodland Reserve

7 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1514.

It had started snowing again, and the fog had come up all around the Girls as they continued their search for the Purple Man, led by a Blossom who was fueled by anger towards the creature who
had killed everyone at the gas station that day.

When they did finally find some signs of Captain Wilbur's whereabouts, it wasn't hard to make out. After going very deep into the woods and up to a small hill, Blossom had spotted a most grisly sight downrange using her eyes' zooming ability. She'd almost puked on the spot as a result.

There were heads, about six of them, some still wearing tactical helmets and night vision goggles, stuck on makeshift wooden pikes in the middle of a small clearing. Some still had gullets and windpipes still attached, and those were wrapped around the pikes holding up the heads as if the whole thing was some sickening art exhibit.

The bodies the heads were taken from were a whole other thing altogether. As soon as Blossom knew to expect dead bodies, she could see them as clearly as the Purple Man she was supposed to find out there. They were all nailed onto the trees surrounding the head pikes, some in spread-eagled positions, others like Jesus Christ on the cross, with arms above the head. One of them was nailed in a kneeling or begging position.

Bubbles and Buttercup did not have Blossom's acute vision, and so it took them a little longer to understand what they were seeing, and when they did, after flying close to the head pikes and straining their eyes, Bubbles gasped in shock while Buttercup couldn't help but curl a corner of her lips in a sadistic smile.

"Mister Blake, I think we found them," Blossom muttered into her radio mic, still fighting to keep what remained of her lunch down. She then turned to her sisters. "Come on, Girls! I think he's close!"

Reluctantly, Blossom flew towards the pikes at close to her maximum speed, partly to warm herself up and stretch, as she had been floating at a snail's pace since the lunch break. Even more reluctantly, Bubbles followed. Buttercup went up to the dead bodies without even a hint of hesitation.

"Affirmative. All units, maintain high alert. Papa-Mike could be close, I repeat, Papa-Mike could be close," Agent Blake immediately ordered over the radio, before addressing the Girls once more: "Stay where you are. We'll catch up with you."

---

Pokey Oaks County. Pokey Oaks Woodland Reserve

7 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1528.

"W-why would he do something like this, Mister Blake?" Bubbles stuttered her question. Despite being sickened and repulsed by the necrotic artwork, she couldn't take her eyes off of it at all.
"These poor men…"

"I don't understand," Blossom said, trying her best to distract herself with the puzzle at hand. A huge part of her, however, still insisted on being terrified. "Does the Purple Man want to be found? I thought he was hiding from us?"

Buttercup was silent as she continued to study the heads on the wooden pikes and the bodies surrounding her in a semi-circle, in the process of being taken down by their still-living comrades. It was giving her ideas, and at the same time telling her that the Purple Man was someone to be feared and even respected.

"Both," Agent Blake explained. "It's a warning. He wants us to stay away, and he wants us to know
what will happen if we don't. But he's hiding out there alright – this is what a man does when he's outnumbered. I've seen this happen before."

"What do we do?" Blossom asked.

"We'll have to keep going. Our people could still be alive and out there. The Purple Man is still out there," Agent Blake said.

"But what if he attacks us?" Bubbles asked fearfully.

"That's the idea, dummy!" Buttercup chided – she really hated Bubbles, especially when she talked.

"Back off, Buttercup," Agent Blake warned Buttercup gently, who did as he asked promptly while pouting. As much as he adored her, he was beginning to detest the way she had been ill-treating the sweetest of The Three. "It's not that simple. We'll stick closer to one another. Don't stray too far ahead, and keep your radios close."

And they truly didn't have to stray that far to find more 'signposts' pointing the other way – the way out of the forest. Not even a half hour further in, the Girls, who continued to scout ahead, had found a few more wooden stakes. This time, there weren't heads mounted on them. No, it was worse: entire men were impaled on them like slaughtered pigs destined to be spit-roasted. There were four of them, all of them still in uniform and gear but with their ghillie suits missing. One of them was even held in a pose by a rickety frame constructed using branches and old rope, pointing the way back from whence they came.

They were all dead. Some of them before they were impaled, as evidenced by clouds of shotgun pellet wounds to the head or chest. Two of them died shortly after. At least, that was what Agent Blake could determine after examining the wounds once he'd caught up with the Girls – not that he'd shared the details with them. He didn't want them to panic.

They kept moving forward despite the warning signs, some of which were quite literal, others, not so.

Then they heard yelling. And screaming. And crying. And the voice sounded somewhat familiar, but different. It wasn't a voice the Girls would associate with yelling. Or screaming. Or even crying. It was once a gentle voice, now made broken and hoarse.

The Girls flew faster towards the desperate cries for help. Pine trees that were still full of leaves but covered in snow blocked the view. The Girls pushed through, pushing aside leaves and stinging branches, starting snow cascades on the trees until they saw it.

There was a huge tree in a large clearing, surrounded by equally isolated but smaller trees. On all of them were hung dead USDO soldiers, with most of whom swinging on the thick branches of the center tree like twisted Christmas ornaments.

The voice had come from the center tree. Someone was still alive. The Girls zipped towards him, only to discover that it was Captain James 'Boomer' Wilbur. And he'd been crucified on the tree. Frozen blood streaked his face, which was contorted by pain. His spectacles were missing, cracked and broken at the foot of the tree.

"Help me! Please!" the USDO officer cried, in a way the Girls had never seen a grown man do so before, not even with the others they'd seen who had died so horribly. "Girls! Please! I'm dying out here! Pull them out! Please! Pull them out!"
Though the Girls were inexperienced, it didn't take a lot of imagination on their part to know what he was referring to. The spikes holding him up were huge and ugly, protruding far out of Boomer's wrists and ankles. Bubbles looked down at his feet: stakes were driven right through his boots – whoever had done it didn't need to make the crucifixion easier by removing hard articles of apparels. In fact, Boomer's uniform was left completely intact save for his winter ghillie suit. Unknown to the Girls' innocent minds, it was a way to delay his death and lengthen his torture by crucifixion. It was a way for him to function as intended…

"It's going to hurt," Blossom cautioned Boomer after she had inspected the stake going through his right wrist, at the same time wincing at the sight of it after she had peeled back his torn glove.

"It hurts so bad! it's killing me! Please!" James screamed. "Just pull it out! Please! It hurts so much! Oh, God!"

Blossom floated backward to take a better look at the captain. He had been nailed in a spread-eagled position on the tree, with his feet apart. Panic was welling up in her because of Boomer's pained screams and delirious babbling – she wanted it to end and quickly, both for her own sake and his.

"Bubbles, help him with his left hand," Blossom ordered. "Buttercup, hold him up!"

The very sight of a stake driven through someone's wrist, however, was making her feel faint. With shaking hands, she took hold of the stake but did not dare to even exert an ounce of strength into it. Meanwhile, Blossom bit her lips before gritting her teeth as she pulled the ugly, jagged stake out in one yanking motion. The Boomer gave a shout when it was out. He could feel his wound throbbing, hurting worse.

Blossom held the stake in her hand, studying it. It felt heavy, and after wiping the frozen blood off of it, discovered it to be metal. It was like a tube, hollow but sort of crushed as if a used plastic straw. It didn't happen immediately, but it dawned on Blossom that it was the barrel of a gun, reshaped for use as a stake. She gasped; whoever had done this was strong enough, like her, to rip apart steel… or shape it like putty.

Bubbles hadn't done a thing in the meantime, except becoming pale and sickly. She'd seen what Blossom had done, and if Boomer hadn't screamed yet, he'd done it – all this had brought back painful memories. People screaming as they were shot – on both sides. Gore and blood and Buttercup sustaining a Duranium bullet wound and she had to pull the bullet out-

"Bubbles!" Blossom scolded when she realized she'd frozen up on her. "Mister Wilbur's in pain! What are you doing!?"

Bubbles turned to look at her, and it was as if she had seen a ghost. She was shaking as though artillery shells were dropping all around them. Alice's words were all but drowned out by the explosions of bad memories.

"Argh, fine! Buttercup, help me with his left hand," Blossom ordered, with no uncertain frustration and exasperation in her voice. "Bubbles, you hold Mister Wilbur up!"

Wordlessly, Bubbles drifted over to Boomer, but she looked so anemic and weak that it'd given Blossom doubts about whether she should even trust her at all. When Bubbles took Boomer by the neck, it'd spelled doom for Blossom's confidence in her.

"Not his neck, Bubbles!" Blossom barked at her sister. In her mind, Bubbles was acting up again, and thus not pulling her weight when she and Buttercup had to fight the same fears. Alice's words
had little effect as she couldn't fully understand the implications of what she said. "Boost him by the chest – put your hands under his armpits!"

Despite having to fight the chaos in her, Bubbles was able to follow Blossom's instructions. Buttercup proceeded to yank another metal spike out before she and Blossom both got to work on Boomer's ankles.

Bubbles and Boomer's eyes met, and they both understood each other. In the limited time they had met and worked together in January, he had already known that Bubbles was the meek but sweet one. The sensitive one. He had been called similar things in his youth and even all the way to his adulthood. He knew that Bubbles had always been hurting inside because that was how it was for him. Now, he was hurting physically – badly. Bubbles hugged Boomer tightly as she held her up. He cried and sobbed like a baby as she did, the dignity and leadership of an elite USDO commander all but lost, bled away from his wrists and ankles by hours of crucifixion.

"Shh… It's okay," Bubbles found herself cooing at him, which she found surprising as she had always been at the receiving end of it. It'd only made Boomer cry even harder at the relief of human touch. "It's going to be okay." She leaned her head on his chest as she carried him. It'd quiet him down somewhat, even as the spikes were removed from his ankles.

"Bubbles, you can let him down now," Blossom ordered, and Bubbles lowered the still-shivering Boomer to the ground. Putting her backpack down, Bubbles went to work in trying to provide first-aid. Ever since she had shown some promise as a medic during the battle at Morbucks Industries Research Labs when she was able to follow instructions over the radio to patch Buttercup up, she had been designated the medic of The Three unofficially - by whoever was in the position to care: Selicia, Blake and Mullens. Selicia had trained her in basic first-aid and the latter two had provided her with tips from time to time. She had even gone on a first-aid crash course in the USDO Headquarters. She'd thought of it as 'playing doctor', and found it fun.

But now it was serious business, and she knew it. Pulling a medical kit out of her backpack, she slipped on a pair of rubber gloves - specially manufactured for her tiny hands, all the while trying to push the bad memories out of her mind. It was a near-impossible obstacle. Her hands were still shaking.

"He's- he's here- he's coming-" Boomer mumbled deliriously as he was lying on the ground, feeling relief as if it was the first time since forever.

"Who's coming?" Blossom asked, and when Boomer did not answer, pressed him further: "Who, Mister Wilbur? Is it the Purple Man?"

Boomer did not answer. He had passed out from exhaustion or relief or both. However, the sound of footsteps in the snow, of movement in the shadows had answered her question for him. But they weren't the only footsteps in the vicinity. There were more heading their way, but the fog had obscured the Girls' sight. As Bubbles sanitized her gloves and proceeded to dab a patch of cotton wool in medical antiseptics, their radios came alive, making them jump.

"Agent Blake here. We're coming to you. I think we'll reach you soon," the USDO operative said. Buttercup could hear his naked voice not too far away, and she turned to look in its direction. Blossom turned to look in the same direction, wondering what she was expecting.

Soon, silhouettes appeared in the fog. There was one at first, then three. The figures emerged out of the fog. It was Agent Blake and his men. Soon there were five, then seven and finally ten.

"We found Boomer, Mister Blake," Blossom told the USDO operative. "He's hurt really badly!"
"Let me see," Agent Blake said. As Bubbles had begun to remove articles of clothing surrounding Boomer's wounds, he knelt down beside her. Putting a pair of fingers on Boomer's neck, he'd checked for a pulse and detected a faint one. "Slow pulse, but alive. Good."

"Someone was here, Mister Blake," Buttercup informed Blake. She continued to watch the fog, near-paranoid that someone - something was about to burst through it, running up to them with claws and fangs huge and deadly and thirsting for blood. "We heard him sneaking around just now. He sounded really big and angry, and he ran away really quickly too, away from us. But he was laughing to himself, so I don't know if he's scared of us."

Blossom found Buttercup's level of detail in her report strange - the clarity of it impossible from what she had just heard - all she had heard were some leaves rustling, snow falling, and footsteps in the snow, and she considered her own hearing to be good. She could neither figure out the direction of the footsteps, the size, and demeanor of the mystery man, nor how quickly he had run away. She certainly couldn't hear any laughter.

"How did you hear all that, Buttercup?" she questioned her sister, feeling suspicious about her. If she could hear so well, shouldn't Daddy know about it? The last time he had tested their senses had been all the way back in the middle of January, and none of them had 'extraordinary' hearing, according to their Dad. In fact, the professor had even commented that Buttercup's sense of hearing seemed to be worse than hers and Bubbles'.

'Oh no!' Buttercup thought when she realized she had accidentally let slip her secret ability to hear incredibly well. "I… just happened to be listening really hard, I guess," Buttercup lied, but it wasn't lowering Blossom's eyebrow nor causing her to remove her hands from her hips - she knew the mannerism. It meant that her 'glorious' leader sister wasn't in a fair mood, either cross or suspicious of her or both. She'd seen it too many times.

"Fine," Blossom simply remarked, but the way she was still pinning her eyes on her implied non-complete trust.

"He ran away?" Agent Blake said as he thought about what Buttercup had reported to him. "Why would he?" At first, he believed that the sight of the Girls might have caused the Purple Man to withdraw, as their use of flight had likely given away the fact that they were enhanced by a Chemical like him. The laughter, however… 'Oh shit,' Agent Blake thought as he'd realized what was going on. He reached for his radio.

"Bravo, Charlie, Delta! Watch your six! Papa-Mike coming your way!" Agent Blake warned his soldiers over the radio. "Acknowledge, over."

There was dreadful silence after that. It wasn't encouraging. As Bubbles continued to work on Boomer, Blossom and Buttercup had stood facing outwards, their MP5 and Stoner Light Machinegun at the ready.

"Bravo reporting in. No confirmed sighting of Papa-Mike, over," one of the team leaders sounded out on the radio. Blake had expected it – Bravo was right behind them and wouldn't have been a viable target.

Another moment of silence.

"Delta reporting in. Papa-Mike is nowhere near us, over," another of the team leaders said on the radio.

Then there was silence again. Several seconds too many, in fact. Agent Blake ran through the
possible scenarios: upon receiving the heads-up, his soldiers would dig in and defend a position. They would watch out for the Purple Man, then report on the radio their status. It could take some time if the team leader was cautious – that could be it. It had to be it.

But the sound of gunshots and screams in the distance said otherwise.
Chapter Summary

A day-long manhunt for the frightening Purple Man leads to a confrontation between him and The Angels of Justice.

Chapter 15: The Purple Man (Part 3)

The City of Townsville. Pokey Oaks County. Pokey Oaks Woodland Reserve

7 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1607.

"It sounds like our friends are in trouble…" Bubbles looked up from Boomer when she heard the sound of gunshots and screams in the distance. She had covered Boomer in a thermal sheet after she was done cleaning and bandaging his wrists. "What do we do?"

"We should help them, Mister Blake!" Blossom suggested aloud, itching to fly in the direction of the USDO soldiers in trouble, the fog, which had intimidated her with its miasmatic white abyss, was nothing now compared to the urgency she felt when it came to innocent lives. "We have to!"

"Yeah! Right? Right?" Buttercup was practically begging for a fight - agreeing to assist for all the wrong reasons.

Blossom was, of course right, Agent Blake thought. However, combat strategy and tactics weren't always about sympathy. He had to think about the cost in lives versus securing the objective. Should he safeguard those who had yet to encounter the Purple Man and brace them for the coming confrontation? Or race to save those who were already locked in deadly combat with him? Should he risk the Girls for the sake of expediency?

"Blossom, Bubbles, Buttercup, go!" Agent Blake ordered. As much as he loved the Girls, he had to think of the lives of others too, even if he wasn't as close to them. It was the right thing to do. It had to be – it was three Girls against one. Three enhanced individuals against a single one. He told himself that the Girls should be fine – they had done this before.

"But what about Mister Wilbur?" Bubbles said as her hands were all over Captain James 'Boomer' Wilbur's face - she had been stroking his hair, his cheeks, feeling really sorry for the poor man for what he had suffered - he had lost all his friends, and he was nailed to a tree as a human signpost for hours on end. And she had yet to take care of his ankles.

"We'll take care of him," Agent Fields, Blake's second, promised. "You did good work on his wrists. We'll work on his legs."

"Let's go, Girls!" Blossom ordered before kicking herself up into a high floating position then flying towards the sound of battle. Buttercup and Bubbles followed her eagerly and hesitantly respectively, their lines of pink, baby blue and lime green light disappearing into the winter fog.

The Girls had charged straight in, and yet, by the time they reached Charlie squad, all they had found were dead bodies not unlike the ones they had found in the Exxon gas station. Some were
ripped apart limb by limb. Another had his face smashed in - his helmet doing nothing against the fists of the Purple Man. Another soldier had his guts pulled out. Yet another was bisected entirely at the waist. Only the minority of them were killed in a more conventional manner - by shotgun shells. Splotches of red colored the snowy floor like drips of paint on a canvas.

As Blossom and her sisters surveyed the scene in utter horror, the leader heard a twig snap, then leaves shuddering as if quaking in fear of the Purple Man.

"There!" Blossom pointed in the direction of some swaying trees leading into a thicker part of the woods. She flew in, her speed much slower to avoid accidents in the woods, followed by her sisters.

Despite giving chase as fast as they could, the Girls could never spot the purple fur Agent Blake had said to look out for. But they were closer than ever. Floating through the thick woods, they were able to hear footsteps just out of sight, and just when they thought they were getting warmer, it stopped abruptly. And so did they.

"Do you see purple, Buttercup?" Blossom asked, puzzled, as she looked all around her, and yet all she could see was white, white, and more white, as the winter snow had covered everything in its purity. Switching to her x-ray vision, she checked behind the trees, only to find no one hiding behind them.

"I don't see anything," Buttercup growled in frustration. She really wanted to best the Purple Man, and even take a few trophies from him.

"M-maybe we should go back and see if anyone needs help…" Bubbles was almost whispering as she held on tightly to her stockless XM4, shivering more from fear than the cold as her eyes darted around the woods, searching every corner of it. The fact that they had found nothing so far had only added to the fear.

"There wasn't anyone alive, Bobblehead," Buttercup said derisively. "And I thought my eyesight was bad."

Bubbles turned to stare Buttercup down - momentarily angry, but the heat in her gave way quickly to hurt, and pain, and misery.

"Shhh! Let's keep moving," Blossom said as she floated forward, deeper into the woods. "Be careful…"

A massive form rose from the snow, silent despite its size, silent despite the volume of snow it was throwing off itself. Standing up in his snowshoes, the massive form took one careful step forward after the next, in silent pursuit of the invaders - this time three wisps in service of the highfalutin government men. He pulled his weapon out of the ground - an old lever-action shotgun which he adored since the bad days in… He couldn't even remember much of his life.

But he wouldn't be using the old Winchester on the wisps - gosh, no, because the wisps were special like he was. They were so special that they were floating with their specialness. Slinging his old shotgun, he had something else in mind, something more personal.

As they floated lazily forwards, he was gaining on them with one big stride after the next. He was gaining on them alarmingly fast, and before he knew it, he was within an arm's length of them.

"Mister Blake said he was easy to see…" the blue wisp had whispered, and the Purple Man thought how knee-slappingly funny that was. After all, they had no idea what he was capable of, and it sure
as hell was more than stealing the snow ghillie pants of the dead G-men to hide his denim pants. His tricks would be the last thing those meddling kids would ever learn.

He raised his claws at them, preparing to strike…

"I'm still worried that there could be someone we could help just now…" Bubbles said, and she wasn't lying. She was truly worried that someone in that recent battlefield was still alive, and in as much pain as Boomer. She turned around- "Maybe if I check-" and saw, right before her eyes, a massive form just rearing to strike her with its massive claws, and it wasn't purple at all.

"B- B- Blos-" Bubbles stuttered, petrified by the monster before her.

Before Bubbles could understand what she just saw, she felt claws on her right upper arm and shoulder, shredding right through the arm of her ghillie suit, her skin and partway, her flesh. The force of the blow had knocked her flat down to the ground. Blood splashed in four long blades across the snow.

Blossom and Buttercup whirled around in mid-air after hearing the roar that accompanied the attack. Buttercup trained her light machinegun on the massive form only for the hulking thing to grab it by the barrel and push it aside just as she had squeezed the trigger, causing her to miss all her shots and hit Blossom in the chest. Next thing she knew, what felt like a freight train slammed into her face, sending her flying many yards away and hitting a tree before tumbling in the snow.

Blossom, who was still recovering from taking a full burst of rifle rounds to the chest, had only time to see what she was up against: He was the Purple Man, alright, except he wasn't purple. His fur was white somehow such that he resembled some kind of a yeti creature, and he had covered his denim pants in stolen USDO snow ghillie apparel. He was wearing a kind of white woolen sack on one shoulder, its content unknown.

The beast took Blossom by the arms, by surprise. Sprinting towards a nearby tree, he slammed her against the trunk hard enough that the force had fallen the tree. She fell in the snow after he'd let go, his attention shifting to a bleeding Bubbles on the ground.

Bubbles was bawling her eyes out as she clutched her wounded arm - there were four deep claw marks going through skin and flesh, all of which were bleeding severely. She had completely lost it, to the point of forgetting that she had powers to match the Purple Man and that she wasn't just a normal little girl.

And it was made worse by the Purple Man staring at her with his ghoulish and soulless gray eyes when it took strides towards her, reminding her of pictures of anglerfishes and other predatory deep sea creatures.

Buttercup sat up despite the pain she felt in her cheek. She had never taken such a punch before. Touching it, she could feel a bulge forming, but something worse under her bruise had made even opening her mouth an agony.

Bubbles was screaming and crying at the same time. Buttercup shot up, but her machinegun was nowhere to be found – she had lost her grip on it after taking an anvil-like fist to the face. She unslung her MP5, which was still surprisingly found on her person. Aiming it quickly, she unloaded everything she had on the white-furred Purple Man, and every shot was a hit - the recoil was no match for her strength.

It served to distract him, not that that was her intention. With a roar, the Purple Man charged at Buttercup, who switched out her magazine quickly but could only let off half of it before he took a
swing at her.

He was blindingly fast, and his size had done well to disguise that. Buttercup couldn't even get out of the way despite her powers of flight, what with the battle being measured in milliseconds.

It felt as if she had been thrown in a shredder when the Purple Man had swung his claws at her. His claws had cut a bloody, diagonal swathe through her ghillie suit, vest, uniform, and skin. A shocking amount of blood had splashed on the snow in the direction of the Purple Man's attack. Buttercup was sent tumbling once more with multiple deep lacerations in her chest leaving smudges of blood on the snowy white floor as she rolled.

And before she lost consciousness, she saw the Purple Man transform before her eyes, turning from white to purple like a chameleon.

Blossom was still recovering when Buttercup was struck down. But she'd seen it – her sister, rent so barbarously by a color-changing maniac. She couldn't even be sure that she was still alive – she'd felt pain in her temple when Buttercup was hurt, and it wasn't a good sign. And Bubbles, who was gripping her bleeding shoulder and arm and bawling on the ground, wasn't far behind.

"Buttercup!" Blossom yelled as she raised her own MP5 and let go with everything she had – bullets and infrared beam both. The bullets did nothing but ruffle fur, but her heat beams had seared red on purple, which was encouraging.

"Wha' in tarnation!" the Purple Man roared when he felt his fur and skin both burn as he shielded himself with his arms. It was the first time he'd felt such a thing. Thinking quickly, he picked up a moaning Buttercup by the sides and held her up as a shield. The heat beams stopped.

"Let her go!" Blossom warned the Purple Man as she was quickly swapping in a fresh MP5 magazine from her pouch.

"Or what?" the Purple Man replied surprisingly in a southern hillbilly accent. "You gonna burn me some mo'?"

"Bubbles, go around!" Blossom had turned to Bubbles for solutions. She was still crying, however, but the worse of it was over – still, she shook her head in fear, panic still deciding her actions. "Bubbles!"

That was when Buttercup came to, and with her remaining strength, threw her fists down and broke the Purple Man's grasp on her. Ignoring the beast's frightening roar, she began delivering right and left hooks to his face, knocking him back one step at a time. The blood on the Purple Man's lips encouraged her further. This was followed up by a furious flurry of machinegun punches to his chest, then a spinning kick where she floated. However, even after all that, the Purple Man was still not down – he wasn't even fazed by the attacks. Surprise turned to shock and fear when he simply spat a glob of blood into the snow nonchalantly and retaliated with a hammering wallop down her skull. So paralyzing and painful was it that Buttercup dropped to the floor after a pregnant moment.

"Leave my sister alone!" Blossom screamed before letting off another pair of heat beams. She could feel more pain in her temple when Buttercup was pounded over the head.

On feeling his chest getting burned, the Purple Man hit the deck immediately and unslung his shotgun, firing off a shotgun shell, forcing Blossom to hide behind a tree.

Buttercup's ears were ringing, her vision blurred. She could feel a severe headache coming on, and it was hard to think. But it didn't take good vision to see the massive, muscle-bound Purple Man,
nor a good brain to figure out what to do next.

While the Purple Man continued to fire wild shots at Blossom as he stood up, Buttercup propelled herself straight from the ground and delivered a kick to his side, stumbling him and launching herself far away from him, up into the sky. From there, she launched herself into a flying punch but missed when the Purple Man sidestepped the attack, crashing into the snow. From the ground, she delivered a quick kick to the back of his knee, causing him to fall to a kneel. Getting up, she aimed a spinning kick to the back of his head and struck home.

"You like that!?" Buttercup taunted the Purple Man triumphantly as she flew away once more when he started swinging his claws around wildly, showing no sign of stopping.

"Oh, you!" the Purple Man said as he rubbed his head. "Slippery lil' city 'un!"

As Buttercup was flying around once more for a frontal assault, he aimed his shotgun and pointed it one-handed at Buttercup. He squeezed the trigger after he was certain he'd hit.

What happened next caught Buttercup unawares: the pellets hurt far more than the regular kind, had even dug into her skin somewhat. Somehow, the Purple Man's shotgun was better. Unbeknownst to the Girls, he had mixed some of his blood into the home-made gunpowder he had been making. The curious addition had made his shots more powerful, but without damaging his shotgun as he had reinforced the barrel and mechanisms with some old-fashioned blacksmithing.

The Purple Man whooped in celebration of his good aim as Buttercup fell from the sky like a hunted goose, landing in the snow. Shocked by her sister falling from the sky, Blossom rushed the Purple Man, eyes blazing and heat beam flaring. The Purple Man pumped his lever-action shotgun one-handed with a single jerk of his powerful arm and fired. Fading sideways, she was able to dodge most of the shot, feeling some of the pellets in her shoulder, before driving a foot into the Purple Man's solar plexus, actually pushing him back somewhat and causing him to roar in pain.

"That actually hurts!" the Purple Man screamed as he pulled down the lever of his shotgun. Meanwhile, Blossom had flown in an arc and delivered a double-kick to his back, aiming for a curious white cotton sack he’d been carrying around. Something crunched - shattered really hard. Blossom did not know what it was at first, as she was too busy trying to stay alive. Then she saw the pieces of a Banjo falling out of the holes in the white sack, scattering on the ground; carefully varnished wood, strings and oiled metal parts all.

"Joe! YOU’LL PAY FOR THAT!" the Purple Man bellowed furiously before smacking Blossom in the face as she was coming in for a flying punch. The blow sent her skidding in the snow and his fur had turned red in the meantime, a color scheme that even a kindergartner could figure out the meaning of. Getting up with blood snaking from her nostrils, Blossom wiped some of it off before launching herself into a flight straight towards the Purple Man, determined to take him down before he did the same to her sisters.

As if shooting a clay target, the Purple Man took aim and fired. Blossom was struck right in the face, the pellets propelled at speeds high enough to cause bruising even in her skin, and that was on top of the heavy blow he’d dealt to her with the back of his hand. The pain had been so blindingly extreme that she’d lost focus and even consciousness in that moment that she’d careened on the snowy floor face-first and delivered herself to the Purple Man.

The Purple Man had acted quickly to take advantage of this, seizing both Blossom and Buttercup by the neck and holding them up before him.

"Bubbles, help us!" Blossom screamed hoarsely for her other sister to act. Buttercup, on the other
hand, was silent, her head lolling as she was being held like a ragdoll by the Purple Man - she was barely conscious.

Bubbles was still on the floor. The sound of the shotgun blasts had rooted her to the ground and spoiled her resolve. Weeks of therapy became non-existent. It had been enough that her sisters were beaten so completely right before her – what chance would she have against the Purple Man if her more able sisters couldn't stand against him?

Torn between her loyalty to her sisters and her insurmountable fear, Bubbles had frozen up. She sobbed and shivered where she was, the rifle near her abandoned, despite being quite reachable - her sonic scream all but forgotten, her strength locked behind her weakness.

Seeing this, the Purple Man chortled at how pathetic she was.

"Bubbles, please!" Blossom screamed, herself crying because she thought she was going to die there and then.

Seeing that the blue one was of no threat, the Purple Man got back to work, throwing them down on the ground so hard, one after the other, that the snow did nothing to cushion the Girls. Blossom could feel the wind knocked out of her and every bone in her rattling and screaming in pain with her. Buttercup was knocked unconscious a second time, and she was the lucky one.

The Purple Man raised his claws once more, and there was no mystery as to what he was going to do.

"Blossom!" Bubbles screamed, still unable to act. Blossom threw up her arms to protect herself - then felt claws on her forearms, slicing through her Kevlar arm guards, rending her flesh. The Purple Man followed up with another swipe with his other hand, and this time had caught Blossom in the chest, his claws slicing through ghillie suit and Kevlar like paper, tearing through Blossom's flesh like cloth. The enhanced little girl gasped and coughed in pain.

Bubbles felt pain in her temple as the Sister Sense between them transmitted the sensation. It'd added to the guilt.

"Why… are… you doing this?" Blossom asked the Purple Man, her voice weak, fading.

"You came to my neck of the woods with guns and terrible manners! You broke my Joe! And you're asking me that!?!" the Purple Man roared his answer, and raised his claws once more. Blossom covered her face with her hand as she closed her eyes. The Purple Man's fur had turned a brighter shade of red in anticipation of the kill.

But help came. Up in the sky, a flare was shot upwards, ominously red but not for the Girls. There was a loud gunshot, and all of a sudden, blood spurted from the Purple Man's right arm. It screamed, surprisingly human.

It took off as quickly as it had appeared behind Bubbles, its fur turning from red to white once more. Within seconds, it had disappeared into the wilderness, chased after by Duranium bullets and more conventional sniper fire.

"Blossom… Oh no…" Bubbles said weakly as she finally found the will to act. Getting up weakly, still clutching her arm - by now her wound minor next to her sisters', she came up to Blossom, and the moment she saw clearly how hurt she was, voices in her mind had started blaming her, calling her names.

Blossom remained lying on the ground. Although she was hurt badly, she still had the strength to
move. Betrayal, not pain, was keeping her down. A very strong sense of utter betrayal. And Bubbles' concerned voice had only served to stoke the fire of anger in her.

Bubbles knelt down beside her with a wince. "Blossom, are you okay?" she said to her sister.

Blossom did not reply. Instead, she stared up into the sky, watching the flare begin its descent. Her tears mingling with blood, freezing quickly into beads of condensed sadness.

"Blossom?" Bubbles pleaded for her to answer, and when she wouldn't, took her by the upper arms and tried to pull her up.

"Go away!" Blossom shouted as she struggled out of her grasp, and when Bubbles wouldn't let go, she pushed her away. They both fell in the snow. Blossom remained on her back, still not feeling like getting up while Bubbles floated back on her feet. She tried to help her up again, taking her by the arm with both her hands.

"DON'T TOUCH ME!!!" Blossom barked madly when Bubbles had tried again to pull her to her feet. She struggled from Bubbles' hands, going so far as to slap her multiple times in the arm until she landed a blow squarely in Bubbles' cheek, at which point the latter girl finally let go, her hands going up to her cheek.

"LEAVE ME ALONE!!!" Blossom cried loudly, clear fury in her voice.

In the meantime, men were racing down from a nearby ridge, along with others from two other directions. Blake and his men.

"I'm sorry…" Bubbles mewed her apology as she clutched her - Blossom's slap had hurt more than the Purple Man's claws. "I… I was scared…"

"I DON'T CARE!!!" Blossom screamed with fury and explosive anger unchecked, before getting up on her own accord, motivated more by anger than anything else as she marched up to Bubbles. "Buttercup's right about you. You're useless! You're a USELESS no-good cry-baby coward!"

"Blossom! Don't! I'm sorry!" Bubbles cried as she cowered on the floor, shocked by how her sister had changed so dramatically with her rage.

"I HATE YOU!!! YOU LEFT ME TO DIE!!!" Blossom screamed and gave Bubbles a kick in the arm – the uninjured one only by coincidence – as the blue-eyed girl shrank away from her mad sister. Blossom would have done more to Bubbles too, had Agent Blake not ran up to her. Instead, she'd left Bubbles sniffling and tearing up instead.

"Blossom!" he called out to her. The mere presence of an adult had quelled her anger somewhat - she knew that the adults she loved wouldn't have approved of her shouting and violence towards her own sister, no matter how justified it seemed at the time.

Blossom turned around to face Mister Blake, turning her back on Bubbles. The pain in her chest - in her arms - everywhere, in fact, had flared up. She shivered as she could feel the cold, wintry gale penetrating her to the very bone, through the slits made by the Purple Man in her tactical gear, uniform, skin, and flesh. She winced as she limped up to Blake, her legs suddenly feeling weak.

She'd nearly collapsed on the floor had the USDO agent not catch her as she fell.

Bubbles, in the meantime, had sunk to the floor, left by Blossom a shocked, gibbering mess, caught in an unfortunate and unpleasant middle world between wanting to withdraw entirely from the world and wanting to cry her eyes out. Her reckoning had come - for the past month and more, she
knew that her peaceful world would come crashing down, and she would be hated once more. Except she didn't expect even her closest sister to hate her too… to the point of taking swipes at her, screaming at her and even agreeing with Buttercup about all the terrible things the toughest of The Three had said about her.

When Sergeant Rutherford tried to get her attention by snapping his fingers in front of her, she wouldn't even respond as she was too preoccupied with feeling down and sorry for herself. The black man had put it down to shock and blood loss.

"Come on, let's get you home," the sergeant said as he pulled a thermal sheet from one of his pouches and draped it over her shoulder. Carefully avoiding the severe lacerations on her arm, he carried her with an arm under the crook of her knees and another under her back. Bubbles clung to his neck, welcoming the fact that there were still people who didn't hate her.

Meanwhile, a couple of Blake's men had come upon Buttercup, who was still out cold in the snow. One of them checked her pulse to discover that she was still alive, despite lying in a pool of her own blood, frozen as part of the snow.

The Girls had to be carried on stretchers as they were too injured to fly any appreciable distance. With their most powerful assets - and friends - severely wounded, Agent Blake had called off the manhunt and declared it a failure, before ordering the three surviving squads under his command to coalesce into a single fighting force as a defensive measure as they made their retreat back to Townsville.

Extraction by helicopters was impossible, thanks in part to the USDO becoming engaged in fighting crime in Townsville - crime was on the upsurge once again. Another reason had been the Purple Man. There was no doubt that he could do something to a helicopter once he saw it. The risk of a crash with all personnel lost was too great.

With the Girls and Captain James 'Boomer' Wilbur on stretchers and some of the dead bodies of their comrades in tow, the retreat took far longer than the advance. Surprisingly, the Purple Man had left them alone despite their more vulnerable state. Lieutenant Blake had put it down to it nursing its own injuries.

It was well into the night before they finally got back to civilization. One thing was for sure: They wouldn't be coming back to the Purple Man's neck of the woods anytime soon.
Chapter 16: Convalescence

Chapter Summary

The Girls get their much-needed reprieve, surrounded by family and friends. However, resentment and sadness brew below the surface.

Chapter 16: Convalescence

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

8 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 1113.

Selicia had to carry Blossom to her room after Thomas was done checking on her injuries - the professor had opted instead to remain in the lab to continue his work on Anti-X, making final checks on his calculations and chemical theories. The Girls were recovering quickly, though their wounds were too heavy for an overnight convalescence. Blossom held on gratefully to Selicia's neck with both her hands as she began to doze off. Lack of sleep last night and her injuries meant that they would need an extra nap.

Emerging into the Girls' room, she put her down on Buttercup's side of the bed, beside her sisters, who were already asleep, partly because of the medication they consumed. Blossom slipped into the green side of the tri-colored blanket on her own with a wince.

"There you go, Blossy-dear," she said as she tucked her in. "All safe and sound now."

"I love you, Mom," Blossom liked Mom when she was like this - caring and nurturing, almost as much as Dad. As she thought about this fact, Selicia leaned in and gave her a kiss on the forehead.

"But don't you feel too safe, dear," Selicia said as she took a bottle of concentrated painkiller from the nightstand on Blossom's side. The painkiller was specially produced for the Girls, made to overwhelm their resistance to the usual concentration of chemicals.

"Why, Mom?" Blossom asked with a yawn - with sleep overtaking her, she didn't read too much into what she said, nor would she be all that capable of it. "I feel safe with you and Dad…"

"Because I won't forgive you for what happened to Buttercup in the woods," Selicia said bluntly, before producing a spoon and pouring some painkiller into it. Blossom had been on the cusp of sleep, her eyes closing, but on hearing this, they opened wide. The little girl pushed herself up close to the headboard, trying to sit up, but she'd ended up about halfway up as her wounds had started to hurt them.

"Mom, please don't," Blossom pleaded with her Mom, who seemed to have transformed right before her eyes on the effects of her magic words. "I tried - I really tried. I love Buttercup, I really do!"

"Shh… It's okay, darling. I believe you," Selicia simply shushed Blossom derisively with a smile as she ran her hands down her face - she liked it when the powerful enhanced little girl was terrified of her so utterly. "It's worse that you love Buttercup. It just means you've failed someone you love."
"Your punishment will come. Just not now. We'll talk about it when you're fully healed," Selicia pushed the spoon of painkiller up close to her lips. "Now drink."

Blossom opened her mouth and let the spoon slip into her mouth, her eyes still fixed on her Mom's. She felt the spoon tilt in her mouth, and she swallowed the bitter-tasting fluid. Selicia took a glass of water from the nightstand and fed Blossom some water for the taste after that.

"Now lie back down dear," Selicia said, deceptively sweet and warm. She helped pull Blossom into a comfortable sleeping position, looming over her like a bear. A dangerous, magically transforming momma bear. "Sweet dreams..." She chuckled before leaning in again to plant another peck on Blossom, this time right on her lips, up close and personal, just to invade what little personal space she had and show the little enhanced bitch who owned who. Blossom tried to get away from it, but her injury and the tight space meant that she could not.

The painkiller took effect quickly, and as Selicia stood up, Blossom could immediately feel its side effects. Her vision blurred, and no matter how she fought to stay awake, she soon slipped into a much-needed sleep.

The City of Townsville. Downtown. Sal's Milk Bar.

8 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 1521.

As promised, Detective Mullens had met the Girls for their fortnightly meet-up at Sal's Milk Bar. Detective Olivia and Stanley Talker had come along too. They were all out of uniform; the Girls had been deactivated for duty as they had yet to recover fully from their atrocious injuries, while Mullens, Olivia, and Stanley had all taken the day off.

The Girls were in their normal dresses with their sashes tied around their waist like ribbons. White high socks and Mary-Jane shoes. But they were also dressed in bandages, and Blossom had suffered the worst of it: the Purple Man's blow was hard enough to cause hairline fractures in her arm. As such, her left arm was in a sling. Most of the bandages were wrapped around the chest, out of sight.

The detectives were out of their trenchcoats – that was just about the only difference with them. Stanley Talker the talking dog had opted to go with a grey hoodie and a short pants.

Things had changed - it didn't take a veteran detective to notice things. The Girls used to sit together at the bar tables, but now, Bubbles had retreated to an empty booth, nesting in a corner seat by the window as if shielding herself from an explosion waiting to happen. Her milkshake sat on the table untouched, where everyone else's was almost done. The ice in her tall glass had already melted halfway to nothing, forming a film of cloudy water on top.

Still, Bubbles sat all alone, hunched and staring into the table, her eyes glazed over like a corpse's. Had Mullens not known any better, he would have thought that she was a wax statue installed by the milk bar to improve customer patronage.

Blossom and Buttercup, on the other hand, seemed to be getting along a little better. They were talking to each other a little more, likely because Bubbles had been taken out of the equation. What did require a veteran detective to figure out was the fact that the Girls had gone through another traumatic event the previous day in the woodland reserves. He'd called up Agent Blake to check on the Girls, and it wasn't as easy as it seemed; he had to go through a USDO operator before he was allowed to speak to him.
From what he heard, it ain't good. Blossom had spilled everything to Agent Blake, who was her next closest confidante after her father, and he'd found out from Blake that Bubbles had basically committed a sin in police partner code terms. She had failed to watch her sisters' back even when they'd watched hers. And her reason wasn't any better: It was because she was scared.

It sounded bad, and Bubbles ought to sound like the dirty little villain, but the detective couldn't blame the little kid. After all, they were kids, whether three months old or five years, it didn't matter. She wasn't ready for the kind of shit even adults fear in the streets, super-strength and eye beams or not.

Stanley Talker had taken notice of Bubbles earlier on. After slurping up his milkshake in a bowl, he'd jumped on top of the booth seat Bubbles was on and licked her in the face, anticipating a giggle or at least a smile. It didn't work. So he sat next to her and did what he was best known for.

"Hrrr… Can't be that terriirle, can rit?" the talking dog said. The truth was, even he knew that it was bad - Detective Mullens had briefed him and Olivia on what he'd found out about the Girls' operation the previous day. Bubbles did not answer. "Talk to re, kid."

"It was…” Bubbles whispered in such a soft manner that even the talking dog had difficulty hearing it.

"Rut you knor what?" Stanley Talker said, trying to coax Bubbles into talking more. He found it to be effective as far as he knew. There were lots of officers in his station who needed someone to talk to - they'd treated him as some sort of a therapy dog and he was a damned good one at that, being able to fulfill the roles of both a team pet and conversation partner at the same time.

"What?" Bubbles mumbled as a tear escaped an eye.

"The world risn't so rad," the talking dog said, and by that he meant that the world wasn't so bad. "Rook rat re - Ri ras running from re rUSDsO for ronths rand now life's reen good rith re police."

"I hate myself," Bubbles sniffled. "I hate this world."

"Don't say that," Talker said. "Tell yourself that things will get retter. Trust re, Rur-rles." Bubbles did not say a word to that. In her mind, it was impossible to believe the talking dog. Things were bad in the past, and things had been bad since. January was good only because it wasn't as bad. The world seemed to consist only of different degrees of terrible to Bubbles.

"Rur-rles?" the talking dog tried to get Bubbles' attention when he realized she hadn't replied to him. "Do you want to re ralone?"

Bubbles replied by wrapping her arm around the dog's neck, and the talking dog knew what he meant. Sitting down in the booth beside her, he allowed Bubbles to lean on him and rub her tears away with his hoodie.

Time slipped by like a trickle of sand in an hourglass. Bubbles had done nothing in the meantime, taking not even a sip of her milkshake. If there was an hourglass, it was broken because time seemed to have stood still at that moment.

The stillness was only broken when Detective Mullens slipped into the booth, sitting on the opposite side of the table as Bubbles.

"You mind if I have a minute with Bubbles here?" he asked Stanley Talker. Wordlessly, the talking dog stood on all fours, gave Bubbles a friendly lick in the cheek before turning around and jumping off the seat.
"I heard it was bad," Mullens spoke respectfully, softly to the depressed little girl. She, however, had kept staring at her lap. The old detective continued: "I won't lie to you, girlie, and I won't sugar-coat it. It was terrible, what happened yesterday, and I can't say that you're blameless."

Bubbles' only response was to shut her eyes. What she did wasn't a mystery when tears had fought through her eyelids regardless. The detective could feel, no, he knew, that she had balled up her fists. He knew because he used to do it, back in the day when everyone he cared about were still fresh memories that he could almost touch.

"You could have done something to distract the Purple Man. Shot at him or punched him, or anything to get your sisters out of the way. They would have been killed, Bubbles," the detective went on. Despite the accusative content of his words, he was still being soft-spoken and gentle – something Bubbles would never have imagined Mullens to be more than a month ago.

"I'm sorry..." Bubbles mewled, then sniffled.

"That's good. It means you know what's wrong. It means you love your sisters, and you won't do it again," Mullens added. "As much as I hate the idea of the three of you leading the fight against crime. Bubbles, I know what you want, and I'm sure many people want the same for the three of you just as much. Including me. Children, you know, should be safe and happy and having fun."

"I don't want anything anymore," Bubbles sobbed.

"Yes, you do. You're just too upset right now to see it," Mullens said. "You know, an old man like me... I've made mistakes like yours too. Wanna hear it?"

Bubbles sniffled. "It can't be as bad as yesterday," she said. To Mullens, it felt like a win because, at the very least, she seemed interested in what he had to say.

"Oh, but it can be. I was once a young, handsome cop in a neat uniform, you believe that?" Mullens reminisced.

"No..." Bubbles slip.

"Right. Anyway, I wasn't so handsome when I had my first multiple armed perps scenario," the old detective went on with his story. "Old jewelry store in Old Town. We went in there, guns blazing. I was caught in the shoulder like you. My partner and two others went on, but it went south really quickly. They called for my help, but I stayed down for, I don't know, half a minute maybe. By the time I got my act together, my partner had to be put in ICU and those two other cops? They gave their lives for a fistful of pretty, shiny stones belonging to some man they don't know. All because I took half a minute too long to act."

When Bubbles heard the story, she finally broke into a full-on sob.

"Bubbles, hey," Detective Mullens said softly to the enhanced little girl – how times had changed; two months ago, he would have more likely smacked Bubbles in the cheek but now... "Look at me." And she did, giving him that needy, thirsty look. "Do you understand what I'm getting at?"

Bubbles shook her head – too upset to think, so upset she likely couldn't even add one to one, much less put two and two together.

"That story I told you? It was a dime in a dozen. I've made more mistakes since and I'm still sitting here with a badge on my belt and a gun to waste them low-lives," the detective spelled it out for her. "You're luckier than I am, Bubbles. Do you believe that?"
"No..." Bubbles said dejectedly.

"You have two sisters, Bubbles. I had one really close brother-in-arms and he's gone. Your sisters are still there, drinking strawberry and mint milkshakes. You still have a chance to make things right with them. And those men who died because of me? No matter how many criminals I put in the slammer, I can't bring them back." Detective Mullens said, a hint, just a hint of sadness in his voice. The stonewall he'd been building in him over the past few decades had gotten as long and thick as the Great Wall of China, but it was never enough to keep all of it in, and Bubbles saw that. She reached out for his hand, and he took it, even though he had great reservations for showing any emotions except in front of Olivia.

But Bubbles soon fell back into her depression again, like a flatlined heart a doctor had failed to resuscitate.

"But they hate me," she murmured. "Buttercup has always hated me and now Blossom hates me too..."

"They're just really mad. Give them time, kid," Detective Mullens advised. "If my ol' pal could come around eventually – even though he shouldn't have - I'm sure your sisters will."

"But you weren't there yesterday," Bubbles said, and the bare mention of 'yesterday' had gotten her sobbing harder than ever.

"What do you mean?" the detective asked. "Here, at least take a sip of your milkshake before you die of dehydration." He pushed Bubbles' blueberry milkshake closer to her. The sweet little girl took one short suck of the straw from it as if it was laced with poison, before insisting on death by dehydration.

"We were taken home yesterday late at night, and Blossom and Buttercup hadn't spoken to me ever since the Purple Man..."

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

7 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 2113.

The Girls were taken home late at night, and Blossom and Buttercup hadn't spoken to Bubbles ever since the Purple Man. This was despite their injury having no effect on their voices and consciousness - Buttercup had woken up hours ago. Despite being put in the same Lamborghini speed transport - Mister Blake's - Blossom and Buttercup hadn't even so much as turned to look in her general direction. They had only spoken briefly to each other, but never to her, and sometimes about her, rudely referring to her in the third person.

When the speed transport had finally pulled up at The House, the light at the window was already switched on. Professor Utonium and Selicia were out the door faster than the Girls could leave Agent Blake's car, and the Girls were in a deplorable state - most of their gear was taken off, they were bandaged all over and all of them had thick thermal blankets on. Blossom's face looked like it had been trampled upon. Bubbles was a poster child for a Good Samaritans depression detection ad. Buttercup's mouth was kept close by a cloth wrapped around her head, under the chin.

Professor Utonium and Selicia were, of course, shocked, with the former looking almost sickly, something that had never happened ever since the previous year. Rushing up to the Girls, Selicia bent down to hug Buttercup while the professor did the same with Blossom and Bubbles - though he had to pull Bubbles closer as she was trying to stay away from Blossom for some reason.
"How on Earth did this happened, Blake!?!" the professor accused the Girls' chaperone. "What did you do?!"

"I'm sorry, Utonium," Agent Blake said, making no attempts to defend himself. His second-in-command and closest men, however, had become more guarded.

"They were trying to help my men and they were… attacked by a hostile enhanced individual. I rushed to help them as fast as I could and…” he tried to explain. His soft voice, his apologetic tone, however, did nothing to calm the professor down. Standing up, he started aggressively towards Blake.

"I put my daughters' lives in your hand! I trusted you and-" the professor growled at the security lieutenant.

"Dad, no!" Bubbles cried and pulled her Daddy by the hand strong enough that she was able to stop him, at the cost of aggravating her wounds. "Ow!"

"Oh, honey, I'm so sorry!" the professor desisted when he realized he had hurt his sweetest adopted daughter in his anger. Selicia came up to the professor, putting her arms around him.

"Thomas, honey, we need to take care of our Girls first," Selicia said, and reluctantly, he backed away from Agent Blake. She then turned to Blake and whispered an apology to him.

The family had literally spent the night in the lab as a result of the disaster that was the manhunt. The Girls’ injuries were grievous enough that they had to be put under and performed on simultaneously. By midnight, they had hundreds of stitches between them and the professor thought that the Girls were lucky they did not have internal injuries. He had examined their wounds while they were asleep and came to the conclusion that whoever it was that attacked them was strong enough to maim them as easily as a bear would a regular human being. Had the Purple Man aimed a little lower, he might have ripped open their bellies and done the damage he wasn't sure even their healing factor could remedy.

The next day, he and Selicia had made sure to prepare the biggest, tastiest breakfast for them, and before they even woke up, they carried them upstairs into the living room. With them convalescing, even with their lightning-fast healing factor, it would take more than a night for them to come back from the Purple Man's savage attacks.

When the Girls finally woke up, it didn't take long for the professor to realize that the damage done to them wasn't just physical. At the dinner table, there seemed to be a change in the relationships between the three of them. Where Buttercup was previously the odd one out, Bubbles had fallen silent with her eyes glued to everything else but her sisters - mostly her plate of waffles. Blossom was talking to Buttercup more, though not as much as Blossom and Bubbles would have. Every time Bubbles tried to engage in conversation with Blossom, she would be given the glare and ignored.

Not wanting to force the Girls to get along as it would be futile, the professor left them be. Selicia secretly liked the new dynamic better, even if she disliked Blossom. It meant that Buttercup had risen in importance. Although she had less against Bubbles than she did against Blossom, Selicia thought that Bubbles didn't deserve to be at the right hand of Blossom - she had neither worked for it nor put her position to use. Blossom had been making decisions all alone and Bubbles would just follow them blindly and jump off a cliff like a lemming if the almighty and glorious leader said so. Buttercup would make a better right hand, if not a better leader.

At least, that was what Selicia read into the dynamics among the Girls.
School was out again as a result of the Girls' injuries. The professor had to phone Miss Keane about it, and Miss Keane had expressed her fears that the Girls' education would be affected if this kept up, going on to say that early childhood was a critical period for the Girls' development, a period which would end whether or not the Girls had learned everything their potential would allow.

"I can't thank you enough, Miss Keane, for looking out for the Girls," Professor Utonium had said before hanging up. "But it won't come to that. I think I have a solution for that too."

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

8 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 1315.

Playtime was more passive than before, owing to the severe injuries the Girls had suffered. Bubbles, however, bore the brunt of it as she had kept to herself as much as Blossom and Buttercup were alienating her. While Bubbles played with her dolls in a corner of the room half-heartedly, more miserable than having fun, Buttercup had brought out her car collection, and Blossom had joined in on the vehicle mayhem she was starting. The pink-eyed girl had even managed to get Buttercup to play a more tame game simulating the traffic they'd been seeing in Townsville.

Their Dad had seen it all. He had passed by the room on purpose several times to check on them. He had suspected since breakfast that animosity had grown between Blossom and Bubbles, and he had been waiting for the perfect opportunity to 'corner' Blossom so he could solve this problem before it got any worse.

"Girls, I think it's time we prepare for your trip to the milk bar," the professor called out to them. Blossom and Buttercup responded with enthusiastic smiles on their face. He padded up to Blossom and Buttercup and stroked the latter girl in the head. "Why don't you go to Mom and she'll give you a sponge bath?"

"Bubbles, go with Buttercup," he said when he turned to the hunched form of the blue-dressed little girl in a corner of the Girls' room. At first, it seemed as if she didn't hear him, but then she got up (very) reluctantly and ambled towards the door.

"What about me?" Blossom asked, still beaming.

"I'll give you your sponge bath, flower bud," the professor said, before taking her hand. She had to go around him as one of her arms was in a sling. "I think your Mom will have her hands full with both Buttercup and Bubbles to take care of.

The professor led Blossom to the common bathroom out in the corridor. Inside, he shut the door behind them before turning the faucet at the bathtub.

"How are you, Blossom?" he asked as he felt the heat of the water, gauging it to be of an acceptable temperature. "Hanging in there?"

"I'm fine, I guess…" the leader of The Three said as she tried to remove her own dress, only to feel pain in her side. "Ouch…"

"Let me do it," the professor said, coming to her. "You get to be a princess today - you've done a lot yesterday. Too much, in fact." The professor's word choice had reminded Blossom of Princess - Elodie - and she could only wonder how she'd been doing all this while.

The professor removed Blossom's dress, slipping it from above her. He then went on to gently
remove her bandages. The sight underneath was horrific - the wounds had healed just about halfway, which meant that there were still hideous rifts in the enhanced little girl's skin, all across her chest and arms. The stitches were still there, many dozens of them. Blossom had seen it while she was changing into her dress, but she couldn't get used to it: seeing it again made her upset. And angry. And the professor could see it in her eyes. It was the perfect opportunity for him to act.

"Do you want to talk about it, Blossom?" he asked, and as the water rose in the tub, he sat down on the side of it and gently - carefully - lifted Blossom and placed her on his lap. She didn't answer as she was conflicted about it.

"Whatever happened out there, Blossom should stay out there," the professor said. "Bubbles is still your sister - and she'll always be your sister. She's the sweetest girl I know. You're lucky to have her."

" Lucky?! Look at what she's done to me! I should have listened to Buttercup!" Blossom yelled, out of control, before regretting it when she realized she had startled her own Daddy. She had been going out of control lately, and it was something she couldn't fail to notice. Hot tears pricked her eyes after she realized it had happened again, and right in front of her father. "I'm sorry…"

"Honey, it's okay," the professor cooed at Blossom, but she'd already started crying.

"I've changed, haven't I?" Blossom sobbed. "I promised you I'll always be your little Blossom and now I've changed."

"Hey, you are my little Blossom - that hasn't changed," her Dad comforted her, wiping her tears away. "It's not Bubbles' fault bad things happened. You have to accept that, Blossom."

Try as she might, Blossom couldn't understand what the professor said. Bubbles was clearly at fault, for failing to act when she could have. She was mostly fine, and could have done something to help. She was mostly fine, and she and Buttercup were badly hurt because she had cowered when they needed her. Without knowing it, Blossom had put on a scowl as hideous as her wounds, and the professor noticed it.

"She did nothing when the Purple Man was hurting me, Dad," Blossom asserted. "She loves me but she did nothing when I needed her."

The professor sighed, unsure of what to say. The way Blossom had put it, it did seem like it was Bubbles' fault. Still, the professor could never blame Bubbles - the Girls weren't supposed to be out there, to begin with. At least, that was his view.

"I don't expect you to forgive her immediately, but you have to try Blossom," he added. "You're the smartest of them all. Why not show Bubbles how wise you are and maybe she'd be inspired to do better next time?" Memories of Bubbles cowering while she was getting pounded on and cut up by the Purple Man, however, told her otherwise. This, along with how she had screwed up in the sewers and factory, had put the final nail in the coffin.

"I'll think about it," Blossom said in a defiantly sarcastic way. It seemed familiar to the professor. Where had he heard that before? It was the first time he heard Blossom say it.

Unknown to both of them, Selicia had redirected Bubbles back to the professor as she wanted to be alone with Buttercup. Feeling unwanted and miserable, Bubbles was walking back to her room when she heard both her dad and Blossom talking. Even her Dad thought she was wrong. She'd been eavesdropping, and she'd heard the whole thing.
And what they had said behind her back broke her heart.

The City of Townsville. Downtown. Sal's Milk Bar.

8 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 1535.

When Bubbles was done narrating her story, she was back to sobbing again, not that she had ever stopped.

"Jesus, kid," Detective Mullens said. "That's really something alright."

Bubbles story had rendered him speechless. It wasn't every day that he'd heard such stories. It was just about as bad as the kind he would hear from street kids - children who were either mixed up in gangs or had family members who were into that kind of stuff. Except Bubbles' was the limited edition law enforcement version.

"Listen… People say all sorts of things when they're mad," he reasoned. "And your father's just trying to make peace between you and your sis. I don't think he agrees with Blossom at all."

Bubbles sniffled. "You think so?" she said. "What if she's angry forever?"

"Nah, ain't gonna happen, girlie," the detective said. "It takes a lot of energy to be angry. I know for a fact that it… eats away at you. Olivia used to be mad at me, and she's as stubborn as they come, just like me."

"Really?" Bubbles said, unconvinced. She was no stranger to stories and tall tales that weren't true.

"I'm not playing with you. Look at us now - a dad-daughter team, and a pretty good one too," Detective Mullens said, trying to sound as optimistic as he could, no matter how much the world had beaten him down. Even if he had to appear a little cartoonish. "My point is, anger isn't forever, kiddo. Now, a lil' girl like Blossom… I don't think she's got it in her to stay mad for very long."

Bubbles looked out the window. The winter clouds above had blocked out most of the sunlight, but there was a silver lining between two clouds, allowing some light through. Mister Mullens had said much about her problem - and she thought that that was enough, even if she doubted most of it. Perhaps there's a silver lining for her too, after all?

"I believe you…” Bubbles said. It was all she could do, with things going out of her control. Finally, after what seemed like forever, she took a hearty, long sip from her milkshake.
Chapter 17: Vice (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, having an elevated status, became involved in a high-stakes operation. Bubbles is given a chance to redeem herself.

Chapter 17: Vice (Part 1)

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2045.

Bubbles remained alone even after a mundane day had come and gone. The Girls were finally able to go to school on Thursday, and their patrol duty was cut short to two hours since they had only just recovered, their battle scars still visible on their otherwise young, spotless skin. It would be another day before they disappear entirely.

Nothing had happened during patrol. The only action they were involved in during the day was found on the golf course with Mayor Wilford shortly after patrol, who had asked to meet them after hearing about the incident in the woods through Miss Bellum. During the conversation, which Buttercup found boring and Bubbles was too upset to listen to, they were given a chance to try their hand at golf, but it became a rather brief session when Blossom accidentally sent a ball hurtling far beyond the bounds of the course, Buttercup had caused an explosion of dirt and grass in the ground when she tried to strike the ball and Bubbles wouldn't even join in.

Instead, she sat alone at the spectator's table, under a parasol. Her only source of comfort was the dream she had last night.

She was in the woods all alone, and it was a cold and snowy night. She was beset by monsters who looked like the Purple Man, and she couldn't escape. For some reason, her powers were gone and she couldn't run very far.

When she happened upon a house that looked exactly like hers, with Blossom and Buttercup sitting on the front lawn, playing with their construction trucks, she thought she was safe. But the house told her otherwise, with it being run down, with severe red lights emanating from the round windows on the second floor. She tried to tell them about the monsters, but they ignored her entirely, still playing with their toy trucks, still conversing between themselves. When she grabbed Blossom in an attempt to gain her attention, she actually punched her - and Blossom was still as strong as she was in reality.

The punch had sent her miles back and right smack in the middle of a horde of those Purple Men. When she thought she was going to be torn apart, a bright light shone from deep within the woods, overtaking her and the creatures that wanted to divide her up. But the dream was over the moment she looked upon her savior - a woman with golden hair, sparkly blue dress and silver shoes, with wings like an angel. She'd stuck out a hand for her to take.

The next thing Bubbles knew, she'd woken up to Mom shaking her awake early in the morning to prepare her for school.
Back in reality, the Girls were back home from the golf course after having their fill of lemonades, cookies and friendly banter. Dinner was eaten with Bubbles being ostracized once more as Blossom and Buttercup conversed between them, talking about battle tactics and martial arts while ignoring Bubbles' feeble attempts at contributing.

It was the worse while Selicia was training the Girls before sending them to the professor for a bath and playtime after that. As usual, Bubbles was pitted against Blossom because the Mom knew she would never stand a chance against Buttercup. Furthermore, she knew that Blossom always go easy on Bubbles.

Except this time, Blossom did not go easy on Bubbles. Already too depressed and suffering from a distaste for physical violence, Bubbles was barely putting in effort when she went for a predictable chest punch, expecting Blossom to just dodge it. Instead, her leader sister went all out on her. With a shout, she delivered a chop to the side of her neck, stunning her before seizing her by the wrist and thrusting a hooking kick to her knees, forcing her to the ground and pinning her arm to her back, making sure to give it a good, painful twist and making her cry out in agony.

And Selicia had made them go at it again and again. Blossom did not let up one bit, and Bubbles knew that where Blossom once cared, she was now the reverse; she even enjoyed making her squeal, likely as punishment or revenge for leaving her to die to the Purple Man. In their second round, Bubbles was driven to defend herself more vigorously, and had tried a double punch, only to be felled by a kick to the side of her knee, a spinning kick to the face, which she blocked but at the cost of getting knocked down, before she was subdued swiftly with a neck lock - Blossom had made sure that it was tight to the point of strangulation, and as if Mom was conspireing with her, she wasn't called off until after an agonizing minute or two, when she actually believed that Blossom was going to choke her to death.

On the third round, Blossom had gone all out, blocking Bubbles' pitiful attempts at doing the same, before delivering a sweeping punch to her thigh, which got her down to her knees once more. The match ended quickly, as always, when Blossom gave her a right hook to the face, and this time, it was hard enough that Bubbles bled from the nostrils as she sat on the ground. She wept when the only reaction from Blossom was a cold stare. Before the Purple Man, it would have been a profuse series of apologies, a hug, and a napkin.

"Bubbles! How many times must I tell you to NEVER take your eyes off the target!?” Selicia had scolded the defeated little girl, adding salt to wound. Bubbles had been consistently looking away from Blossom, mostly because she couldn't bear to make eye contact with her. "NEVER let your guard down! God, what am I supposed to do with you!? No wonder Buttercup and Blossom were hurt so badly!"

Back in 'her' room after a bath, in which Blossom and Buttercup played with the water without her, Bubbles was left by the wayside again as Blossom and Buttercup played with a construction set, with Blossom throwing in her wooden blocks as building material. Bubbles had only her mind to play with, with Octi lying limply in her lap, after she found everything else unpalatable because of her situation. Yet, all she was doing was to think back to those times when she had faltered, to those horrible times that made her feel terrible beyond a normal person's comprehension.

That was when the hotline rang. And its song was almost a godsend. To Bubbles, it meant a distraction from her solitude and alienation, or even a chance to redeem herself.

Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz! It rang. Blossom flew to it within the third ring, ready as ever to help the weak.

"Mister Blake, is that you?” Blossom had answered enthusiastically; it had always been him so far, and he had been nothing but a good friend. In the woods, when they were in so much pain, he was
right beside them at all times.

"This is General Blackwater," the big man's voice boomed into her ear instead. "I have a special assignment for the three of you. Do it better this time than you did the last time." He'd said it sternly, coldly and without remorse - perpetually in a bad mood.

The City of Townsville. The Strip, Outer Edges.

9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2102.

"Aw, yuck! Not this place again!" Buttercup moaned as they flew into the area known as The Strip - she could identify the district by the more garish colors of the buildings and street decorations. They were flying really low this time by the explicit instructions of General Blackwater, so low down that they were following the streets, mere feet above the tallest vehicles. The last time the Girls were here, it didn't end well, and it wasn't just because they ended up chasing a bunch of criminals from The Strip to Highway 13, resulting in severe property damages, heavy civilian casualties and little contribution to the war against organized crime. The adults here were… strange. Odd. To put it mildly, weird to the Girls. Not so mildly, they thought the adults here were disgusting. For some reason, some of them would pull off some or most of their clothes while they were on stage and the others would like it, to the point of hooting and whooping at them, catcalling with every flex and jerk of their bodies! The Girls couldn't understand one bit why they would behave in such a manner, nor what the appeal of such an activity was.

"I wonder what did General Blackwater mean by 'special assignment'?" Blossom asked aloud, mostly addressing Buttercup while Bubbles kept silent. Even their formation was broken because of Blossom and Bubbles' falling out, with the latter flying behind them. "And why do we have to fly so low? I hate the smell of the smoke…" By that, she meant the vehicle exhaust fumes coming from the busy traffic of the city.

But it wasn't just the smoke that Blossom hated. The reason why she loved flying so high was that cutting through the city was faster and easier. By flying low, she was bound to the directions of the streets, and she had to remember exactly how to navigate it, street by street. Even with her superior memory and intelligence, it was a major headache. A slow and painful process.

After rounding a corner, they had finally made it to the address General Blackwater had given. This time, there was no heart signal, and the number of accompanying cops or soldiers were very few - in fact, there were no USDO soldiers at all. At first glance, it appeared as if there were no cops, and Blossom had to squint and zoom in with her eyes to spot her favorite policemen: Mister Mullens and Olivia. Stanley Talker was with them, and he had blended in far better than any human being could.

They weren't in their usual clothing. Mister Mullens was in a dark blue suit, something incredibly uncharacteristic of him - the intention being that he was supposed to be a tourist looking to roll a few dices and pull a few levers. Olivia looked like a waitress with a formal blouse and pants from a high-end restaurant. The talking dog… had to go naked to blend in as a normal, unremarkable dog, complete with a restrictive collar and a demeaning leash which Olivia was holding onto.

The Girls landed in front of them, unsure of what to expect and why their police friends were playing dress up.

"What are we doing, Mister Mullens?" Blossom asked.

"Yeah, I hate this place," Buttercup added.
Bubbles remained silent, her eyes glued to the floor. Mullens, Olivia, and Stanley were looking at her, concerned, but their duties took precedence.

"I'm glad you do. I've got a new lead after busting up the sewers," Detective Mullens explained as he lit a cigarette. Blossom found it disconcerting, and when she took a glance at Olivia, she saw that she appeared the same way too. The detective had stopped smoking weeks ago - and the little girl knew from her Dad that it was a bad habit - a vice. That he would start again meant that something was wrong. "The drug lord you bagged for us, Blossom, squealed that some of his merchandises were going into The Strip…" The detective took a puff of his cigarette as he leaned against a lamp post, looking like he had taken on some extra weights upon his shoulders.

"What is it, Mister Mullens?" Bubbles finally talked, unable to stay silent any longer. The old man looked incredibly troubled, and she was worried about him. He had been nice to her and she wanted to do the same for him.

"Some of the drugs aren't just going into The Strip, they are going to the worst part of it. We're talking about men - and women - who... well, takes an unnatural shine on kids, boys and girls both. And they exploit them…" the detective explained further, the next word always harder.

"What do you mean?" Blossom asked, unsure of what he was saying.

"It's something I was hoping the three of you won't have to know about, at least until you're older - much older," the detective went on after taking another puff. "Not all adults see your innocence as something to be cherished, and today, it's just our luck we get to deal with the worst of them." Blossom and her sisters were still confused as to what Mister Mullens meant, but she didn't have time to be confused for long when he nodded in the direction of something - someone. "But we won't be alone in this today."

The Girls turned to look in the direction the old detective was nodding at. Two more men were walking up to them, one of them dressed a little more like a classical detective - or a gangster - and another with tattoos covering his entire body. The top he wore, which was just a small vest baring midriff, parts of the chest and his arms, was flaunting it.

"Meet Detective Jack Wednesday and his associate, Felipe Hernandez," Detective Mullens introduced. Jack Wednesday was a detective who was considerably younger than Mullens - a man who looked like he was only a few years older than Olivia, at his early 30s at most. He wasn't the same bruiser-type, looking more like the sleek and smart sort of detective, not too tall, not too muscular. Too smart for most gangsters, but sometimes too smart for his own good. He was a rising star in the TPD on the fast track, and with crime's corrupting grip on Townsville seemingly weakening, he was able to rise even further.

"Pleasure to meet the three of you - it's great to finally work with the famous Angels of Justice," Detective Wednesday greeted the Girls. He extended a hand to each of the Girls, who shook it awkwardly as they recognized the gesture but had rarely ever used it. Before the Girls could speak, however, he'd already gone on. "Call me Mister Wednesday. I heard the three of you love using that title. Anyway, I was once in the juvenile division and now I'm putting my foot into vice, starting with this case."

"But what are we doing?" Blossom asked again when she was finally allowed to speak, though, with this Jack Wednesday character, that window was much smaller and tighter. Her question, this time, however, had put hesitation in even the energetic Wednesday. The younger detective exchanged looks with the elder, then with Olivia, before returning his gaze to Blossom, his hazel eyes hardened, but unable to help but display sympathy for her.
"We need at least one of you to go undercover with us as a… merchandise. We'll be busting a child trafficking ring, and it's going to be a big one, with hundreds of kidnapped children to save and many major ringleaders - and their underlings - to arrest," Mister Wednesday explained. "If we pull this off, the children of this city will be much safer, once and for all. No one will dare to sell a kid for a pound of marijuana in this city again once they know the three of you are on the case."

"Girls, this will help me put the Amoeba Boys behind bars for a very, very long time," Mister Mullens added. "Our favorite sewer drug lord confessed that the Amoeba Boys have been protecting them in exchange for a cut of the child trafficking money - if we can pin it on them, they'd be locked away for life - for sure. Even some of the corrupt have reservations about child exploitation."

"The plan's simple enough, I'm sure you kids will manage-" At this, Blossom felt vaguely offended, but Mister Wednesday continued without noticing the change in her expression. ". Because of the traffickers' way of doing things, one of you will have to go in as a kidnapped child while smuggling in a GPS device - courtesy of your USDO pals. The device will reveal where the traffickers' hideout is. Using a computer in my van, I'll find out where you are, inform the few hundred undercover cops in The Strip, and bust the trafficking ring before they knew they were in for it," Detective Wednesday explained, at length, the plan, again leaving no room for a two-way conversation. "I know this is a lot to ask from you - whichever one of you - but I can't use regular kids, you understand, right? Right - so who's volunteering?"

"Wait - what will the other two of us do?" Blossom asked.

"Help bust the child traffickers, of course," the newly-minted vice detective said.

"Um… I would go but…" Blossom said, conflicted as to her decision. "I'm the leader, and I have to lead my sisters." She looked at Buttercup with a worried look on her face, then to Bubbles, with her expression changing to one of coldness as a single look at Bubbles' had reminded her of the perceived betrayal. 'I need Buttercup because she's the toughest of us three.'

"M-m-me?" Bubbles stammered when she realized that all eyes had turned to her. "But I can't!"

Blossom glared at Bubbles angrily - thinking that Bubbles was at it again, being her usual, cowardly self. Couldn't she see that it was the best way to do things? Taking Bubbles by the arm, Blossom pulled her aside roughly behind Mullen's car to have a private conversation with her.

"You're not getting out of this one, Bubbles!" Blossom chided her meekest sister.

"But I can't! I'll just mess up again!" Bubbles cried as she stared at the floor, afraid to meet Blossom's glowing pink eyes, eyes that did too well in expressing anger.

"You said you wanted to be a normal little girl," Blossom tried to hand out the carrot. "Now's your chance to act like one."

But Bubbles wasn't having it. She knew that acting as a kidnap victim did not constitute being a normal little girl.

"Bubbles, look at me," Blossom ordered her sweetest sister when she realized Bubbles wasn't nibbling on her carrot like a bunny. When she wouldn't respond and was instead mewling pathetically in fear, Blossom raised her voice as the stick: "Look at me!" Reluctantly, Bubbles obeyed, though it was a hard thing to do, looking at those glowing pink eyes that were burning with rage and showing dislike towards her. She had to really force herself to look at them. "Do you want me to forgive you for what you did in the woods?"
"Y-yes…” Bubbles replied, her eyes dancing between Blossom's eyes and her eyebrows, then her lips, and back and forth.

"Do you want us to play together again?" Blossom asked, unaware that she was more like Mom than she would like to be, just like what she said.

"Yes…” Bubbles replied predictably.

"Then go in as a normal little girl," Blossom delivered her ultimatum. "Do it, and I'll forgive you and we'll play together again."

"But what if I-" Bubbles tried to say, but was cut off again.

"It's the only way, Bubbles!" Blossom said impatiently, nearly raising her voice once again, displeased that Bubbles could not see things her way. Putting her hands on Bubbles' shoulders, she tried to do things her Dad's way: "We'll help so many people - children like us!"

Bubbles remained silent. This felt wrong - everything felt wrong, and in The Strip, no less.

"Bubbles, you're my sister and… I'm sorry I've been mean towards you," Blossom tried again. "I still love you, Bubbles. Won't you do it for me? I promise I'll forgive you - I won't leave you alone again."

Bubbles nodded curtly, totally unwilling, but agreeing only because it meant redemption in Blossom's eyes. They then returned to everyone else who had been waiting on them, with Blossom's hand gripping Bubbles by the upper arm.

"Well?" Detective Jack Wednesday asked. Blossom and Bubbles stopped before them, and when Bubbles wouldn't answer his question, Blossom gave her a jab of her elbow, prompting her to act.

"I'll do it, Mister Wednesday…” Bubbles said reluctantly.

The City of Townsville. The Strip, Outer Edges.

9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2147.

"I don't like this…” Bubbles said as she looked at herself in the mirror. She was inside Detective Wednesday's van, and she had undergone a complete do-over. She had swapped out her uniform and tactical gear for an expensive white dress, let her hair down and dyed it brown. She had to put on black contact lenses that blocked out the glowing light from her eyes (mostly). Even her own sisters, who were with her in the van, had trouble recognizing her after that.

"It won't take long at all, so bear with it," Detective Wednesday said dismissively as he was leaning into the back compartment of the van before he had to lean out again - his veteran colleague had been jumping on his back because of this.

"Isn't there any other way to do this?" Detective Mullens made his disapproval known. "We're still talking about a little kid here!"

"I'm sure it'll be fine. Unlike other little kids, Bubbles' got all her 'enhanced abilities' and all that, as the USDO likes to call them. She can't be hurt or restrained, isn't that right? I was there when the USDO announced their deployment," Jack defended himself at length.

"That's not what I'm-" Detective Mullens tried to object, but he was cut off very quickly.
"Therefore, her life and limbs are secure and we have nothing to worry about, not that anything could happen to threaten her - it wouldn't take long for us to track her down and start busting down doors, and the child trafficking ring does not damage their own goods. Even in the event that she has been sold and taken away, which is unlikely in the time frame we're working with if you can do the math, she'll easily be able to rescue herself through the application of her enhanced abilities. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a vice operation to run," the younger detective had spewed out even more points just when everyone thought he had run out of it. Getting back into the back of the van, he closed the door and called out for his associate, Felipe, to start driving, leaving the Girls' more familiar friends to take up their own positions.

"Now, let's run through the whole thing once again in case the three of you have trouble remembering everything," Detective Wednesday said to the Girls, turning to Bubbles especially. "You remember everything I told you, bubble girl? Repeat them to me again."

Depressed at what she was being forced to do to win back Blossom's love, Bubbles had nonetheless done everything she was told to the best of her abilities. She'd run through everything the detective had told her over and over again even as she changed her outer appearances.

"My name is Anastasia Summers and I am the 5-years-old daughter of a well-off grocer from California. I was kidnapped at the airport while I was on vacation and brought straight here," Bubbles recited her cover story.

"Good. I didn't think you have it in you," the detective praised Bubbles, though the little girl felt vaguely insulted instead, not that she let it show - she wasn't about to try anything that could ruin the whole operation, whether the potential consequences of her actions and words were real or imagined. She wanted Blossom to smile at her again, to play with her and comfort her again whenever she was down, and she wanted it all so badly. She couldn't imagine spending another day with Blossom frowning at her and treating her like an enemy. "Now, let me run through the ground rules for you once again: Do not use your enhanced abilities. Do not reveal who you are. Do not resist the bad guys - just do as you're told. And act your part - act gutless, helpless and hopeless. Cry and scream when appropriate. Blend in."

"Okay…" Bubbles agreed - not that she had a choice. The rules were easy enough - she essentially had to do nothing and be the coward that Blossom and Buttercup thought she was. That Bubbles thought she was. It seemed like an easy ticket to win back Blossom, and yet it didn't give her hope. It all felt wrong somehow.

"And we'll hide in here until it's time to go," Blossom added after Bubbles had said her final word. Blossom and Buttercup were sitting in cardboard boxes, among many others and all sorts of other random junk.

"Right. Now for the final layer of disguise…" Detective Wednesday said as he pulled out some things from a cardboard box - a blindfold, rags, and ropes. "Just calm down - you'll be fine. Or don't, if it helps you act the part. Who knows? You might be on your way to becoming a Hollywood actress."

With that, the detective began tying Bubbles' hands behind her back, then blindfolding and gagging her. When Bubbles started crying, her bawling muffled by her gag, Buttercup found it satisfying, and actually liked Bubbles better that way. Blossom became concerned at what she was putting Bubbles through, but she didn't let it show. She told herself that it was the only way Bubbles could contribute - something which Bubbles herself would want if only to feel useful and helpful to her friends, the citizens of Townsville.

It was all for the greater good. Even though Blossom did not know the expression, she was
thinking the same thing.
Chapter 18: Vice (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

As complications arise and the ugly end of Townsville is revealed in its fullest glory, Bubbles is put in hot water.

Chapter 18: Vice (Part 2)

The City of Townsville. The Strip. Abandoned Warehouse.

9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2204.

A white van with the typical washing-machine logo of an unremarkable laundering business printed on its door pulled up in the back alley of an old building, an old warehouse that had become a haunt for illicit and criminal activities. Four muscular men guarding the back door came forward with shotguns, rifles and machine pistols. A woman in a coat stood between them, a slender pistol in one gloved hand.

The backdoor of the van opened, and out came what appeared to be a gangster of the Lombardi type, pushing out a little girl who had been blindfolded and gagged with her hands tied tightly behind her back. Her frightened whimpers were muffled by the gag and the ball of rags in her mouth.

Felipe Hernandez came out from the cab of the van.

"Katerina, my friend!" the tattooed Mexican greeted the woman with open arms and familiarity. "We meet again!"

The woman raised her pistol instead, cocking it, and so did her armed guards. Felipe, however, didn't look surprised.

"Fancy for you to show up here, Enrique!" the woman screeched, the paranoia in her voice was not a mystery, unlike herself. "You're in the wrong block, 'friend'. We don't do drugs here – as a business, I mean."

Felipe laughed, and he didn't let down his arms because of the guns pointed at him.

"You know about the USDO, bella chica," Felipe explained. "I sold everything while I can. I've decided to start a new what-you-call-it? Business venture."

The woman looked at the little girl Felipe's accomplice had brought along. When the little girl backed away, the 'Lombardi gangster' seized her by the arm and pushed her forward. Felipe waved a hand at the little girl in a white dress.

"My first product - what do you think?" Felipe boasted. "I'll be bringing only the finest merchandises from now on - for a price, of course. Something tells me there's a niche in luxury goods."

The woman seemed distracted by what she saw - perfect skin, perfect cheeks. Well-conditioned
hair and a good, healthy physique. It was obvious that the 'product' had been well taken cared of before she had been abducted. She wanted to see more of her. Coming up to the little girl, she ripped off the blindfold. A pair of tearful, beautiful dark brown eyes stared back at her. Those eyes were pretty, almost glowing, even. They were full of character - an instant winner.

"So ah… I'm new to this whole gig. How do we do this?" Felipe asked, looking like he had scored a lottery ticket. "We negotiating here or what?"

The woman returned her pistol to Felipe's forehead again.

"You're damn right we'll negotiate here. We run a tight operation, it's how we've been doing this for years," the woman explained to the Mexican at gunpoint. Her eyes went down to the little girl before coming back up to the Mexican again. "I'll give you five hundred greens for the girl."

Felipe didn't look happy with the woman's proposal. A master of deception, he'd faked his immoral dissatisfaction big time, impossible to tell from the real thing.

"I want two thousand, no less," he said. "C'mon, it wasn't easy getting this kid from the Townsville Aerodrome - and it's my first time doing this. Give a working man a chance to break into this, will you?"

"One thousand, 'working man'," the woman haggled, her pistol still trained on Felipe's forehead - the Mexican didn't seem too bothered by it. "It's not my problem where you got her from."

"One thousand five," Felipe counter-offered calmly.

"One thousand, two hundred - accept my offer now, or accept my bullet," the woman forced the deal. "I'm getting impatient, newbie."

"Fine - man, you drive a hard bargain," Felipe said almost casually, hiding the triumph he felt with the nervous smile and laughter of a defeated man. "You've sure gotten better ever since our drug days."

"Another word out of you and I might put a bullet in your pretty Mexican brain," the woman said cruelly before nodding to one of her bodyguards, clearly offended by what he said. The bodyguard slung his shotgun on his shoulder, took out a paper bag from his jacket before pulling out some cash from it. After counting an appropriate amount, he handed the dough over to Felipe roughly before giving him the stare.

"Okay, okay… She's yours," Felipe said before nodding to his own man, the Lombardi-looking gangster. He pushed the little girl forward into the arms of one of the child-traffickers. She struggled against him, but could not break free and run away. "Pleasure doin' business with you. I'll come back with more chickens for you to sell."

With that, Felipe and the gangster - who was actually Detective Jack Wednesday going undercover - got back into their van and drove off, leaving behind the little girl, who was actually Bubbles in disguise, with a GPS tracker sewn into her dress.

"Wow! Where did you learn to talk like that, Mister Hernandez?" Buttercup asked after getting out of cover from behind a stack of boxes.

"Too many years working undercover, that's how," the Mexican, who turned out to be another cop, said. "The line blurs too much sometimes. I envy you, little miss - you know exactly where you stand as one of the good guys - or good girls."
After being sold, Bubbles was taken to another vehicle to be transported elsewhere, not that she would know the location as her blindfold was put back on. She was taken deep into The Strip, into the deepest parts of it where the cops would look the other way, and illegal prostitution, trafficking, gambling, and drug dealing and using proliferated.

As one of her cronies drove the van, the woman and one of her bodyguards were all over each other, making out and running their hands over each other. They had struck gold - like predators of the African savannas, they had hunted well. Years of experience in child trafficking had honed their ability to pick out the best pedophile material. 'Anastasia', not that they bothered to learn her name, was a good pick. They hadn't expected much at first when one of their messengers had given them the heads-up about a new player in the business. But now, they were going to earn tens of thousands from a single child. Hundreds of thousands, even. She knew of at least a few rich clients who would be visiting the auctions, one of whom had his own dungeon filled with children who had never seen the light of day for years. 'Anastasia' would be a welcome addition to it.

The road they had taken was like the jaw of a crocodile through The Strip, to avoid suspicion and the rare idealistic detective. It might have lengthened the journey time, but there was no rush - their method had kept them safe for years, with hundreds of kids sold and counting.

When the van finally stopped, Bubbles was led out of it in an unexpectedly gentle manner. The child traffickers didn't want their 'product' to be damaged after all, nor do they want her to panic as she would be harder to control and move.

When Bubbles' blindfold was finally taken off again, she found herself in a bedroom of some sort, with red lighting and a heart-shaped bed, no doubt a twisted satire of love. The smell in the room was horrible and unthinkable, impossible to understand to a little girl. Unknown to Bubbles, she was taking in a noxious fume comprising of cigarette smoke, booze and bodily fluids from every possible human orifice. She finally saw one of her kidnappers clearly for the first time – a woman in her early 30s with an Eastern European look to her. She looked up at her, but the woman simply pushed her, forcing her to sit down on the heart-shaped bed. Bubbles couldn't help but feel filthy upon touching it.

"Look at you, such a beautiful young thing," the woman said in a sultry voice. She wiped Bubbles' tears away as she caressed her cheek. "Don't be afraid. You're going to be loved by everyone you meet. What's your name?"

"Anastasia..." Bubbles lied, but then she remembered her fake last name. "Anastasia Summers. Please don't hurt me..."

"But I won't, and neither will they," the child trafficker boss said. "I'll make sure of it – you're safe with me." It was a convincing lie. Had Bubbles been a normal little girl, however, she would have been none the wiser. The voice and the face were convincing.

"I want my Daddy..." Bubbles cried, and she didn't have to fake it. She was not supposed to use her superpowers, and any number of things could happen to her if she didn't. "Please..."

"Shh... Hush, little puppy," the pedophile appeaser whispered to Bubbles, putting a finger on her lips. "This is how it's like to grow up. Believe me, I know. My advice to you? Try to enjoy it. That's a very good line, by the way. Work on it."
Outside, the rowdy sound of people shouting numbers unnerved Bubbles. Just what was going on out there?

"Ten thousand for the black bitch!" someone outside screamed like a maniac.

"Twelve thousand!" another shouted, pure competition in his voice.

"Five thousand for the redhead boy!" another man shouted, the lust in his voice not held back at all.

"Sold!" a more authoritative but uncaring voice declared.

One of the woman's bodyguard came in, and for a moment, the voices outside were louder.

"A hundred for that filthy little wench!" another man shouted.

"Going once, going twice…" the authoritative voice called out. The door closed after that.

"We're in luck, Katerina," the man, a guy in a pair of singlets and jeans and boots, said, sounding like he had won a million bucks at the lottery. The truth wasn't as grand or lucrative, but it was as close as he knew to striking the lottery. "He's coming, said he'll give her a try before buying first."

"How much is the rent, Jac?" Katerina asked, "Did you mention the rent?"

"We agreed on a thousand," Jac said. Katerina smiled. Bubbles didn't like the sound of it.

"And this is what you get when you build trust with your customers," Katerina quipped before turning to Bubbles. "You hear that, Bubbles? He really loves you. And now… it's time for you to get prepared."

Katerina loomed over Bubbles, who tried to get away by crawling over the bed. The woman seized her by her legs. Bubbles had wanted badly to use her abilities - she'd wanted to fly off into the night and never come back, but she remembered what Blossom said.

"NO!" Bubbles screamed, her voice high-pitched and shrill, every bit of it authentic as she felt trapped by both her surroundings and her crime-fighting duties. She felt hands seizing her dress, and before she knew it, it was torn away from her.

The City of Townsville. The Strip. Mussel Street.

9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2255.

Detective Wednesday was working on his computer when the unthinkable happened. The bubble on his map that indicated Bubbles' location had disappeared. With GPS systems being in its infancy even with the USDO, the computer was struggling to triangulate her exact location when the 'estimated location bubble' had stopped shrinking, jumped around at random before pulling a disappearing act.

"God damn finicky electronics!" the younger detective swore in frustration.

"What's going on?" Buttercup asked when she looked up at Wednesday – she had been making paper boats with the waste paper found at the back of the van. She'd left it up to Blossom to worry about Bubbles.

"The GPS just… stopped! I won't be able to find Bubbles like this!" Detective Wednesday said. His
eyes darted between his computer and the radio. Waiting for the GPS to start working again could put Bubbles in hot water - he'd downplayed the threats she could face for the sake of the operation and busting a major child trafficking and pedophilia ring. In truth, by abstaining from the use of her enhanced abilities, she ran the risk of child molestation at least and rape at worst.

Calling on all units to do a block-by-block search of the areas highlighted by the GPS as probable locations of Bubbles could take far too long, alert all criminals within the child trafficking ring of their activities and cause them to flee - at which point, it would be impossible to arrest all or even some of the offenders. Hundreds of children would be lost that way with only a few abandoned by their captors. The child trafficking ring would then remain intact, relocate and start over again. Thousands more children would be kidnapped and sold, and scarred for life.

"But… Bubbles!" Blossom exclaimed. Her mind was previously clouded by anger towards her meek sister, but now there was regret and worry, and wonder as to whether she should have taken her place. "What do we do!?"

Jack Wednesday continued to stare into the screen of his computer, sweat pouring down his face. Despite the front he enacted to show the others, he wasn't a thoughtless and ruthless man. The idea of putting a child in the position to be raped did not sit well with him. Hell, before his promotion to lieutenant and part of the vice squad, it was his duty to prevent that. However, when he rationalized the mathematics - either save one child (whose duty was to enforce the law anyway) or hundreds (whose only duty was to grow up) - it quickly became clear what the best decision was.

---


9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2258.

Bubbles sobbed as she held her new dress closely to her chest, unsure of whether to feel disgusted by it and strip it off or to treasure it just like the previous one. It was loose-fitting, likely to make it easy for removal later. Unlike the previous dress, it was black, which was all the better to hide any filth that might result from what would come next.

Katerina handed Bubbles' white dress to Jac for disposal. He walked out of the room with it nonchalantly.

"I saw your scars just now," Katerina said, referring to the three ugly marks on her arm. Unknown to the child trafficker, it was the result of the fight with the Purple Man, and too little time had passed before it could disappear. "Must be your dad, isn't it?" Bubbles shook her head at the accusation, tears still dripping.

"It's fine, you don't have to tell me. I can promise you that it won't happen again - unless it feels good for you or your next 'daddy'." she went on further. "Looks good on you. Makes you look used. Some men and women like that." Bubbles hated the woman. Selicia, even in her blackest mood, would look like an angel next to her. In trying to put some distance between them, she moved deeper into the heart-shaped bed.

'Blossom, Buttercup… Please hurry up," Bubbles thought as she watched the woman like a wary little kitten.

---

**The City of Townsville. The Strip. Mussel Street.**

9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2259.
Detective Jack Wednesday's face was on the keyboard of his computer as innumerable fears and worries were wreaking havoc within him. He'd tried everything - rescanning for signals, diagnosing the GPS program, restarting the program, restarting the computer, banging the monitor of his computer and praying silently to whoever would listen from outer space - nothing worked. His past failures returned to haunt him.

In a city as wretched as Townsville, someone like him could only solve seven, maybe eight out of ten of the cases that were handed to him, at least on average - and he was the best in his field, which had its own taboos. His boss got to decide what kind of cases to hand over to him, and he could only try not to think about what had gone unreported, and what cases had been ignored, then closed prematurely when his supposed superiors decided to look the other way.

There was only so much he could do whenever he decided to secretly go rogue, break into the cold cases division and solve a few more cases on the side, burning the midnight oil, usually to roll the dice and either find some tiny skeletons in some obscure backyard, or a few severely mistreated kids whom he couldn't get to in time before they were marked for life.

This operation was supposed to be like a Mecca to him, something to chase away his nightmares and ghosts, perhaps redeem him for his failures, real and imagined.

And it wasn't going very well. He had been left totally in the underworld without a ray of light to follow…

Until Bubbles' 'probable location bubble' came up again.
Chapter 19: Vice (Part 3)

Chapter Summary

The vice operation comes to an end.

Chapter 19: Vice (Part 3)


9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2300.

Katerina opened the door to Bubbles' rent room to peek out. There were footsteps in the distance - Bubbles' hearing was good enough for her to discern it from the raucous bidding happening outside.

"I want that Vietnamese girl for two thousand!" someone made another offer.

The woman turned back to Bubbles, whose heart sank even further than she thought it could when she did.

"Looks like he's here," the child trafficker said. "Don't worry, I know him intimately. He's gentle as long as you are, and he'll treat you real good too as long as you do the same."

A hand, sleeved in expensive cashmere wool, shot out from the opening at the door, widening the gap. A man in his thirties, undeniably handsome and well-dressed and likely well-connected, even hard-wired into the society of the city, appeared at the threshold. He looked at Bubbles with the softest gaze, his eyes blue like hers. Had Bubbles met this man on the streets, she wouldn't have known that he would be found in a place like this. She would have liked to talk to him, or even befriend him.

"My, you weren't kidding about the girl," the man said to Katerina, before giving her a peck in the lips and a stack of hundred dollar bills. "Where did you get her from?" The woman thought about it, and it occurred to her that she hadn't bothered to find out where she was from.

"Anastasia, where are you from?" the child trafficker asked Bubbles, who was visibly sweating as her mind was racing with some crazy ideas on what would happen next. Her question had gone unheard and unanswered as Bubbles, for a crazy moment, hoped that the man was only here to read her a story, or play with her. "Anastasia Summers, don't make me ask again."

"Ca-California," Bubbles found it surprising that she remembered her cover story.

"Ah, California. I've been there too many times. It was sunny and beautiful there, last I checked. Full of hot girls too - no wonder Hollywood's there," the man said, before turning to Bubbles again. "Do you want to be an actress, Anastasia?"

"Y-yes…" Bubbles said - and she wasn't lying. She'd seen the TV, and she wanted to be there, and not while she was fighting one criminal or another.

"I'll leave you to it then," Katerina said as she left the room. "Holler if she's giving you trouble."
"You know me. They never do," the man said to the child trafficker before turning back to Bubbles. "Be sweet to me and I can make that happen, Anastasia Summers. That's a beautiful name, by the way."

The City of Townsville. The Strip. Mussel Street.

9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2301.

Detective Wednesday felt like hollering at the computer. Despite regaining the signal from Bubbles' GPS transponder, it was an intermittent signal, disappearing and reappearing as if on the whim of some trickster god. It'd never shrunk by any substantial size, and the whole 'probable location bubble' was the size of nine city blocks. Even with hundreds of undercover cops, it would take forever to search through them. Scattered throughout The Strip, some of them would be out of range. Almost all would likely be searching the wrong buildings if they had to go through nine city blocks.

"This is Mullens! Where the fuck is my go-ahead signal!?!" the older detective was practically screaming on the radio, though it was likely due to the volume. Detective Mullens sounded dead worried, desperate even. They both knew what could happen to Bubbles, even though Wednesday had downplayed the threat.

"Just wait, damn it!" Detective Wednesday snatched his radio off the table and shouted after pressing the 'speak' button. "I'm working with some shitty instruments here!"

Blossom felt like she could have a meltdown there and then - she'd begun fantasizing about busting through the van and all the buildings on The Strip to find her sister, but she was smart enough to figure out that it wouldn't work out that way. For all her powers and enhanced abilities, she felt helpless.

Buttercup, on the other hand, was nodding off. A sliver of drool was slipping down her lips. It was way past bedtime.

Detective Wednesday stared at his computer, begging for it to do better - as far as he was concerned, it was his only option for now.

And somehow, it'd worked. The location bubble began shrinking again, slowly at first, before doing so rapidly. He jumped at the development, staring hard at the screen, making sure that he remembered where the bubble was highlighting least it disappeared again.

What was once a gigantic bubble covering nine city blocks became the size of four, then one. Then a quarter of it. Good enough. Had to be. The younger detective grabbed his radio.

"This is Lieutenant Wednesday to all units, location confirmed!" he was practically screaming into the radio. "Storm The Blue Moon, Gold Pole Strip Club, Backside B2B, and Your Inqueery Hotel, now!" He turned to his partner in the cab: "Felipe, drive!"

"Which?" the Mexican-descended undercover cop asked. Wednesday hadn't considered that. Between a bar, strip club, adult business office, and sex hotel, which would make the best front for a child trafficking ring? They all looked like the right answers. And now they were all starting to look like the wrong one.

"Backside B2B, now! Step on it!" Detective Wednesday ordered. The van screeched into a jolting start soon after that.
9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2301.

If Bubbles wasn't terrified, she was now. The man, who called himself her new 'daddy' and 'lover', had chained her wrists to the bedposts, and she wasn't supposed to use her superpowers. 'It's so you'll know what's right', the man had said. The cuffs were loose, but tight enough that she couldn't wriggle out of it. They were strong enough that she would need her enhanced strength to break loose.

"I'm helping you here, Anastasia," the rich man said as he slipped out of a bathrobe and crawled up to her in bed, with nothing but his boxers on - this fact alone traumatized Bubbles immensely, as the last time she saw an adult naked was back when the Highway 13 incident happened. There were a whole bunch of them even, back in the strip club with the strippers. That was when she understood that naked adults were bad. "You'll grow up quickly, and you'll love it."

He reached for her dress and pulled it down gently. Bubbles mewled in fear - although she hadn't fully grasped the concept of shame in its entirety, she knew she wasn't supposed to be naked in front of anyone except for Dad, Mom, and her sisters – with the only exception being Blake, who became her governor when Dad was too sick at one point to care for her. How she wished they were here now!

"Please don't…" Bubbles begged for the man to stop.

"You know, I like it when you girls do that," the man remarked as he leaned in close to her - they were staring face-to-face such that Bubbles could smell the man's breath - and it was deceptively refreshing, minty and lemony. "Makes it more satisfying when I finally break you and make you come around to my way of thinking."

And with that, he kissed her in the cheeks as she shivered in terror, then the mouth - which thankfully did not last long. He ran his lips down her neck and Bubbles could feel a shiver going down the same area. He ran his filthy hands down her legs and body. "Don't worry, I've got a long track record."

"No! Stop!" Bubbles pleaded with the man. She hated the sensation of flesh and saliva on her skin. She hated everything that was happening.

"Shh…" was the man's only reply. "This is how love is made. How you were made." Not that Bubbles really knew. Not that the man really knew how Bubbles was made, or who 'Anastasia' really was.

"STOP!!" Bubbles screamed in her high-pitched voice - the last straw had been the feeling of her panties coming off. "NO!!" She threw the man off with just her legs, who fell off the bed with a surprised yelp. He rose from the floor, looking mad and incredulous that such a thing could happen. He slapped her savagely, and it was when Bubbles looked back around at him, the anger coaxed out of her, that the man knew that something was wrong with his newest prey.

One of Bubbles' black contact lenses had fallen off, revealing the glowing baby blue underneath it. Angry that she had been violated and made to feel helpless, Bubbles had completely forgotten about her undercover job. With an effortless jerk of her arms, she snapped off the chains tying her to the steel bedposts above her and let off a sonic scream, which blew the child rapist away. He slammed against the door.
Her scream could be heard throughout the entire building. The windows of Bubbles' rent room, which was papered over, exploded outwards. Some sort of alarm had sounded off in the building, and people could be heard screaming. As the pandemonium spread, Bubbles pulled up her panties properly and cocooned herself with the bedsheet from the heart-shaped bed. Floating herself to a corner of the room, she began sobbing as she hid under the dressing table there.

Her near-rapist, with blood slithering down his ears, eyes, and nostrils, stood up with difficulty before disappearing through the door and screaming that the USDO and The Three were in the building.

---


9 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 2305.

Blossom, Buttercup, Detective Wednesday and Felipe could hear it from a mile away. The sound of windows breaking and numerous vehicles driving off in a hurry. Bubbles' sonic scream. The policemen didn't like the sound of it. It wasn't a part of the plan, nor the expected planned chaos.

"This is Lieutenant Wednesday, how many units at the Backside, over?" the detective bellowed his question into his radio as if it had offended him.

"There's two of us at the front," one of the units reported. "We're the first ones here."

The news hit Wednesday like a car in a dark alley. He'd attended raids before, organized a number even whenever his cases had gotten big enough. He could see bad news from a mile away, with or without the smoke signals.

"Anything to report, over?" the detective interrogated his radio like a suspect.

"They're, ah, not using the front door. The other units didn't make it in time," the police officer on the radio said. "Lots of vehicles driving away from the back. Our suspects are getting away. I'm sorry, sir."

"This is Mullens. I'm heading there now," the older detective said over the radio. "The Blue Moon's legal."

"All units in vehicles, pursue all vehicles coming from Backside B2B!" Jack Wednesday ordered through the radio like a pissed-off drill sergeant with a class of failures. "All vehicles from there are to be considered suspicious!"

The detective leaned back. The computer's useless now. To Blossom and Buttercup, he looked like a wreck. It was no wonder why: whatever had happened with Bubbles in the adult business offices had acted as an early warning to the child trafficking ring. They'd evacuated and it would be futile to try to chase them down.

Shortly after that, Felipe pulled the van up in front of the offices. He jumped out with his pistol out, and so did Felipe. Blossom and Buttercup practically flew out, floating above the van.

"This is Wednesday. The Three are at the Backside Offices. I repeat, The Three are at the Backside Offices," Wednesday put out a PSA for his fellow cops over the radio. They went in straight immediately, but the place was deserted. Blossom and Buttercup went through the lobby and main office space on the first floor, as well as the recreation area. Their guns were out and Blossom was keeping her heat beams charging, but there was no one to use them on. The rooms were all empty, and the bad guys had left in a hurry; the lights were still on, dim though they were,
and the drinks, cigarettes in their ashtrays and condoms were still there. The criminals had taken everything illicit with them. There wasn't even half a dollar bill left that could be linked to them.

"I think I hear her," Buttercup said as she floated over the stage area of the recreation room, which, unknown to her, had been used as the auction area.

"Hear what? I don't hear a thing!" Blossom exclaimed aloud, still confused as to how Buttercup could hear so well when she scored lower on the hearing score. Buttercup did not reply, but instead flew towards a door and opened it. Blossom followed, and they both peeked into the room. It was lit in red, with a heart-shaped bed in the center. Blossom could finally hear something, what amounted to sobbing and sniffling.

Detective Wednesday and Felipe came up behind them just as the two of The Three entered the red-lit room. Coming up to a dressing table, Blossom and Buttercup had finally found her – Bubbles had been crying and hiding there, with a foul-smelling bedsheet wrapped around her tightly. There was the jangle of chains whenever she moved.

The detective muscled past them to see what was going on. Bubbles, despite the trauma she suffered, saw that she was safe, and came out from under the dressing table. She let go of the bedsheet, such that it became looser.

"What the hell did you do!?" Detective Wednesday accused Bubbles, who shrank away from him. The detective, however, was more preoccupied with the results of the operation than her.

"I told you the ground rules! Don't use your abilities! Don't reveal yourself! And you didn't listen!" He bellowed at the little girl. Before he could lecture Bubbles any further, a cop in plain clothes appeared at the doorway. A man in a baseball cap and leather jacket.

"Sir, we've found a few kids," the police officer said. "They were on the second floor, probably ran off and hid when the traffickers were evacuating."

"How many?" Detective Wednesday asked without taking his eyes off of Bubbles.

"Five of them," the officer said, before eyeing Bubbles and frowning at her as if she was a pest. "Looks like we've done some good, sir." He disappeared from the door.

"Can't say the same 'bout them 'Angels'…" the police officer's voice trailed off but made an impression.

"Five of them," the detective repeated his subordinate's words, his eyes still on Bubbles, who cringed at the way he looked at her. "Five. Did you know how many kids were here?" He didn't wait for an answer. "An estimated three hundred. Three hundred kids. Some your age, a few younger. We could have saved three hundred," the detective had said this, forgetting that Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were not even 3 months old. "We could have saved more throughout the city had we caught those traffickers and made them talk."

"Weeks of work - weeks of preparation and hope, flushed down the drain just like that…" the detective went on. He stared daggers at Bubbles, who was still crying where she sat. "You Girls aren't what you're cracked up to be."

Severely disillusioned, the detective simply turned around and walked away, too shocked and disappointed to reprimand the Girls any further. Instead of redemption, he'd found damnation - and another road deep into the bottle.

"DAMN IT!" the detective shouted halfway through the room, kicking a stool that happened to be
close by, breaking the furniture against the wall. And then he was gone. Felipe took a sympathizing look at Bubbles, apologizing with his eyes, before following his fellow detective out the door.

Bubbles stood up, her eyes still on the red-carpeted ground.

"Blossom..." she said, her voice a near-whisper. She was shaking, and in pain on the inside. She'd let go of the bedsheet wrapped around her entirely as she reached out for Blossom, desperately a little something – a human touch free of taint. Anything. Her wrists were still cuffed, and broken chains dangling from them. One of her eyes was still dark brown because of the contact lens while the other was free and baby blue. She looked odd this way. "I'm scared… Please hold me…"

Blossom pushed Bubbles back, and she bumped into the dingy old dresser she was hiding under. Her bedsheet fell all around her. Buttercup flashed a sadistic smile at Bubbles when she had become almost entirely naked once more, save for her panties. Having learned shame the surest but hardest way, Bubbles folded her arms over her chest.

"I gave you a chance, Bubbles!" Blossom said coldly as she stared daggers at her. "Did you hear what Mister Wednesday said? We couldn't save hundreds of kids! Hundreds! I can't imagine-" And she wasn't kidding - the Girls had barely learned the concept of numbers running into the three digits. Therefore, numbers that were three digits or more were as what anything above the quadrillions was to an adult. It was an unfathomable number.

"Mister Wednesday said there's more than three hundred," Buttercup added with a mischievous grin on her face as she observed Bubbles for a reaction. Bubbles sniffled and had to hold back a sob. Her words had only served to make Blossom even angrier at Bubbles after being reminded of the terrible truth.

"Do you know what those kids must be going through now?" Blossom reprimanded Bubbles in place of Detective Wednesday as tears pricked her eyes. A single drop drew a near-invisible line down her left cheek. "He told me what they're going through while we were waiting in his van. Those children were kidnapped and they didn't get to see their mom and dad for days! Weeks! Even months and… Years!" As the Girls hadn't lived over a year, the idea of a year - a time period comprising of twelve months, was just as unfathomable as numbers that ran into the hundreds. "They were made to do things they hate and they didn't get to play!"

"But-" Bubbles was about to say more when Blossom cut her off.

"No buts! You've done it again, Bubbles! You've ruined everything!" Blossom scolded.

"You don't understand! It was horrible!" Bubbles screamed desperately as tears and mucus spilled from her face. "They were hurting me! There was a man doing disgusting things to me! He was- he was touching me and- and-"

"I DON'T CARE!!!" Blossom yelled back at Bubbles, her temper deteriorating once more as Detective Jack Wednesday's words continued to torment her. The fact that there were more than three hundred kids in the same boat all over Townsville drilled at her psyche. The leader of The Three clutched her head as if it was about to explode, digging her nails into it. She snarled incoherently at Bubbles after that. "YOU JUST HAD TO DO NOTHING!!! NOTHING!!!"

"You look fine to me, Bubs," Buttercup added dismissively just to upset Bubbles further. "Better than how we were when you didn't help us with the Purple Man."

"Blossom… Please! I'm scared… it's cold, and dirty and… I'm really upset…" Bubbles begged and
pleaded and mewled as she tried again to hug Blossom. "Please…"

"Get away from me!" Blossom exclaimed unsympathetically as she pushed the half-naked Bubbles away again, this time hard enough for her to knock into the dressing table. She fell down on her butt and didn't get up. Neither did Blossom let up with her tirade: "You gave up on hundreds of kids just because someone touched you! You're selfish! You're useless!"

"Don't forget 'cowardly'. Forget it, Bloss. She's not hardcore, not like us." Buttercup continued taunting the helpless Bubbles as she stood beside Blossom like a little devil whispering evil suggestions into her. Bubbles could only look on at her toughest sister in utter dismay.

"You hear that, Bubbles? Buttercup's right. I've had it with you," Blossom went on coldly. "You can't seem to do anything right. You can't fight, and when you get to act like a normal little girl, you couldn't do that either."

"Why do I even have a sister like you?" shaking her head, Blossom turned around and walked away, her love and care for her sister so diminished that it didn't worry her that she was sitting on the floor of an abandoned place, without clothes and suffering from trauma and feelings that were beyond terrible.

"Phew, I'm tired - I can't wait to get some hot chocolate and bedtime," Buttercup wished casually as she followed Blossom, well aware that it would upset Bubbles even further.

"Blossom, please don't go…" Bubbles continued to call out to Blossom, but she was completely ignored. "You said you'd forgive me! You promised!"

"BLOSSOM!!! BUTTERCUP!!!" Bubbles screamed one last time but by then, both her sisters had disappeared through the open doorway. They had left her there, and even when she half-expected them to come back with arms folded and 'learned your lesson?' on their lips, they didn't.

By the time Detective Mullens, Olivia and Stanley Talker got to her, she was totally unresponsive and rocking herself where she sat, mumbling to herself incoherently as her soulless, still-teary eyes stared into space. But there was something she kept repeating:

'Don't leave me.'
Chapter Summary

The world continues to spin, and life goes on even as Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup fights crime, try to help the weak and suffer in their own ways.

Townsville Tribune Extract 10 FEB 1989

The following are newspaper articles taken from the Townsville Tribune on the date of 10 FEB 1989. The newspaper articles are selected based on relevance to Project Powerpuff and B-47, B-48 and B-49.

CATHOLIC POPE DECLARES THE THREE 'NOT DIVINE'

In a widely publicized statement yesterday, Catholic Pope John Paul II reveals the Catholic church's stance on Townsville's The Three, also known as The Angels of Justice, to a massive crowd of tens of thousands. As the pope and the Vatican Council deliberated on their decision when it comes to the status of The Three - Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup - the Christian community was in upheaval ever since their appearance.

Drama ensued when churches battled with each other for their voices to be heard - with some believing that they were angels from God, while others proclaiming them to be the works of the Devil himself. Within the Catholic sphere, the advent of The Three and their rise to fame ever since stopping a terrorist attack at the Morbucks Industries Research Laboratory had resulted in some within the Catholic denomination jumping the gun and declaring them to be divine, resulting in their excommunication. They have gone on to form Catholic cults, creating what appears to be a new denomination of Catholic or Christian faith, now thousands strong.

It was amid this crisis of faith that the pope finally makes his announcement that The Three are not divine in any way - that they are not a new 'trinity', or angels, or representations of God himself. Neither are they manifestations of the Devil or demons. They are to be considered worldly creatures, though whether they are humans possessing souls or merely animals, flesh made animate and given intelligence by the ways of man, is a matter best left to the schools of theological debate.

Critics of the Catholic faith contend that Pope John Paul II's decision is steeped just as much in politics as it is in faith. Had the pope announced that The Angels of Justice were divine, they would have looked bad as they had excommunicated thousands for making the same conclusions. Had the pope announced The Angels of Justice to be literal incarnates of evil, it would mean advocating resistance or even hostility against them and the USDO. Thus, their declaration that Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup are worldly is the most tactful decision - a most worldly decision.

The pope denies politics to be a factor in his decision when interviewed in a press conference following his address, stating that it is grounded in the Bible and voice of God.
TOWNSVILLE POLICE OFFICIALLY REVEALS NEW LAW ENFORCEMENT UNIT

The Townsville Police Department has officially pulled the veils off of a newly formed branch of Townsville's primary law enforcement service. In a press conference yesterday, Commissioner Davis reveals that planning for the new law enforcement unit had started ever since the Highway 13 Incident perpetrated by Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup of The Three. When questioned if it is a unit created to rival the USDO and even combat The Three, Commissioner Davis denies such a claim, stating that the TPD and USDO are in a close partnership to fight crime in Townsville, and that the TPD now fully trusts Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup to assist them in doing the same.

The new TPD unit is called the STARS - the Superiority Tactics and Response Squad. While similar to the existing SWAT units, the STARS units are supposedly organized to be the elite of elites, modeled after the military, with some of the new recruits drafted directly from the various branches of the military, in addition to select members from the existing SWAT units and the cream of the crop from the investigative branches and patrol officers. Commissioner Davis states that they will be responsible for preventing and thwarting high profile terrorist attacks, as well as attacks made by enhanced individuals, also known as bioweapons, fielded by terrorist groups. As such, they will be heavily armed, again mirroring that of military units.

While their numbers are few at the moment, at around 50 members spread over 4 squads, evenly but thinly distributed throughout the city, they are projected to grow in strength over the course of the years after they leave their current trial stage.

When questioned as to what his involvement with the TPD's expansion is, Mayor Wilford has stated during the press conference that such a move would not have gone forward without his approval and admits that he has indeed signed the bill to introduce STARS into the local law enforcement scene.

' STARS will not be misused under my watch - we are not heading towards the dystopia of a police state and neither will our beloved Angels of Justice be subjected to their tactics,' Mayor Wilford stated in the previous day's mayoral press conference.

CITIZENS OF TOWNSVILLE WANTS THE THREE RENAMED

In a poll conducted by Townsville News Network, it comes as no surprise in this day and age that the citizens of Townsville generally wishes to rename 'The Three'. This, however, is a general opinion. Out of roughly 1000 citizens polled, 59.5% wants them renamed, 27.9% do not want them renamed while 13.1% are unsure.

There are many reasons given for renaming The Three, with the top reason (34% of positive respondents) being a pride for the young 'superheroes', as some have started referring to them as. The second top reason (21% of respondents) given is in the veins of respecting the fallen in the early days of The Three and coming to terms with the past. Unsurprisingly, the third top reason (19%) is purely aesthetics – they do not like the current name.

In reality, however, one does not simply rename The Three. On official capacity, only the USDO possess the rights to amend their names. According to official sources, they do not even have a team name for Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup. Through the Freedom of Information Act, it is
also revealed that they are usually referred to by the codenames B-47, B-49 and B-48 internally, and they were derived from an enigmatic project titled 'Project Powerpuff', of which no hard information has been released to the public yet. As such 'Subjects of Project Powerpuff' is what amounts to their current team name.

Even if official channels are bypassed by the court of public opinion, the citizenry will be too divided to force a change from the already established names. The news media, including this newspaper, will also have no reason nor justification to change the girls' names - the news media reports the news, and does not create it.

And finally: Would Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup take well to being called something else? Would it be ethical to force a name on Townsville's newest guardians?

These philosophical questions, however, did not stop the most creative and brightest of Townsvillans from coming up with their own names for The Three, below are some of the more popular ones collected from various sources:


*The Dynamite Girls* (500+ supporters. Source: Townsville Youth Development Center. Rationale: Aesthetics.)


*The Ultraviolets* (150+ supporters. Source: Townsville National Guards, 7th Infantry Company. Rationale: Aesthetics.)

*The Rowdyruff Girls* (100+ supporters. Source: Townsville Farmer's Union. Rationale: Criticism.)

*Sugarstar Sweets* (80+ supporters. Source: Mommy Margaret's Bakery. Rationale: Commercial.)

At the end of the day, only the USDO is capable of naming the city's newest defenders and carrying out the will of the people - as a federal agency should. Will one of these names ever
emerge as the dominant collective noun for Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup? It appears that 'Angels of Justice' has been well-introduced to the vernacular of Townsville, beyond the confines of the new Catholic cults' church walls, but only time will tell what form their official team name will take, or if it will remain as the ugly and unwieldy 'Subjects of Project Powerpuff'.

(This news article is found on page 2 of the Townsville Tribune, main news)

THE THREE BREAKS UP CHILD TRAFFICKING RING IN THE STRIP

11 pm, 9 February. As the working week approaches its twilight, The Strip is abuzz as usual with entertainment and activity unabated all year round. Men and women gallivant on the streets, picking up other men and women and going into bars, strip clubs, casinos, and hotels.

As the sooty jewel of Townsville, The Strip has been the center of controversy in every arena of debate and action. For every election there is, there is always talk about Mayor Wilford's inability to rein back on The Strip, and there is always a counter-argument that it is better that The Strip exists in one place than every part of Townsville. A not-insignificant amount of wealth flows through The Strip, whether it be tourist dollars or local - it is said to be the second or third most profitable district in the city, depending on who is asking. It is a place where parents would warn children to stay away from, and yet at the same time are places some parents would go to.

It is also a place where the Townsville Police Department is known to look the other way every other second, where the vice cops respond only to the worst breaches of human decency. It is also something the USDO decided to change, and where The Three was involved yesterday.

Eyewitness accounts had filtered into the Townsville Tribune offices even before our journalists could interview the cops involved. Hundreds of undercover police officers descended on four buildings: The Blue Moon, Gold Pole Strip Club, Backside B2B, and Your Inqueery Hotel.

Two of The Three, Blossom and Buttercup, were seen at the front entrance of Backside B2B before they swiftly charged in.

'Bubbles was breaching the building from another entrance,' Detective Jack Wednesday, one of a few rising stars of the TPD, hero cop and known protector of children, asserted when questioned about why the third of The Three was missing. No eyewitness accounts could verify his statement, though it is possible that she was not seen due to the speed of her flight, and possibly stealth tactics.

The operation was conducted all in the name of saving 5 children, who the detective claimed was a tip-off from an informant. He also claimed that the disproportionate number of participants in the operation is not indicative of the size of the child trafficking ring they were raiding, and is merely an attempt to initiate more police officers into the worthy pursuit of saving children from the clutches of Townsville's vilest criminals. 'It is a training exercise in tandem with a real operation,' he added.

'In any case, we've broken the back of Townsville's bigger child trafficking rings - they'll be running scared after what we've pulled in The Strip. With the city's Angels of Justice on the case, they'd better run really fast, because they're going to catch up with them fast,' Detective Jack Wednesday had gone on further to claim when interviewed. 'They will need time to regroup and rethink their strategy, and in the meantime, we'll be hunting them down. Townsville's children are safe once more, thanks to The Three.'

While the heroics and justified heavy-handedness of hero cop Jack Wednesday have certainly not gone unnoticed, one cannot help but smell some fish among the less salty beverages of The Strip.
While no doubt brimming with bravado and masculinity, Detective Jack Wednesday's previous exploits were resource-light even when his police chief had expressed that he had availed his entire precinct's resources to him whenever available. He was described to be a highly intelligent and resourceful investigator and crime buster. Thus, that he would throw an entire army of plainclothes policemen, and even The Three on top of it no less, 'just' to rescue 5 children and arrest no one on the crime scene seems suspicious per se.

Unfortunately, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup could not be reached for an interview. They were seen leaving the scene in a police vehicle shortly after the cessation of the police raid, with Bubbles oddly shrouded in a trench coat. Detective Jack Wednesday declined to comment when asked about this development.

(CRIME IN TOWNSVILLE ON THE UPSURGE - LAW ENFORCEMENT QUESTIONABLE)

With the entry of the USDO and their now-famous The Three, also known as The Angels of Justice in some circles, crime had seemingly been crippled, and the perpetrators' unlawful activities on the way to the history books. January saw a 60% drop in major crime activities and 55% in minor offenses. However, as a quarter of February comes to a close, sources inside and outside the TPD indicates that half of those gains are now lost.

There are even experts claiming that the statistics might even have been falsified or inaccurate - though these experts are in the minority. The majority of experts within the TPD, USDO, government administration, and academic circles believe that the statistics did not account for 'potential crime', with much of the criminal underground in hiding and at large. With organized crime in Townsville considered the most sophisticated and well-organized in the entire United States of America, it is not out of the realm of possibility that a 'cease-fire' and 'retreat' had been called by the leaders of the underworld - mainly the Lombardi dons - after the major victory scored by the USDO and The Three in the Battle at Morbucks Industries Research Labs.

Now, it appears that the 'cease-fire' and 'retreat' instruction has been rescinded. While the USDO and TPD have been responding with equal opposing force, many have called into question the limitations of the law enforcement agencies operating in Townsville, and whether it will just be another long, bloody and ineffectual campaign against crime on top of the last two decades of terror and moral decay.

The TPD bore the brunt of criticisms, as numerous sources claim the police to be more corrupt than honest. While a few hundred arrests have been made by internal affairs over January and the first week of February, these are believed by experts to merely be a token gesture made by high-ranking corrupt officials, a diversionary tactic to keep the current status quo going. It is believed that the number of police, justice, and government officials on the payroll of any one or more criminal enterprises in Townsville nearly outnumbers the honest, or has already outnumbered them - the measurement of this metric is often hindered by numerous factors.

The USDO, although considered largely upright and incorruptible, has been criticized for their use of heavy-handed and unsuitable tactics in their war against crime. Previously an agency focusing mainly on cutting-edge technology for the betterment of the United State's military and law enforcement, as well as subterfuge, their switch to a more military-oriented mindset is seen as
inefficient and overkill in a law enforcement scenario. Massive amounts of resources are often deployed to combat proportionately small groups of belligerent criminals. There are rumors that they are using illegal methods in their war against crime as well, such as torture, unlawful imprisonment and summary executions on both criminals and their own operatives.

The Three, or The Angels of Justice, comprising of Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, are widely regarded as a failure by most experts despite the limited success they have seen in arresting criminals, shutting down criminal enterprises and suppressing crime. Most critics point to their USDO-reported age of 5-6 years as a hot button for debate, for numerous reasons. The wide number of problems attributed to The Three's age and experience are cited as major factors resulting in the failure of certain operations, as well as putting a ceiling on the degree of success in more fruitful operations. The potential of their 'enhanced abilities', including the 'infrared beam' and 'sonic scream' or even the more 'mundane' enhanced physical performance, are thus wasted where it would have done many times the level of good in adult law enforcers. The most pressing of all is The Three's inability to rescue hostages alive and intact - something that even the 'traditional' SWAT team could do better with conventional weapons and tactics based on statistics. This is not to mention that the reality of employing little children in hard law enforcement is a huge problem in and of itself, and the USDO statement that they are 'not children' and 'not human' does little to stymie the tide of criticisms pointing out this fact.

However, there is hope yet - the very fact that this article could be printed where previously shorter token articles were made to assuage the public is a victory in and of itself. The rest of the United States is awakening to cheer Townsville on - the FBI, ATF, and DEA are now rumored to make a return to Townsville in the coming months after their disastrous attempts at assisting with law enforcement in the city in the past, joining the beleaguered TPD, USDO and Angels of Justice in the war against crime.
Chapter 20: Deterioration

Chapter Summary

Bubbles continues to relive the past, even as another emergency pulls her sisters and her into another conflict zone. Professor Utonium vows again to do right by the Girls.

Chapter 20: Deterioration

Pokey Oaks County? Pokey Oaks Woodland Reserve?

? FEB (?) 1989. ?

"Bubbles? Bubbles?" a kindly feminine voice was calling out to Bubbles, no, it was singing her name. "Bubbles…"

Bubbles, however, would not respond to it. She had been surrounded by a horde of Purple Men, and she was too afraid, too scared out of her wits to respond to anything. At this point, anything and everything could be a trick.

"Open your eyes," the woman's voice said patiently. Bubbles felt coaxed into doing so, and when she did, she wasn't disappointed nor afraid any longer. The most beautiful and angelic being she had ever seen was hovering in the air before her, her face framed by golden locks of hair, her dress sparkly blue. She was held aloft by a pair of angelic wings, ethereal and mesmerizing. "It's going to be okay."

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

10 FEB (Friday) 1989. 1920.

Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz! The dreaded clown phone rang again, not even twenty-four hours after the previous one, the bad night that removed Bubbles out of Blossom's sisterhood round table permanently.

Blossom had been playing with Buttercup, as usual, falling into her tomboyish influence when it came to leisure. An hour earlier and outdoors, they were playing catch the way Daddy taught them – except the ball had flown as far as a few houses over, hundreds of feet into the air. However, they didn't play catch for very long as flying everywhere was tiring. Now, they were putting together a train set, stuffing plastic people into the passenger compartments and cargo, both normal and weird, into the freighter sections. There were logs in one cargo compartment and Velociraptors in another.

Bubbles had been staying in bed all day. She didn't even go to school when Blossom and Buttercup did. While she wasn't sick, not that she ever was, she didn't feel like doing anything. Had it not been for her Dad, she wouldn't even have eaten or gone to the toilet at all. She had to be dosed with a box of sleeping pills last night.

Last night had been running on repeat since Blossom had done a little tit-for-tat, abandoning her in
the child trafficking front building just as Bubbles had left her for dead with the Purple Man. Had Detective Mullens not found her, she would have been left there, at least until Dad forced her to fetch her.

After Detective Mullens had found her, he'd put his trench coat around her, asked her gently what had happened before reassuring her that everything was going to be fine.

Before Blossom and Buttercup could leave, the old man had hunted them down and prevented them from being dismissed and sent flying home. He'd straightened things out with them, though Bubbles couldn't remember what was exchanged between them nor did she listen, because what had happened in the child renting room had been on her mind since.

Before she knew it, all three of them were in Mullens' muscle car. Olivia wasn't in it – she had taken the subway home instead. Straining her memory, Bubbles remembered that the talking dog had refused aggressively to go with Olivia. He'd sat between her and the other Girls instead, putting its front leg around her shoulder like a human pal as she leaned on him speechlessly, her mind a total blank.

She remembered what happened next when Mullens had personally sent them home. Mostly because her Dad was there. He'd rang the doorbell and Daddy answered it.

Selicia had ushered them inside and they sat around the coffee table in the living room. Blossom and Buttercup looked nervous, probably because they were afraid of getting into trouble. But Bubbles… Bubbles was still in that child renting room, still chained up and violated. She could still see herself in chains as she stared blankly at the wall of her living room.

"I'm afraid today's a bust," Detective Mullens had said, Bubbles somehow remembered. "It was bad, Mister Utonium."

"What were they sent to do, officer?" Bubbles remembered her Dad interrogate Mullens as if he was some criminal, a mix of firebrand accusation and horror in his voice. "What did you subject them to this time?"

"It wasn't me," the detective had defended himself. "I was just one of the foot soldiers today."

"That's what they all say. Aren't you a little too old to fall for the Bystander Effect?" Dad had criticized Mullens harshly.

"Look, I tried talking to the man of the hour!" Mullens had gone at length to defend himself, making himself look worst. "I tried talking him out of it! But it wasn't my operation, and I had to follow the chain of command!"

"Don't you shout at him!" Mom snapped at Mullens even though he didn't really raise his voice all that much. Mom was holding Dad's hand possessively for the entire thing. "Can't you see how hard it is to raise children like this?"

"Of course, ma'am, it's not that I-" the old man tried to clear things up, but was interrupted.

"Talk is cheap," the professor said to Mullens as if he was facing an enemy in a fight to the death. It was the first time Bubbles had seen her Dad this way, looking like he was ready to kill someone. "Tell me what happened."

And Mullens did. He gave them everything – Detective Wednesday's plan involving Bubbles, the child trafficking ring, the raid, and finally everyone's reactions when Bubbles broke cover prematurely and caused the operation to fail, condemning every kidnapped child (but five) in the
ring to life as either manual laborers or under-aged sex workers.

"Is it true, Blossom?" Daddy had turned to Blossom when Mullens got to the part where Blossom tried to abandon Bubbles in the middle of The Strip. Bubbles had never seen her Dad so angry before. Even Blossom was terrified to tears of him.

"Is what Mister Mullens said true? Did you leave Bubbles behind?" Dad had asked with a voice shaking with restrained anger. "I want an answer, Blossom Utonium."

"I was just so angry, Daddy..." Blossom explained in tears. "All those children – She shouldn't have used her powers, Dad! She shouldn't have."

"Don't you 'Daddy' me! Go to your room, Blossom," Daddy's eyes were shut when he demanded, as if he was in great pain, his voice seething with anger. Anger that could no longer be contained, no matter how dearly he loved Blossom. "Now!" The pink-eyed of The Three flew up the stairs, crying, but soon her wailing could not be heard after the door to her room was slammed shut.

"Buttercup, you'll go to my room," Dad had then said.

"What did I do!?" Buttercup snapped back, and Daddy didn't like it one bit.

"Don't raise your voice at me, young lady!" Dad yelled back, pointing at her before pointing to the second floor: "You should've defended your sister! Now get going. I'll talk to you later." Bubbles shook when he was shouting, even though it wasn't directed at her.

"Fine," Buttercup said, sounding like she had still done no wrong. She'd pouted all the way up to the second floor and slammed the door shut. There was silence after that. It was awkward to have a police detective witness all this. Neither was their family exactly a normal American family. In some far future, he would likely think back to this moment and thought it was like something out of a TV series.

"Don't be too hard on them, Mister Utonium," the detective finally said, trying to alleviate the tension. He was never good at that. Conversely, he had a talent for creating tension. "I'm sure they didn't know what they were doing. They're kids, after all."

"Don't tell me how to parent my own daughters, officer," Dad snapped at Mister Mullens. "And don't you dare patronize them again."

"I wasn't, Mister Utonium."

"Of course you weren't," the professor said defensively. He'd been on edge for far too long to do otherwise.

"Dad... Stop... please..." Bubbles remember herself pleading for her Daddy to stop chastising Mister Mullens, despite drowning in her own depressing memories, in her own miseries.

"I think it's time I take my leave, then," the old detective said with a sigh, realizing that he had overstayed his welcome. It didn't take long for him to ruffle some feathers, but he was used to it: he'd experienced it all the time when he had to visit the homes of his dead or injured colleagues or of victims of crimes. Within a few years of doing this, he'd thought of himself as a therapist or a counselor of the punch bag variety. For every slap, shout, accusation and insult he took, he was making the victims feel better. This particular incident, however, would stay on his mind forever, probably even follow him six feet under.
The clown phone had continued buzzing in Bubbles' mind, implanted deep into her memories as a herald of doom.

Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz!

Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz!

Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz!

Bubbles! Bubbles! Bubbles! It seemed to scream at her. The clown phone sounded as if it wanted to drag her to some forsaken place.

"Bubbles! Bubbles! BUBBLES!" it turned out to be Blossom screaming at her after all. Bubbles had been lying on her side, facing an empty corner of the Girls' room. When she turned to face the music, she realized that Blossom had been looking down at her from above, floating in her tactical gear with her MP5, which was the length of her entire leg, in one hand. "Finally! Didn't you hear the phone? Get dressed!"

"I don't want to…" Bubbles said, her face a blank as she stared up at the ceiling. She turned in bed after that, again facing away from her as she lay on her side.

"General Blackwater wants all of us - I told him you wouldn't want to, but he didn't care," Blossom said, her arms crossed as she seemed to stand in mid-air. "I wouldn't have bothered with you otherwise. Now get dressed!"

Reluctantly, Bubbles got up, even with her mind still crowded by the past week's nightmares, real and imagined. She was still in her pajamas - not only did she miss school, but she had missed the day's patrol as well. Time had ceased to be a concept with her. There was only one time period now: the past, the horrible, horrible past.

Bubbles floated to the walk-in closet, trying her best to stay in the present, but the flood of bad thoughts kept washing over her like a tide at its highest, drowning her – and she was still chained in that terrible red room-

"Hurry up, Bubbles!" Buttercup shouted from the window, already impatient from waiting a few seconds. She'd been sore not just in body but in her mind as well - getting defeated by the Purple Man had made her really unhappy. It'd ruined what she thought was her day. The operation at The Strip was supposed to provide her with some fresh meatbags to make up for the Purple Man, but then Bubbles had ruined that. She wanted to make up for both today. "I want to punch some things! Man, what a slowpoke!"

A minute later, Bubbles was still not out of the walk-in closet yet, and Blossom had to fly in to help get her dressed. As it turned out, she had zoned out inside, while changing, and had only succeeded in removing her pajamas. The very act of removing her clothes had reminded her of the bad night, not that it was ever out of her mind.

The professor had entered the room while Bubbles was getting changed. By the time she was done, the professor was already sitting on the Girls' bed. On seeing him, she flew to him for a hug.

"Do I have to, Dad?" Bubbles was gripping tightly onto his lab coat. She didn't want to let go if she could help it.

"Does she have to go, Blossom?" the professor asked the declared leader of The Three.

"Mister Blackwater wants all of us there. He said it's big," Blossom said, all the while trying not to look at her most pathetic sister because she knew she'd glare at her and Daddy didn't like that.
Selicia had walked in on them in the meantime. Buttercup wasted no time in embracing her. In the meantime, the security officer turned mom gave Blossom a warning through her stare, angry enough she thought it would turn red from green. That look alone scared Blossom – she didn't want to know what was next if she failed to keep Buttercup untouched.

"But I don't want to…" Bubbles mewled.

"Bubbles, look at me," the professor said as he stroked her cheek lovingly. Bubbles searched his eyes desperately, hungrily, hoping for some kind of magic in it. "I can get you out of this, believe me. I think I have a way out for you – the three of you."

"When can I stop doing this?" Bubbles could feel hope rising in her as she latched onto his words.

"Give me a few weeks. I have to make sure it's safe," the professor said.

"But I can't, Dad! I can't take it anymore!" Bubbles cried. She could feel small arms wrapping around her own when she did. Seeing Bubbles like this had shattered the professor inside.

"We have to go!" Blossom said impatiently. "See you later, Dad."

"Yeah, come on, you baby!" Buttercup added as she yanked Bubbles off of Dad before flashing a toothy, guilty grin at the professor when he frowned at her for her choice of words.

The Girls had to fly out a single port window because of Bubbles, with only two streaks of light behind them.

The professor looked on, feeling helpless and falling into despair. Selicia sat beside him and embraced him. It was all she could do – to be there for him.

"It looks bad now, but maybe Bubbles will pull through. She's slow to adapt to change, but she'll get there," she said in an attempt to comfort him. "It happened before, and it can happen again."

"And I'll make sure it happens," the professor said as he opened his eyes, wide and determined. Standing up, he marched out of the room and down to the lab.

"What do you mean?" Selicia asked as she followed him down.

"I've been hesitating for far too long!" the professor said. "Calculating and recalculating, going through the entire procedure over and over! Analyzing the same risk factors over and over!"

"Honey, what are you talking about?" she asked as they'd gone down the stairs and into the living room, barely keeping up with her 'husband'. His language had always been a mystery to her.

"The Anti-X, Selicia. I'm talking about the Anti-X," he said as they both got through the airlock leading to the labs.

"It's the only way Bubbles will pull through," he continued as they descended into the lab. "It's the only way they'll all pull through. They're not fit for law enforcement. They never were."

Below, dozens of potted plants were arranged neatly in rows and columns on one huge table, all of which were covered by bell jars. Some of them looked mundane, while others were fantastical. There were a few with glowing flowers – mostly sunflowers - and a few that could even move, with their flowers tracking Thomas and Selicia for some unknown reason the professor did not pursue. One of them shot a pea at them, only for the pea to bounce around in the bell jar.
When the professor got to his desk, he pulled a few pages of documents out of a drawer. Then something hit him. He froze.

'I'll think about it,' Blossom had said when he asked her to be more patient with Bubbles. It'd suddenly occurred to him where she got it from. While he was spitefully rejecting Mister Morbucks' plea for help on the phone, he'd turned to look at the Girls' door when he saw Blossom peeking at him from there, probably wondering why he was shouting. She'd heard it from him. Alice came to mind after that.

'Don't forget who you are. You're a good man, and you shouldn't let anything change you,' Alice had advised him back on Saturday, 'The Girls look up to you, Tom, and if you break and become something else, so will they.'

He'd never taken the advice to heart. Much as he liked Alice as a friend, he'd never liked her psychiatric perspective - too little science, too much wriggle room that could lead to mistakes and misinterpretations.

Until now. She'd been right all along. Blossom was changing because of him - whether his role was big or small did not matter. He'd changed her in some negative way.

"Thomas, what's wrong?" Selicia asked, very concerned about the way her lover had frozen up over the desk. She came up to him, putting a hand on his back, letting him know that he wasn't alone.

"Am I a good man, Selicia?" he asked. He wasn't even sure anymore, after everything. Had he changed and taken Blossom down with him? "Am I still a good man?"

"Yes," Selicia said without reservation, without pause, without a hint of trickery or cunning - something she'd do for Thomas and Thomas alone. "You've always been a good man, since the first day I saw you. I love you - and I mean it - because you're what I can never be."

The professor reached for the phone after giving Selicia's words some thought. Picking up the receiver, he paused, then realized he was missing the number. He searched for it through the cardholder and after failing to find what he was looking for, went to the wastepaper basket instead. It was where he found it - a card with gold and silver trimmings and a crown in the middle, all crumpled up but very well-made with the name in the middle of it unmistakable. He started punching the numbers in and put the phone to his ear.

The phone ringed in his ear as if deciding whether to act on the professor's little confession.

It beeped continuously, forcing a pregnant pause as if letting him decide to slip back down the hole.

Until eventually, it relented.

"What is it now?" a deep voice, hoarse and exhausted, answered the phone. "I've already told you, I can't attend that board meeting! Can't a man have a peaceful moment to himself these days?!"

"It's Professor Utonium," Thomas said.

"It's you," the man on the other end said defensively, apprehensively.

"I'm sending the Girls to Elodie," the professor said.

"You- you are?" the man on the other end said, sounding like he'd just witnessed a feat of true magic.
"Yes. Now, they're involved in another mission today, so chances are-" the professor had tried to explain the terms, but Mister Morbucks was so grateful he couldn't stop to listen.

"Thank you- Oh thank you! Really- Thank you so much-" the billionaire sounded like he was crying, on all fours, even.

"Chances are, they'll only be able to make it tonight, if even that," the professor continued explaining without pausing to acknowledge the rich man's gratitude or feelings. "Or if they come back injured, probably tomorrow, or the day after. Maybe you should tell Elodie they're coming. It'll cheer her up."

"I had to lie to her constantly that they're coming, this entire week. And when they didn't, I had to lie that they were caught up in something. Saving the day or building a house for the poor or some other excuse that... tears at my soul," Mister Morbucks let off his deepest thoughts, surprisingly, before catching himself and stopping it. "I can't thank you enough-"

"Don't thank me, Morbucks," the professor said coldly. "I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing this for your daughter, and mine." And with that, he slammed the phone down. He hunched over his desk, wondering if he was doing the right thing - wondering if, like all his other good intentions, he would just end up hurting someone again. Selicia embraced him as he agonized over his decision even when he'd made it, putting an arm around his shoulder.

"You did the right thing, Thomas," Selicia said. "You've always done the right thing."

"Selicia, honey, I need to work now," the professor then said, the determined look on his face still unchanged. "I'll be with you when I'm done." Realizing that he might have been a little insensitive when Selicia's expression changed, he pecked her in the lips as he caressed her face - a way for him to express his apology and love.

"What about the wedding photos?" Selicia asked - they had been planning to have a family photo with the Girls, and the plans had to be pushed back constantly whenever the Girls came back looking like they'd been through a war zone - though that wasn't far at all from the truth.

"Maybe next week," the professor pushed it back again, even further. Upset and disappointed, Selicia left him alone and went up the stairs leading to the surface. With her gone, the professor began walking away from his desk. Walking past the supercomputer and the Chemical X storeroom - he'd been stockpiling on Chemical X lately - he came to a special glass room tucked secretively at a corner of the lab where no one had gone to. He switched the lights on in the glass room.

In the center of the glass room was a metal table that was made to the size of the Girls, resembling an X with a rectangle in the middle, looking oddly like some space-age sacrificial altar. There were shackles on every limb of the X. A tray full of medical instruments was sitting beside it. The entire table was made of Duranium, with legs that went deep underground, secured to the foundations of the lab by steel and concrete such that it would be impossible to lift the table without lifting the entire house. The professor had ordered it built over the past couple of weeks the moment he realized that Anti-X was a real possibility. It was built little by little while the Girls were out, expedited by Wiggums, the head of USDO's logistics arm himself until it was done.

But it was more than just a precaution. Buttercup would certainly not give up her powers willingly. Would Blossom? No, he decided that neither would she - she had become very invested in helping others with her enhanced abilities. He was only confident that Bubbles would relinquish her enhanced abilities when given the chance. For the rest of them... It would be better that it be him who forcefully take it away rather than someone else. It was something only a father should do if it
came to that, he decided…

For the Girls’ own good.
Chapter 21: The Descent (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

A new emergency forces The Three into action before they have the chance to find their bearings and recuperate. Bubbles finds a new source of strength to aid her sisters.

Chapter 21: The Descent (Part 1)

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

10 FEB (Friday) 1989. 1930.

On the way to the crime-in-progress, Bubbles was flying behind her sisters and in the wake of their X-haust light as usual. Blossom and Buttercup were chatting happily in the meantime, about how it was great to be back in school once more, about what they would be going up against this time around, and how they would go about dealing with it.

Bubbles, of course, was completely excluded from the conversation, but the conversation itself soon died down quickly when Blossom and Buttercup discovered that they had run out of things to talk about.

Without external stimuli, Blossom soon drifted into her own thoughts, going back to the previous day, when Daddy got angry with her – really angry.

She remembered crying all the way into her room and staying there, just like what he wanted. She'd hoped that he would no longer be angry if she did. Looking outside one of the round windows, time passed quickly as she became buried in her own thoughts, in the injustice of it all: why should Dad be angry with her when Bubbles had been the one at fault? Not only did she fail to save Buttercup at one point, but she'd also failed to save them both - her very own sisters! On another occasion! And that was not to mention the three hundred other children too!

Hadn't she forgiven her enough, back when they were just starting out in law enforcement? When she'd abandoned them during the fight against Junior, one of the Amoeba Boys? Or when she failed to board an escaping car, failing to end the Highway 13 Incident before it became severe? Buttercup did not fail to mention, either, that Bubbles had abandoned her to Naga.

The door to her room soon opened, and in stepped her father, with his arms crossed. Blossom was snapped out of her moody introspection.

"Blossom," he'd said her name in a way she had never heard of before – a way that was brimming with negative emotions. Now, she had seen the other side of her father, the side she had never really seen before. "I am very disappointed in you."

Blossom turned around. She had stopped crying, but the feeling of being misunderstood never went away.

"But it's not my fault!" Blossom argued.
"Which part!? Is it the part where you left your sister behind, naked in some dirty place!? Or is it the part when you pushed her!?" the professor accused. The words he said had disarmed Blossom completely. The way he'd said it had painted a terrible picture she could not hope to defend. "Huh!? Which part!? You tell me!"

"Three hundred children were missing because of her!" but Blossom was going to try anyway. Tears were already streaming down her eyes. "Kidnapped!"

"And is that what you want for your sister!?" the professor barked at Blossom, who shrank away from him in fear – he had never talked to her that way before. "Because that could have happened had it not been for Mullens! Townsville is a very dangerous place, little lady! Mojo Jojo or Naga or someone else - I don't know who - could have been watching nearby!"

"But she's been leaving us behind!" Blossom stubbornly continued to defend herself. "It wasn't the first time!"

"You know what, I think you're right!" the professor shouted, further infuriated by Blossom's sudden lack of empathy and wisdom. He started towards Blossom menaciously.

"Dad? What are you doing!" Blossom screamed as she saw the way her Dad was coming towards her - without the same love he always showed, and with malicious intent.

"You're perfectly right! I should throw you out for abandoning Bubbles!" the professor said as he marched up to Blossom as she backed away, knocking over a stool with a teddy bear. "I should even offer you up to Jojo or Naga as a peace offering!"

"Dad, NO!" Blossom screamed as she darted away, accidentally knocking down a mountain of soft toys.

"Let's see, who should it be!? Any ideas, Blossom!?" Despite her speed, the professor was able to catch hold of her."I'm sure they'll take good care of you!"

"NO!" Blossom screamed as she yanked her hand out of her Dad's grasp and sped away again, this time hiding behind her pink kiddy table.

The accusation, what the professor said – how right the professor was had made Blossom lose control and cry like she never did before. The convincing act he'd put up to make his point had made it even worse - even Bubbles would look better in her usual crying fit if Blossom was melting down next to her. So much so that it'd snapped the professor out of his anger and forced him to put an end to his act prematurely.

He had to go back to being the nurturing dad. At first, Blossom was constantly backing away from him whenever he tried to come close, but she eventually accepted a hug from him and wet his shoulder thoroughly with her tears. It took a very long time for her to calm down, which was uncharacteristic of her.

"Blossom, as hard as it is for you to believe, it's not Bubbles' fault," the professor had gone on to explain when she had calmed down and entered a kind of receptive daze. "It wouldn't be any of your faults if any of you did something wrong. The three of you weren't supposed to be out there."

"But you said we're special, and we're supposed to fight crime," Blossom sniffled, still hugging her Dad. It was at this point that the professor wished that Blossom was more forgetful. It was challenging to think of a way out of what she remembered.

"But the three of you are kids, too," the professor reasoned. "And fighting crime – that's an adult's
job. Maybe the three of you should start only when you're older…"

Despite everything her Dad told her, she could not bring herself to forgive Bubbles. But she knew that Dad loved her, and so she resolved to be less angry with her, perhaps even eventually forgive her despite the consequences of her mistakes, when enough time had passed and she'd done something - anything - to make up for it.

---

**The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Silver Age Cineplex.**

**10 FEB (Friday) 1989. 1952.**

It became apparent quickly where the crime in progress was the moment they saw the heart light in the sky and the facade of the building that was surrounded by the police and USDO. The signs on the roof, box office, and posters were designed to attract attention, and they had done just that.

But it seemed that something else had succeeded better in attracting attention: the number of police and USDO vehicles and manpower deployed was enormous. At the front alone, there were something like six squad cars and a few SWAT vans, as well as just as several humvees and a couple of APCs. Just as many vehicles were on each side of the cineplex, partly out of necessity as the building was huge, and had served as the main center of entertainment for the entire tenement area.

The Girls swooped in and landed as soon as Blossom saw where Mister Blake was, and he was with the usual suspects: Mullens, Olivia, and Stanley.

"The movies?" Blossom wondered aloud the moment she landed. "What is there to steal in the movies?"

"Beats me," Olivia replied as the group formed a circle to plan their raid on the cinema. "There's not a lot of money and valuables to steal in there. They're after something else. Maybe something they can't just steal."

The group crowded around the hood of a humvee, where they had laid out a map of the cinema - apparently, the criminals in there had been holding hostages, and had been around for a couple of hours. Hostage negotiations had come to a standstill, preceded by delaying tactics on both sides. Conflict became the only option, but when it was apparent that there would be heavy casualties no matter which point of entry they used, they decided to call in Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup.

"We're not dealing with your run-of-the-mill criminals here," Agent Blake had gone on to explain the situation. "We have reasons to believe that they are affiliated with a cult. Eyewitness descriptions fit the bill - some of them wore strange robes and accessories or had equally strange markings on them. And there's a lot of them, something like twenty or so of them at least, mostly holed up in cinema 3 of the cineplex based on our observations."

"But what does that mean? They're still normal people, right?" Buttercup had asked naively.

"Cultists… They're not very normal if you ask me," Mullens had answered her instead. "They're going to be really dedicated to whatever they've been asked to do by their leader. They'll do whatever it takes, even if it means sacrificing themselves."

"Do they have superpowers? Like us?" Blossom inquired. The detective thought her question was very pertinent for a three-month-old, even if naïve.

"No, of course not," the old detective said.
"Then they're easy," Buttercup assumed. Blossom, in the meantime, had noticed something worrying however: Bubbles hadn't been listening. She was staring at the bumper of the humvee, her eyes distant, and evidently so was her mind. The leader of The Three could not help but to glare at her.

"So Blossom, any idea how you want to do this?" Mister Blake asked.

Blossom did not answer immediately, as she was momentarily distracted by Bubbles' lack of attention and participation.

"How about like before? Bubbles could use her sonic scream and we could fly in to save the hostages," Blossom proposed. Looking back at Bubbles, she was certain that her mind was still in some other world - a castle in the sky, for example. She put her hands on her hips and glared at her some more.

"That's a little run-of-the-mill for the three of you, but it could work," Detective Mullens said, all the while ignorant of the tension growing between Blossom and Bubbles.

"But what about the hostages? Won't the sonic scream hit them too?" Agent Blake asked. Blossom, however, did not catch his question.

"Bubbles. Bubbles!" Blossom shouted at her sister to try to catch her attention. Quite infuriatingly, Bubbles had withdrawn herself to such a state that she didn't hear her.

"BUBBLES!" Blossom screamed one last time, the loudest she could muster, to the point where she was turning heads several squad cars or humvees over.

"Huh?" Bubbles vocalized absentmindedly, half-stuck in the past. "What?"

"Were you listening just now?" Blossom interrogated Bubbles. "What did we talk about, Bubbles?"

Bubbles did not answer, knowing full well that she had missed everything, and knew nothing about what was going on in the situation.

"How many bad guys are we fighting today, Bubbles?" Blossom questioned her coldly, shaking with anger.

"Urm… Ur… Nine?" Bubbles had to take a wild guess, basically giving her the largest number she could think of.

"Fine - do you know what you're supposed to do this time?" Blossom jabbed at Bubbles further, her patience strained by Bubbles' error.

"I don't know…" Bubbles said, still so preoccupied with what happened the previous night that there was little room left for anything else.

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," Buttercup remarked from the side, more out of mean-spirited spite than surprise and disbelief.

"What is wrong with you, Bubbles!?" Blossom hammered at her with her rhetorical question, as she gesticulated wildly.

"I don't… I'm sorry…" Bubbles tried to explain, but she was struggling to do so - there were things in her head that she didn't want to talk about, not in such a public place, and then there were things she could not put into words. "I just…" She'd continued to stare at the ground, her hands clasped
together in front of her as she didn't know what else to do with them.

"Hey, Blossom," Agent Blake tried to break it up. Blossom did not even hear him. "I think you need to-

"You're useless, Bubbles! Useless, useless, USELESS!" Blossom screamed in blind rage as memories of past difficulties caused by Bubbles came up, and the real possibility of more pain and failings caused by Bubbles had enraged her. In her wild rage-filled imagination, she believed that the hostages inside would die and all criminals involved would escape because of Bubbles. Dad would then somehow be mad at her again, Buttercup would be injured and then her Mom would punish her, likely in an imaginative, painful way. It was all too real and vivid that it might as well be a reality to Blossom. "Dad told me to forgive you! But you're USELESS!"

"I HATE YOU!" And before anyone could stop Blossom, she slapped Bubbles hard enough that she'd slammed into the humvee face-first, at which point, Mullens and Olivia had to risk their lives to restrain Blossom before she could harm her own sister any further. Thankfully, Blossom had cooled herself off when she realized who was stopping her.

"Rur-les? Are you rokay?" Stanley Talker asked, very concerned. He nudged Bubbles in the arm with his snout.

Bubbles had broken in a cry late. The slap and her face planting into the armored plate of the Humvee had shocked her at first. Turning around, she sat on the military vehicle's bumper, covering her face as she finally bawled. But when she realized how low she had sunk, how badly she had screwed up and how many people were looking at her, she took off, her baby blue streak of light looking like an uneven streak of tears. She'd gone at maximum speed, taking everyone by surprise, going through some dark alley and likely several streets over.

"Oh great, now we'd have to go after her or Dad's going to go crazy about us leaving her," Buttercup moaned in frustration. Detective Mullens, in the meantime, had lost it. He forcefully took Blossom by the arms and plopped her down on the humvee's hood hard enough that her butt hurt.

"You lil' pipsqueak! That how you treat your own sister!?!" he scolded Blossom, and she didn't like that one bit. For one thing, he'd used the same word as the time he gave her a ride-along, back when they weren't friends yet. Then there was the fact that the detective had told on her and Buttercup, causing Dad to go ballistic on them. What kind of a friend would do that?

"Didn't you see her, Mister Mullens? She wasn't even listening! She wasn't even trying when she should be working harder!" Blossom defended herself.

"Did it ever cross that little mind of yours that you were being a little heavy-handed!?!" the detective scolded, pressing a finger into her collarbone. Blossom didn't like that one bit.

"Like how you used to talk to me?" Blossom talked back. The detective was taken aback by both her memory and audacity, at how she'd dug up the past. Behind him, Olivia was crossing her arms and glaring at Blossom.

"You're getting a real mouth problem, you know that?" Detective Mullens chided.

They would have argued further, had it not been for a window breaking on another front and the sound of gunshots back and forth breaking them up.

"I have to find Bubbles, Mister Mullens," Blossom said as she floated and brushed past his
shoulder. "Dad will be mad if I leave her behind again."

Agent Blake stood in her way, blocking her not just with his body but with their friendship.

"There's no time, Blossom," Blake said. "We need you in there now. People – hostages and police officers both – will die if we wait."

"But what about Bubbles?" Blossom asked, torn between listening to Blake and going her own way, torn between her love for Bubbles and her anger.

Yes, it was a bit of a problem. The USDO agent's eyes went to the ground as if to search the floor for answers, only to actually find it there for once.

"Stanley Talker, I know you don't like me because of my affiliation, but…" Agent Blake said, tried to be delicate with the dog's 'feelings', if it had feelings analogous to a human's. "You're the best person to find Bubbles right now – I know the two of you have bonded well, and we humans don't have the same tracking skills as you do."

"Hrrrrr…" the talking dog glared at Blake through his ballistic lenses as he sat on the ground, contemplating and still disliking the man because he worked for the USDO.

"You've seen Bubbles. She needs a friend – I can't get to her but you can," Blake went on further. The talking dog got up shortly after he was done talking, then padded towards the alley Bubbles flew through.

"Rrrr… Don't think that Ri'm doing this recause of you," Stanley Talker said sternly to the USDO human before sprinting away into the alley, faster than any dog ever could.

"Will the two of you be able to handle it alone?" Blake asked Blossom.

"Pfff, we'll be fine without her," Buttercup answered the question for Blossom, scoffing at their apparent 'need' for Bubbles to be in their team. Blossom couldn't even find it within herself to object to it. Deep down, she loved Bubbles, but recent events - an entire week of it, had shown that Bubbles just wasn't cut out for fighting crime. "Miss Goggle-Eyes will just cry for no reason and ruin our plans anyway."

"We'll have to go with or without Bubbles," Blossom said, avoiding the question tactfully, and it hadn't gone unnoticed. She looked up at Blake, some indescribable fear overtaking her as she did. She didn't even know what she was afraid of or for anymore – was it for herself, or Bubbles? Or of her enemies? Or Mom? Was it the fear of losing her friends and their approval? "Those people need our help…"

"Right… We'll be right behind you, and closer to make up for Bubbles' absence," Agent Blake decided not to pursue the matter, and with that, he started barking orders for his men to prepare for a breach.

The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Near Silver Age Cineplex.

10 FEB (Friday) 1989. 2003.

Bubbles flew from one alleyway to another, caring little about what was around her. Cars would screech to a halt or even crash in her wake. People were startled or knocked aside.

And she wasn't just crying – she felt her control slip away entirely – a common occurrence, but not
in front of everyone. When she realized she'd given in to her bad memories once more during such an important moment, she couldn't help but feel ashamed, and it was worse when Blossom slapped her. It'd hurt inside more than it did physically.

Blossom had changed, and she blamed herself for it. Had Alice just been comforting her all along? Lying to her that she wasn't wrong just to keep her happy?

Or was Alice right all along? Had Dad been right to coddle her? She did not like the uncertainty of not knowing one bit.

Bubbles had kept on going for a while – she'd kept running until she could feel aching everywhere as she felt drained from the speed. It was only then that she stopped, and after deciding that she had run away far enough to avoid being seen by her friends and sisters did she finally settle down.

Sitting down on a boxy old television screen, she burst into tears, sobbing in the dark where no one would listen. It was better this way, she thought with whatever little presence of mind she had left. Because no one would get angry or get hurt this way.

"Poor little girl… So misunderstood and utterly misused," a voice came from the dark, startling Bubbles out of her despair. It was feminine and rich in pronunciation as if spoken by a well-read or cultured person.

Bubbles jumped to her feet and would have lit her eyes up to brighten the alley had someone else not done it for her. From deeper in the alley, a woman floated down from high above, glowing brightly with white light, looking like an angel. She even had wings too, resembling that of a dove's, or an angel's. Touching down on the filthy, muck-covered snowy floor of the alley with her silver shoes, the woman – or angel – came towards her, covered in a dress that wasn't just blue like the sky – it was sparkling. Her hair wasn't just blonde – it was golden like the promise of a good morning. A satchel bag hung on one shoulder - it was the only thing that wasn't shiny, being dark blue. In one of her gloved hand was a wand that ended in a star. In the other was a handkerchief, which she used to wipe Bubbles' tears away.

And the enhanced little girl allowed her to do it, without suspicion or doubt, as she had exhausted her capacity to think by then. Neither did it seem like she had anyone left to turn to – and the woman, pure in the way she looked, pure in the sense that she was never tainted by the horrible events of her life, felt like the only avenue for comfort left.

Bubbles sobbed anew as the angelic stranger caressed her in the same cheek that Blossom slapped. The woman hugged her for some time, patiently cooing at her until she stopped shaking and crying.

"You… You're the woman from my dreams..." Bubbles mumbled after taking a second look at her.

"That was me, yes," the woman admitted.

"But who are you?" Bubbles finally asked. "Why are you being so nice to me? When even my sisters..." She couldn't finish her sentence, as the topic was still painful to talk about.

"That's because I'm your fairy godmother, Bubbles," the angelic woman introduced herself, answering both her questions at once as she took a few steps back to let Bubbles see her again in her fullest glory, putting her arms out like a messianic figure. "I've been watching over you since the day you were born, and I will watch over you until the day you return to the ether. You've been strong, Bubbles, but your strength has its limits. I've come to help you in your darkest hour, dear Bubbles."
Bubbles stood up - she'd finally found the will to do so. For the first time in what felt like an eternity, she finally smiled, because something had finally gone her way.

"I've always wanted a fairy godmother! Oh, I need you so much!" Bubbles exclaimed, but she soon became dejected once more. In her experience, things had rarely worked out very well. "But... How're you going to help me? Things are really bad - Blossom and Buttercup hate me and I... I... just can't fight crime. Dad said that he needed weeks before he could save me but I don't know how I can even last tonight..."

"Well, that's why I'm here... Yes... Yes..." the fairy godmother said in a kindly, maternal voice. "You are destined for greater things than catching a few hoodlums, Bubbles. That you're wishing to be a normal little girl isn't your failing, but the failing of everyone around you. Do you believe that?"

Bubbles couldn't be sure - she had to search within herself for answers, and even then, there was a whole lot of things to think and feel through for someone who had just lived for three months.

"I've watched over you, Bubbles, all this time. Although it pains me to see it, I had to stand by and watch your mother mistreat you - oh, how she would fail to teach you and bring you to your fullest potential. Your sisters were no better... Yes... Yes... Buttercup, especially, but Blossom is to blame for some of it too," the fairy godmother explained. "Even your father seeks to lead you away from your destiny..."

What the fairy godmother had laid out to her was convincing, and it'd made her mad, and disillusioned, and disappointed, at least up until the part where she mentioned her father.

"But Dad loves me..." Bubbles defended her father meekly.

"Oh, dear, how you leap to the defense of your loved ones so readily. You are good, Bubbles. Pure of heart," the fairy godmother said. "Yes... Yes... your father loves you, as does your mother and sisters, and your friends - there is no doubt about that. But sometimes, even those who love you do not know how to help you. I, on the other hand..." The fairy godmother looked at Bubbles expectantly from the corner of her eyes as she felt the rough surface of her satchel bag, rubbing it as if to suggest that it contained something of interest to her.

"How will you help me?" Bubbles asked. The fairy godmother turned to face her directly with a smile as if she had been expecting that question all along. Opening her dark blue bag, she reached into the darkness within it and pulled out what appeared to be a metal syringe.

"I will bless you with my magic, Bubbles," the fairy godmother said mystically as she put out her hand to present a leather pouch with something long and thin inside, waiting for Bubbles to take it. Hesitant at first, Bubbles stretched both of her arms out, her hands forming a cup. The fairy godmother gently put the object into her hands. Pulling the gift out of the leather pouch and looking at it, she saw that it was a small metal syringe with a glass center where she could see a dull, red liquid inside. On the side was printed 'His Secret', but right beside it, '2.0' was scribbled using a dark red marker. "Contained within this device is my magic. Use it, Bubbles, and all your problems will go away..."

"Will I live happily ever after?" Bubbles asked. She had been read a lot of fairy tales, and she couldn't help but see the parallels between her life and those stories. The princesses in those stories would always start out amid terrible circumstances, terrible people and with humble backgrounds. The fairy godmother smiled widely, before holding it back and damming it into a kindly smile. She chuckled.
"Why, yes… yes… of course, dear," the fairy godmother said with her all-knowing smile. "A princess like you deserves a happy ending, do you not? Now… Do you know how to use it?"

"My Mom taught me how to use a needle…" Bubbles said, referring to the times when Selicia had trained her as a field medic. Holding up the syringe before her, something occurred to her as she removed the plastic cap covering the needle of the syringe: "Wouldn't it break if I inject myself with this?"

"Oh no, of course not. It is special, made just for you… Now hurry along and use it!" the fairy godmother gently pushed Bubbles to inject herself with it. "I sense that your sisters might need some help - help that you can't provide unless you use my magic, dear."

As if on cue, Bubbles could feel her right temple flaring up in pain - she knew what it meant. It meant that her sisters, one or both of them, were in trouble, in serious pain.

"Yes, fairy godmother…" she muttered as she quickly got to work. Under the fairy godmother's glow, she slapped the inside of her forearm to find a vein. Once she found it, she took a deep breath and aimed with the syringe needle… but hesitated. Fear overtook her, though this time it was fear that she couldn't understand. It felt like something beyond the fear of needles.

"Your sisters are in trouble, Bubbles…" the fairy godmother repeated herself. The way she looked at Bubbles had become strange - piercing, intense, almost willing her to stab herself with the needle. "If you can't help them, they will grow to hate you with a passion even if they live through tonight…. yes… yes… That is certainly not what either of us wants…"

'I HATE YOU!' Blossom's voice echoed in Bubbles' mind.

'You're useless, Bubbles! Useless, useless, USELESS!'

Bubbles could feel her temple becoming worse. She could only fear the worst.

'She's not hardcore, not like us.' Buttercup's voice joined in the fun in Bubbles' war-torn mindscape.

'Why do I even have a sister like you?'

"You can't help your sisters without my blessing, Bubbles…" the fairy godmother repeated herself.

Yes, Blossom and Buttercup did need her help. Yes, they were mean to her, but no, she wasn't going to abandon them again if she could help it – the last time had been one too many times. Sisters were sisters, and love was love. It was what her Daddy had always taught her and she wasn't going to forget it, ever.

Taking the plunge, Bubbles stuck the needle into her vein and depressed the plunger, pumping the dark red fluid into her. The fluid felt hot in her veins, and she could feel it spread like molten iron inside her. It was painful at first, but then something else took hold. Bubbles withdrew the syringe and dropped it out of shock and regret, both of which didn't last very long because of what happened next.

The first thing she felt was pleasure - intense pleasure she had never felt before, better than being plunged into a warm bath after a freezing day out in the open. Even better than sleeping snugly in Dad's loving and warm embrace. It was better than any candy she had eaten or any rush she'd felt doing anything. She could feel it on every inch of her body, inside and out. Then the fear was gone - as if it was a thing of the past, as if she never knew it. To be released from the tyranny of fear itself had completely enthralled her. Bubbles clutched her head as she felt overwhelmed by the
sensation of pure delight running through her veins, and throwing her head back as she fell to her knees, moaning with it as she smiled and chuckled. She closed her eyes, taking in the sensations.

There was no more fear, and something else crept up in her, slow at first, but quickly gaining momentum. Boldness. Unbridled anger. Fury. Boundless fury! Bubbles opened her eyes and caught sight of herself in a broken mirror not too far away, and saw that her eyes had turned hellish red. Cracks were running down the mirror as if splitting her face in two, but she liked what she saw. A grin spread across her face as she imagined what she was going to do to the people who were hurting her sisters, as she imagined what she was going to do to people, period.

"Thanks, miss fairy godmother!" Bubbles exclaimed with an aggressive growl in her voice, cruel laughter erupting after that. Balling up her fists so tightly that her knuckles and wrists cracked, she tensed up her muscles in preparation for battle. "Thank you, so much! SO VERY MUCH!" She couldn't help but laugh madly as pure pleasure and rage coursed through her veins.

"I'm glad to help. Now go… Go and save your sisters!" the fairy godmother prompted as she pointed her wand in the direction of her sisters, and Bubbles turned to fly away, her streak of baby blue light in her wake, now with a thin core of hellish red in its center.

"Yes… Yes… I'm so very glad to help…" Bubbles heard the fairy godmother say faintly before her voice disappeared entirely from the distance.

But she didn't care. All that mattered to Bubbles now was to rip and tear… until it is done.
Chapter 22: The Descent (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

While Bubbles ran away and found a new source of strength, Blossom and Bubbles storms the Silver Age Cinema without her as an army of two, backed by their USDO friends.

The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Silver Age Cineplex.

10 FEB (Friday) 1989. 1954.

Agent Blake wasn't kidding when he said that he would stick closely to the Girls to make up for Bubbles' absence. As Blossom and Buttercup took cover on either side of the grand entrance into the old cineplex, Agent Blake's men had formed two groups and sprinted to catch up with the Girls and take up positions behind them.

The moment Blossom and Buttercup flew into the lobby area, past the box office, guns were already blazing and there was no going back. A couple of armed guards were taking potshots with shotguns the moment they streaked in and surveyed the room.

"Buttercup, left!" Blossom ordered as she flew over the man on her right, stoically enduring a shotgun blast to her chest as she did. He had been hiding behind a wooden desk. She was able to shoot him with her heat beam easily from her vantage point, knocking him out. Buttercup had a less elegant solution; crashing into her assigned target and dashing him against the wall before delivering a knock-out punch to his face when he was too stubborn to fall unconscious.

Agent Blake and his men needed only to come in and cuff those men. Blossom and Buttercup took up positions behind Cinema 3 as they waited.

"Hey Bloss, these men are not cultists!" Blake informed the Angel of Justice. Numerous possibilities assaulted his mind, putting pressure on him. "There could be more than twenty bad guys, watch out!"

And he was right. Doors leading into the lobby area burst open simultaneously, forcing him and his men to scramble into cover; some had to leap to safety when more gunshots resounded. A Powerpuff Task Force soldier was caught in the ambush, bullets ripping through him as he fell to the ground - dead or alive, no one knew.

"Go! Get the hostages! We'll hold them off!" Blake shouted over the gunshots and Blossom nodded. He spotted criminals, still of unknown affiliation, shooting from the doors of restrooms for both sexes, as well as multiple employee corridors. There were two or more to each door, which meant he was outnumbered.

Blossom and Buttercup crashed through the sturdy doors of Cinema 3, then through another set of double doors meant for soundproofing. Rows upon rows of seats greeted them immediately. The lights in the cinema were still bright, at least, revealing men and women hiding behind seats, with
guns pointed at them - mostly shotguns, for some reason.

The hostages were lined up near the silver screen, forced to kneel with their hands bound behind their backs, and their ankles tied as well. There was a couple of security guards, and nine others - three of whom were men, the rest women. A couple of children who looked like siblings, about twice the Girls' physical age. They were guarded by a couple of women in red, flowing robes. They had street-grade machine-pistols in their hands. Cultists.

A man in a similar robe stood before the Girls, in the same aisle. He seemed to be the guy in charge. His full beard and mustache, and long flowing hair invoked the appearance of a kind of religious leader.

"Ah yes, His young little angels..." the head cultist said as if greeting them in some kind of a party. "We've been expecting you."

There was an explosion outside. A grenade had gone off. Whether it belonged to a criminal or Blake's men, neither Girls knew. It worried Blossom - she was worried about Blake and friends. There was no telling if they were fine or shot dead. She saw the hostages at the front of the cinema, and that worried her too.

"Let them go, mister," Blossom warned the head cultist. "If you give up-"

"Give up? There's no giving up," the head cultist interrupted. "All will fall under His power willingly or otherwise. No, only by giving in to him will we truly be free – Blossom and Buttercup, let me propose to you this instead: join us and you will have anything to your hearts' desire!" He looked at Blossom eye-to-eye. "Blossom, He can give your friends peace and you, everything there is to know." He looked at Buttercup. "And Buttercup, only He can sate your desire for battle and glory, if you would let him."

"Who are you talking about?" Blossom asked.

"Really?" Buttercup could not help but utter, wanting to know more.

"Yes. And unlike even your dearest 'mother' and the USDO, He will not stop you from doing what you want with petty morality and philosophy..." the head cultist ignored Blossom and preached to her sister instead. Buttercup did not understand half of it, but she liked whatever she could grasp. Sick of Blossom and Dad telling her what to do, it sounded like a good deal.

"Don't listen to him, Buttercup! He's a bad guy!" Blossom said to her sister before turning back to the head cultist. "Let those poor people go, or you'll be sorry!"

"Very well," the head cultist said nonchalantly and made a gesture to his fellow cultists. The women in robes guarding the hostages unsheathed knives and placed them dangerously on the closest hostages' throats. "Then I'll make it simple for you. Give in to Him or watch those people die."

"Why do you have to be such a bully!?" Blossom shouted in disbelief. "What did those people ever do to you?"

"It's nothing personal. Their lives are immaterial but instrumental," the head cultist said, with a condescending smile aimed at Blossom. "So, what would it be? An inexhaustible supply of pleasure from knowing? Or pain and death?"

Blossom glared at the head cultist, glaring straight into his eyes, resisting the urge to blind them with her infrared beam. Her eyes kept switching between him and the hostages. But no, she
couldn't trust him. She knew not to trust strangers, much less those who were vague about their acquaintances and affiliation.

"Buttercup, the left hostage, now!" Blossom ordered as she flew towards one of the hostage takers, enduring a hailstorm of bullets from the shooters even as she unleashed her very own with her heat vision and MP5, knocking out several cultist shooters or wounding them. But before she could punch her out, she had already slit the security guard's throat. The same thing had happened with Buttercup's attempt at saving a hostage.

Then it happened. The other criminals in the room had started gunning down the hostages. After punching out her hostage taker, Blossom tried to help by descending upon the shooters with Buttercup by her side, ripping through cinema seats, tackling bad guys, but there were too many of them. Half the hostages had hit the floor, dead. The other half, out of fear. But there was also shooting coming from the projector room. A sniper, who had taken the life of another hostage prone on the floor without second thoughts.

"Buttercup, go up!" Blossom ordered as she continued to wreak havoc at the seats, giving one cultist a stunning upper-cut before smacking aside the machete of another and giving him a power-punch to the chest.

The head cultist did not run, but he stood where he was, watching with interest, arms folded behind him.

Buttercup flew up and into the projector room, breaking through the wall and smashing apart the film projector and knocking the red-robed cult sniper there into the wall. His wooden-stocked hunting rifle clattered to the ground. It seemed that his conviction had given him more tolerance to pain, as all he did was to scramble to his knees, ignoring his wounds and pain.

"Wait!" the cultist pleaded, and somehow, it'd gotten Buttercup's attention.

"What!?!" Buttercup asked brusquely with a shout. The cultist ripped off his pendant – which had a crab-like claw carved into it – and held it in his hand before putting out his arms as if expecting a hug from Buttercup.

"I sacrifice myself for your pleasure!" the cultist said. "Tear me to pieces, I ask of you!"

Buttercup hadn't thought about killing behind Blossom's back at first. Everything had happened so quickly that she didn't even have time to think. But now that the cultist had presented himself to her…

"Are you kidding? Why would you-?" Buttercup tried to interrogate the cultist, finding him and his request more strange than anything, but he'd interrupted her by tearing open his red robe and the buttoned T-shirt underneath, revealing flesh crisscrossed with scars.

"He requested this of me and I bow to his will!" the cultist explained, his face twitching and his lips shivering with some kind of an obscure and perverse pleasure he felt from this.

It'd enticed her entirely, the offer too good to pass up. It'd tempted her so much that she couldn't resist grinning. She'd already had an idea of what to do with him.

"If you insist – open your mouth," Buttercup ordered the cultist kneeling before her in submission. He did exactly as he was told, opening his mouth wide as if receiving the flesh of Christ during a Catholic mass.

Staring at the cultist with a hungry, intense look, Buttercup seized him by the lower jaw with her
other hand on his face and gave it the hardest yank she could muster. Blood splattered all over her vest when the cultist's lower jaw came right off, the skin and muscle snapping like wet rubber.

And he was still smiling, or at least what amounted to smiling when one no longer had a lower jaw. His upper lips were still curling upwards even as blood was being vomited out of the torn flesh and blood vessels below.

Next, Buttercup thrust her fist through the cultist's liver, cutting through flesh and hitting bone. She yanked whatever it was out, and it turned out to be the man's spine. It was the first time she had pulled a man's spine out through the liver - she didn't know she could do that. Unable to control his lower body any further, he fell on his back, upper lip still curled as he grasped Buttercup's arm lovingly, even caressing that very arm that was ravaging him.

"Urrgh..." Buttercup was disgusted by the man, how he was worshiping her arm. Taking one of it by the forearm, and putting a foot on his shoulder, she pulled it out by the shoulder socket before giving it a twist by the elbow as if it was a chicken wing, dislocating the elbow, and throwing the mutilated arm out of the way. The man had stopped moving by then, his upper lip uncurled. She gave him a kick in the side. No reaction. He was dead.

"There goes the fun..." she said, almost regretting how she had proceeded straight to tear the willing cultist apart - she thought she should have ripped off one finger at a time from his hands, or one tooth at a time. And it was all Blossom's fault! With her constant surveillance, she had made it a habit to rush through her kills. Her torture of Marcello was a fond memory, one that she wanted to replicate but hadn't been able to for the past month or so because of Blossom's tyranny.

The head cultist's offer had piqued her curiosity and interest. Would there have been more cultists for her to hurt and kill had she accepted his offer? The more she thought about his call to 'give in', the more she wanted to join up with him to find out... And she was so deep in thought that she was taken completely by surprise-

When Naga came bursting through the door to the projector room, tackling her out of it through the hole she made. It'd caught Buttercup so off-guard that she had forgotten to fly, and so the wayward little girl landed among the cinema chairs, groaning. After making a bigger hole for herself in the wall of the projector room by smashing the corners, Naga jumped out of it and landed close to her.

Blossom, who had to take down one gun-toting cultist or criminal at a time on her lonesome, was just punching out her last bad guy when Naga decided to join the fight.

Naga was armed differently this time, with a pair of shotguns, each wielded by two of her four arms. Her armor was the same, however, consisting of scale armor that reminded the Girls of a snake, and a hexagonal-patterned under-armor. Boots. Gloves. Hair tied into a bun. And her amber compound-iris eyes.

And she wasn't alone. The scraggly-bearded head cultist came forward, a serene smile on his face that was out of place in the chaotic battlefield. He unsheathed a machete, the blade of which seemed to reflect different colors of light at different times. However, it was his eyes that looked more dangerous - they had started glowing red somehow, and a normal person's eyes would not do that.

"Long time no see, Blossom," Naga said to the leader of The Three. "Ready for a rematch?"

"This is the last time you'll hurt my sister, Naga!" Blossom replied, balling up her fists, getting ready to strike.
"Are you sure, Little Miss Bossy?" Naga taunted as she pumped both her shotguns, working all four of her arms at once.

"Well, I'm sure!" Buttercup burst out of the heap of chairs she had landed in, a streak of green light following her up to the middle of the air. Without saying another word, she launched herself at Naga, who responded by firing both her shotguns at her.

Blossom, in the meantime, was engaged by the head cultist, who rushed her with his machete, taking swipes at her as he shouted like a madman while she dodged the surprisingly fast and furious blade strikes.

Buttercup had missed Naga on her initial attack, having been distracted by the twin shotgun blasts as she had to put up her arms to shield her face. She wasn't prepared when Naga lunged forward at her. Buttercup ended up crashing through a pillar holding up the projector room, causing it to crash down upon her.

The head cultist wound up his sword arm for a sweeping strike with his machete, only for Blossom to dart out of the way deftly as she was floating. Sensing an opportunity, she jabbed at him in the throat with a kick, knocking him back as he clutched his neck, momentarily unable to breathe. Sensing a chance to quickly neutralize the cultist as a threat, she went in for a tackle, knocking him down an aisle, herself rolling with him, before delivering a knock-out blow to his jaw.

Except he wasn't knocked out. He'd taken it like a champ, somehow stronger than a regular human being - than a human being trained for combat, even. The next thing she knew, she felt her skin split in her thigh, pain erupting as if acid was poured on her leg, before going deep down to her bone. She darted backward, looking down at her leg… To realize that she had been slashed in the thigh, and blood was pooling there. Seeing it made the pain worst. Clutching her wound, Blossom stifled a scream and held back tears as the head cultist rose, a bloody machete in hand. The weapon had turned out to be Duranium - Blossom thought that she recognized the inconsistent shine of the world's hardest metal.

Bursting out of the concrete rubble that had fallen over her, Buttercup shot towards Naga, knocking over more cinema chairs. The four-armed woman sidestepped the charge and whirled around just in time to block Buttercup when she had stopped quickly to throw some punches on her back.

Letting go of her shotguns, which hung on her neck, Naga continued to block Buttercup's unskilled but brutal strikes, before launching a knee at her, which Buttercup blocked with her own.

The tide was turning – Naga began throwing out punches of her own, in seemingly random combinations, at speeds only an enhanced being could ever hope to match. Upper left, lower right – then both upper arms – followed by both left arms then both right arms. When Naga punched with all her fists, Buttercup was thrown for a loop and was only able to block her upper arms while neglecting the lowers, which struck her in the stomach, sending her flying into the silver screen, breaking the fourth wall.

Seeing that Buttercup was in trouble, Blossom opted to end her confrontation early by firing a quick and dirty pair of weak heat beams weighed to knock out the head cultist, only for him to throw up his hands over his face, blocking it but receiving burns on his forearms.

Blossom stared at the cultist wide-eyed, mouth dropping. Just who was he? For her entire life, no ordinary man could withstand her attacks.

She simply couldn't believe it. Heating her eyes up, she charged them for a big one. The head cultist took the opportunity to draw a pistol from within his robes. They both fired at the same
time, both of them blocking each other's shots simultaneously. The man was burnt; Blossom felt a sharp pain deep in her forearm.

But the head cultist had finally gone down, his blocking arm burned severely, his robe on fire. But so had Blossom, who lost control of her flight and collapsed from the severe pain. It was a Duranium bullet, fired from a Duranium pistol.

Meanwhile, Buttercup flew through the hole in the silver screen – she wasn't done with Naga yet – and straight at the four-armed woman with a flying kick only to be grabbed by the ankle and slammed into the floor, creating a crater in the carpeted wood, with Buttercup fallen through.

Sensing an opportunity, Buttercup sprang up and through the floor right underneath Naga, hitting her in her unmentionables with her right fist, causing her to fall back, clutching her groin with her lower two arms in a near-fetal position as her face contorted with pain. Floating upwards, Buttercup took advantage of Naga's fall by propelling herself at her head foot-first - what was meant to be a killing blow - but Naga had forced herself to roll out of the way. Buttercup's foot was buried in the floor instead of flesh and bone.

Blossom was clutching her arm as she dragged herself behind a cinema seat, bearing with an excruciating sensation that was spreading fast. Examining her arm, she immediately regretted it when she realized that the Duranium bullet had gone right through her forearm and embedded itself between her chest and belly. She could feel it in her, not as a tiny bullet, but as a bubble of pain, pulsing and expanding; the only good thing was that it had taken residence in her flesh and not a vital organ, not too deep from the surface.

Meanwhile, the head cultist was getting up. One of his arms was burned severely and in too much pain to be of any use. He tossed his robe away, letting it burn on the floor. Returning his pistol to its holster, he picked up his machete and started coming towards Blossom, intending to do his master's bidding and complete the task.

"Enough of this!" Naga screamed in frustration as she struggled to her feet and drew four swords from her back. "It's time for this to end!"

The flash of four Duranium-edged blades had intimidated Buttercup. The battle had dragged on for too long, and she was becoming weary, especially after getting thrown through too many walls and the floor. She'd even had trouble getting her foot out of the ground. As she tried desperately to pull it out, Naga began charging her, swords held with their tips facing her, hungry for her blood.

The moment Buttercup could see her reflection on the lethal blades, she forced herself to take flight, expending now-precious X-energy. She had only narrowly averted being cut to ribbons as she could feel sharp edges on her right arm. Stopping the thrust in mid-air, she let herself drop in an arc further down the movie theater. Naga continued her pursuit. Knowing that she couldn't run anymore, Buttercup dug in her heels and prepared to counter-charge the snake woman. Staring intensely at Naga, she plotted her next moves, her decision changing with each twirl of Naga's quad blades.

It felt impossible - it would be like brushing clay against a cheese grate and expecting it to come out fine. Fear broke through the steel fence in her heart as she realized just how much trouble she was in. Her vision grew green for some reason - which was when it happened. Naga's charge was broken somehow, and Buttercup saw her armor split, blood spurting out and skin tearing out of the blue - or out of the green. The four-armed woman dived for cover, which was when lines were cut into the cinema seats she was hiding behind.

But before she knew it, her green vision was gone, and when it was over, Buttercup felt exhaustion
more severe than before - and it hit her belatedly that she had discovered her own version of the heat beam, except things did not burst into flames with her. Things were cut up right before her eyes instead.

Buttercup's joy at discovering a power that would put her on the same league as Blossom, however, was cut short when Naga hurled a cinema seat at her. Although the seat was well-cushioned, the force was great, sending her rolling down-range, back closer to the silver screen. Heaving the chair off, she discovered too late that Naga was swinging and thrusting her swords at her. She could only dodge so far before her back was to the wall, and by then, she felt, immediately, Naga's vengeance cutting through her face and chest before she was able to roll out of the way, turn tail completely and run. Drawing her pistol out of desperation, Buttercup fired multiple shots behind her on her retreat, which did little to hinder her enemy.

Blossom, in the meantime, was just as exhausted as her toughest sister, and she could only crawl away from the head cultist as he came closer and closer to her, machete held high above his head, and he couldn't wait to bring it down. Then there was the added complication of the head cultist's rear guard bursting into Cinema 3 - swallowing her pride, Blossom drew her pistol and fired on them, taking one down with no idea if she'd killed him and forcing the other to take cover behind a corner speaker.

They had served well as distractions, however, as the head cultist was able to gain on her with a sudden sprint, hacking at her with his machete, putting deep cuts in her shoulder and her arms when she threw her hands up. She could only cry helplessly not like a little girl, but as a little girl, as she began feeling faint from the pain, her vision blurring...

Buttercup wasn't far away from her, in terms of physical location and state. As she continued to retreat, Naga hurled two of her swords at Buttercup - one she narrowly dodged by ducking, but the other going right through her left thigh, causing her to fall forward, next to Blossom.

"It is done," the head cultist said cryptically as he stood over Blossom. Naga came up beside him, adding two more blades to the execution squad. Blossom shielded her face with an injured arm, afraid of what might happen next, while Buttercup had flipped herself to a supine position, a hand on the Duranium blade in her left thigh, afraid to pull it out and yet afraid to leave it in.

"My, my, you kids are growing up so fast. You girls are becoming a handful," Naga taunted as she twirled her blades in anticipation for the kill. "Too bad Bubbles isn't here to save the day - again - I would sure love to kill her too."

Blossom couldn't help but think back to her folly of succumbing to the rage in her and ending up mistreating her sister. Anger is temporary insanity, and outside of it, she could only regret it. Had Bubbles been beside them, things might have gone differently; there would have been some chance that she would have redeemed herself and done something to save them or turn the tide.

"I'm sorry," Blossom mumbled deliriously in between sobs as she cringed from the impending doom standing over her.
Stanley Talker didn't so much as found Bubbles as she had flown right by him - and when he'd barked and shouted at her to stop, she wouldn't. In the split second he'd seen her, however, he knew that something was wrong. The color of her eyes was different, and so was her X-energy contrail. It was baby blue, and now it was bleeding red from the center. He should know - being a dog, he saw the world in a spectrum of blue to yellow - that her eyes and part of her contrail had turned yellow to him was disconcerting. Frightening, even. Since when could humans, even enhanced humans, do that without their mystical technology?

Bubbles had returned to the Silver Age Cineplex in just a couple of minutes, ignoring police warnings to stop, not even stopping to help Agent Blake and his men to finish off the remainder of their ambusher. Despite not knowing Blossom and Buttercup's location, she didn't have to - her Sister Sense had gotten stronger, and she was able to locate them by how its increasing strength had denoted proximity instead.

Knocking down the two sets of strong double doors leading into Cinema 3, she was met with the sight of her sisters on the floor of a cinema aisle, both of them severely injured and looking incredibly exhausted. Helpless. Bubbles' hellish red eyes went from her sisters to Naga then the insignificant cultist beside her. Before, she would have seen an insurmountable obstacle, a mountain with four crane-like arms. Now, all she saw was red - rage and blood.

The cultist Blossom had forced into hiding behind a corner speaker had made the mistake of coming out at the wrong time and shooting Bubbles. The bullets and pain were ignored. His presence as a pest and annoyance wasn't. Turning to him, Bubbles zipped to him and shredded his face with a single swipe of her fingernails - the fingertips of one of her gloves were cut open at the same time. He was knocked back, finding purchase on a cinema seat, and when he tried to get back up, Bubbles punched him so hard that his head flew down the movie theatre and bounced off the silver screen, making a splatter of blood. The suddenly headless body twitched as it collapsed. She then turned to Naga.

"You're next!" Bubbles growled at the four-armed woman with a kind of hatred that even Buttercup couldn't muster up.

"You'll pay for that bite you gave me!" Naga proclaimed stubbornly, referring to their first encounter when Bubbles had actually saved Buttercup in The Strip by climbing on the snake woman's back and chomping down on her neck.

Without another word, Bubbles flew across the theatre and cannonball-tackled Naga, at the same
time ignoring the sword cuts she gave her, even though it had split skin and spilled blood. The tackle had sent Naga tumbling down towards the silver screen, losing her swords in the process.

"The chosen is here - it is done," the head cultist simply said as he walked away, refusing to help Naga.

Getting up, Naga stood in a defensive stance, her arms held in a posture with certain strikes prepared. Bubbles zipped towards her, swinging a destructive punch, which Naga ducked. The lady returned it with a right hook to Bubbles' face, then a left hook, both of which Bubbles simply laughed them off maniacally like a joke.

"Bub…Bles?" Blossom groaned as she saw what was happening. The Bubbles in the theater was unrecognizable from the Bubbles she knew. The way she fought - the way she talked. It was as if she was a whole other person.

"You have more arms to break than me!" Bubbles simply laughed madly as she gave Naga an unexpected uppercut which sent her stumbling back. Desperate, Naga drew her shotguns out of desperation and fired both of them at Bubbles - doing a grand total of nothing except pushing her back and ruining her Kevlar arm guards and vest. Bubbles launched towards her again, delivering a flying kick aimed at her chest, which Naga blocked by forming a cross with her shotguns. The force of Bubbles' kick was so great that it'd broke both shotguns in two. Naga was sent flying into the silver screen with a loud crash, the force paralyzing her. Falling out of a crater she'd made, she dropped to her knees.

Bubbles floated menacingly towards Naga. While still on her knees, Naga aimed two punches with her left arms - but it was like punching a Duranium wall. In response, Bubbles chuckled masochistically and gave her the same kind of right hook that beheaded her ally. It was only by virtue of her enhanced resistance that the same did not happen to her. Naga had been trying to get up, but the blow had put her back on her knees again.

Stubbornly, Naga went for a double right punch, which Bubbles blocked with ease before she screamed like an animal and clawed at her with her fingernails, putting numerous cuts and slashes in the snake woman's face, even putting tears in her armor. At the same time, Bubbles' gloves had basically become fingerless. Grabbing her by the neck with her left hand, Bubbles continued to pound on her with her right hand, sometimes aiming at her head, sometimes her chest.

Buttercup could only watch in disbelief and wonder if a second Bubbles had taken the place of the crybaby coward she knew.

"One is my favorite number!" Bubbles screamed deliriously as she slammed Naga against the ground on a prone position. She stepped on one of Naga's forearms and broke it by bending it backward with both her hands. A loud, spine-tingling crunch resulted and Naga screamed – her illusion of invincibility destroyed. Finding the woman's pained cry annoying, Bubbles delivered a kick to her skull. "I'll break you bit by bit for what you did!"

"One is followed by two!" Bubbles screeched as she stepped on a second arm and bent that too, breaking it with a sickening crack using her bare hands. Miraculously, despite the excruciating pain she felt, Naga was able to elbow Bubbles in the face, throw her off and get up on her knees. It wasn't even an inconvenience to Bubbles, however, and when Naga followed this up with another feeble punch with one of her remaining arms, Bubbles intercepted it with her own punch, breaking Naga's hand, rendering a third arm useless. "Two plus one is three! Hehe- hehehehehe-"

"You… sick little… freak…" Naga muttered while she was on her knees as she bore with the pain in most of her arms, as she listened, in fear, to Bubbles giggling like a sick puppy. The enhanced
Sensing that Naga was no longer a threat, Bubbles touched down, clutching her head as she panted from exertion. She could feel it coming down - the fairy godmother's blessing was running its course. The return to a lack of constant pleasure and a state of constant fear was painful to Bubbles such that she was gasping and wincing.

"Bubbles?" Blossom's pained call was the only thing that could distract her from the withdrawal. Bubbles turned around, her pupils changing color from hellish red to baby blue when she did. Blossom had been limping towards her when the change in color alarmed her and caused her to freeze. But the red was just a glimpse, however, a blink-and-you'll-miss moment, such that Blossom was questioning her own eyesight when she saw it.

Buttercup was coming up behind her, one of Naga's swords still in her thigh. She was putting most of her weight on her good leg, and she had to lean on Blossom for support.

"Blossom? Buttercup?" Bubbles said as she walked up to them. Buttercup tried to come closer, but she'd nearly fell had Bubbles not warped forward to hold her up. Blossom limped up next to her.

"I'm sorry for everything, Blossom," Bubbles apologized to them, her eyes swimming in tears. "For being weak - for letting all those criminals go… and those children…"

Blossom hugged her. She knew what was wrong, and it certainly wasn't Bubbles. It had been her all along - the anger in her, and how she had failed to be a good leader and sister even when she loved Bubbles as a sister.

"No, Bubbles," Blossom said. "I should be the one saying sorry. I shouldn't have yelled at you, or hit you."

"Yeah, and that was hardcore, Bubbles!" Buttercup exclaimed with a smile.

"You mean it?" Bubbles said, unable to believe that she had found acceptance with Buttercup too, something that seemed impossible and unattainable before.

"But how did you do it, Bubbles?" Blossom asked.

"Oh, I… um…" Bubbles struggled with the explanation. She knew she couldn't reveal it. Her Dad had taught all of them about the horrors of Townsville, and drug use was one of them. Though he'd tactfully explained it in a more child-friendly way, it was enough for Bubbles to know that what she did - using the fairy godmother's magic - was wrong. Her Dad would have called it 'abominable', 'reprehensible' and 'evil', along with other impressive vocabularies that only adults know.

"It's a new power I discovered!" Bubbles lied, forcing a smile and faking her excitement over it. Why should it matter that she had to drug herself and lie to her sisters? As long as she had saved the day and the lives of her sisters? Why should it bother her when she had finally found redemption with Blossom and acceptance with Buttercup? Blossom was entirely convinced by the lie - she had never known Bubbles to be a liar, and it was a perfectly logical explanation for the red eyes if she could even trust her eyesight after the beating she took.

"Hey, I discovered a new power too!" Buttercup added. "I can cut things with my eyes now!"

Outside Cinema 3, the sound of gunshots had long ceased. From every door leading into the movie theater, USDO and police officers alike were bursting through, only to discover that the day was saved… thanks to Townsville's Angels of Justice.
Agent Blake's men were quick to secure Naga, putting Duranium cuffs on her many arms and dragging her away. The head cultist was nowhere to be found, however, though his followers and criminal allies - the majority of who were alive, just wounded - were arrested on the spot.

Detective Mullens and Olivia followed up behind the cops and soldiers, searching the cinema for the Girls. Stanley Talker had to boost himself up behind a seat, and when he saw Bubbles, he barked happily a few times, showing a typically doggy grin. They ran up to the Girls, with Stanley in the lead. The talking dog darted up to Bubbles, before putting his forepaws on her shoulders and licking her face.

"You're ralright!" the talking dog said in between licks. "Ri ras rorrried rabout you!"

"I'm fine, really," Bubbles said with a giggle. "What makes you think I won't be?"

"Ras ruch ras Ri like you, Rur-rles," Stanley said as he finally backed down. "You're rot a good fighter."

"I've discovered a new power now, Mister Talker," Bubbles said with forced pride as she'd put her arms around her sisters, each of them supporting the other as their injuries had mounted over the course of today's battle. "I think I'll be okay from now on." Of course, Bubbles had said this from a short-term point of view, the only one she was capable of at the moment - the fairy godmother had got to have more magic to give her - she's got to have more!

That was when Bubbles could feel pain humming in her chest and jaw, getting hotter and hotter. She winced. Blossom and Buttercup had to carry her all of a sudden when she sagged.

"Rur-rles? Are you rokay?" Stanley Talker asked, and there was no answer immediately. He whimpered as a result. "You know, your reyes rere re-" the talking dog could not finish his sentence before Bubbles lunged forward and wrapped her hands around the dog's muzzle. Quickly, she led the dog aside.

Meanwhile, Detective Mullens and Olivia had just reached them - they were detained by a quick meeting with Agent Blake, USDO soldiers and TPD officers.

"What was that about?" Mullens asked off-handedly as he watched Bubbles lead Stanley Talker away by his snout – an odd sight indeed. But thinking that it was nothing more than just some childish exchange of petty secrets between a 3-month-old enhanced little girl and a 2-year-old talking dog, he went on his way to talking to Blossom and Buttercup. "Jeez, you girls are in a bad way." He'd said this while looking at the sword that had gone through Buttercup's thigh. "We'll have to get you to your pops, sooner the better."

"But good job, Girls," Olivia praised them. "Naga has terrorized Townsville long enough - believe me, she was way worse when we didn't know she existed."

"What are we going to do with her?" Blossom asked.

"Your USDO buddies will take care of it," Mullens said. "They probably have a million questions to ask her, and a thousand old scores to settle. The fun's just beginning."

The detectives' meeting with Blake and the USDO a minute ago had been about this. Apparently, they had to figure out what to do with Naga. A quick debate solved the issue, however - while Naga had committed numerous crimes within Townsville, such that the TPD had jurisdiction, the police's lack of equipment and infrastructure to deal with enhanced individuals precluded the local authorities from jailing Naga and conventionally processing her through the local justice system.
Since she was originally the USDO's responsibility, she was to be returned to them for containment instead.

"Rur-les! Not the whiskers!" Stanley Talker exclaimed after Bubbles finally let go when they'd found themselves a corner. "What ras that rabout?"

Bubbles sat down on a carpeted step beside Stanley as she contemplated deeply, more than she had before, about what to say to the talking dog. She traced the zigzagged lines forming a pattern in the carpet with her eyes as she did so until she finally made eye contact with the talking dog.

"Can you keep a secret, Mister Doggy?" Bubbles asked.

"Rof course, Rur-les," Stanley Talker promised. "What ris it rabout?"

"It's my red eyes," Bubbles said, and even then, she was still trying to think of a convincing lie. She was never any good at it, as unlike Buttercup, she lacked practice. Eventually, she fell back to the closest thing she could get her hands on: "Please don't mention it. It's part of my new power, and I don't like the color."

"Roh hoh hoh!" Stanley Talker imitated the human laughter as he made a doggy grin. "That's rit?"

Y-yes…" Bubbles stammered. "Why? Was there something else you saw?"

The talking dog couldn't help but peak his ears when Bubbles asked that question. He studied her while tilting his head slightly. The question was odd, but he couldn't quite put a paw on what made it suspicious.

"No, not rat rall," Stanley Talker finally said, deciding finally that he was wrong to suspect the sweet and innocent Bubbles. She'd been the victim since… forever. There was no way she could do any wrong.

Blossom had gotten sad all of a sudden. Floating up to the armrest of a mostly intact cinema seat, she sat on it as she shed a tear. Looking over at the dead bodies down the theater, near the silver screen, she hinted at why. Detective Mullens and Olivia could tell. Buttercup was kept guessing.

"It's not your fault," the detective said. "Your friends were pounced on, and the seconds were ticking."

"I wish I could save them," Blossom said, nearly in tears. She was looking down at the children. One of them was shot in the chest and killed. The other, a boy, was crying over her dead body. Both security guards had been killed, one of them with his throat slit while the other was shot in the forehead. One of the woman hostages did not survive the dozens of shots aimed at her.

"It's okay- You did what you could," Olivia comforted her as she came forward and gave her a hug.

"What my daughter said," Detective Mullens added as he came up beside Blossom and Olivia. "Besides, you've saved more than you didn't. I don't know if my boys could have done the same. I've lived through too many moments when they couldn't."

"You Girls rock!" one of the hostages shouted as he was being led by a police officer out of the theater - he happened to be passing by.

"Yeah!" a young woman beside the male hostage added. She was clutching his arm. They were a couple, presumably.
"Don't be sad, Blossom. You're better than either of us in crime-fighting," Bubbles tried to console her sister. "It's why you're our leader."

It had only compounded the guilt Blossom felt. She didn't comfort Bubbles as a sister should when she was upset. Instead, she'd shouted at her and even struck her - on multiple occasions. At that exact moment, she remembered what Dad had said about this - that they should stay together as sisters no matter what happens so that they would always have a family whenever they were far from home.

"I think it's time I take you Girls home," Agent Blake said as he approached the Girls.

"Just like before?" Blossom sniffled, feeling a little better as she was surrounded by friends and family. Her guilt, however, required another solution.

"Just like before," Agent Blake agreed.

"Oh yeah!" Buttercup really agreed even as she winced hobbled along to join the crowd. Blake scooped her up carefully so she didn't have to inch her way around painstakingly.

---

**The City of Townsville. Tenement-Downtown District Limits. En-Route to USDO Headquarters.**

10 FEB (Friday) 1989. 2031.

It took Naga a while for her to come to. She had never been beaten so thoroughly in a one-sided battle before, not since she was something else - pond scum that would barely qualify as a human being. The moment she had awoken, she found herself sitting down, and when she tried to stand up, she found that she couldn't, and it wasn't just the sharp pain erupting in three of her arms, which rattled. Her hands were all cuffed to a bar on the seat ahead of her. She was in a prison bus, and she could easily guess that she was on a one-way street back into USDO custody.

All around her were seated heavily-armed USDO security officers and soldiers - about twenty of them were guarding her. Even without Duranium weaponry, they could easily overwhelm her as she had been chained by her broken arms and too much pain even without injury could knock her back into unconsciousness.

"Well, looks like our favorite four-armed freak's awake! Good evening, honey," one of the USDO soldiers walked up to her, greeting with what could only be sarcasm in his voice. A bald man in his thirties. She recognized him. He was one of the guards assigned to her since the very day she was transferred to the USDO back when it was still the shadowy Organization, back when she was still human. "I hope you're comfortable where you are."

"Very much, yeah. Thanks for the world-class limousine," Naga said defiantly. "It's real fucking comfortable. How's Carl and gang by the way?"

What Naga said last had pissed off the USDO soldier - she was referring to his security friends, those who were killed in her breakout. He punched her in the temple - the hardest punch he could muster. Yet still, the Naga laughed, brokenly and malevolently. No one in the soldier's security detail cared. They all knew the story, and a punch from a regular human being was far from what Naga deserved.
"You punch like a little girl," Naga insulted the man derisively. The USDO soldier grabbed her by the throat, squeezing it. As much as he was trying to choke the enhanced individual, he couldn't do it, however. Naga need only flex her neck muscles to prevent the squeeze - not to mention the fact that her windpipe could not be crushed with just the strength in a normal man's hand.

"Oh, you have no idea. You have no fucking idea," the bald soldier snarled with seething anger. "You're going to pay for what you did. We're going to make you cry and beg and squeal. You think your arms are broken? You have no idea. Just like how you have no idea how much fun we're going to have extracting every single scrap of information in your brain as we drill and cut and break you with Duranium. I'm going to personally feed you your spare arms if there's anything left of you after that."

With that, the USDO soldier gave her another punch, this time aimed at the jaw, which Naga laughed off all the same.

"I'm going to enjoy using you as a punchbag - and we still have plenty of time before we reach headquarters," the man growled as removed his XM4 carbine from his shoulder and placed it on his seat. "I'm sure you don't mind, milady - since I punch like a little girl. Like Bubbles, who defeated you on her own, I heard."

"Are you sure she defeated me on her own?" Naga said with a stubborn chortle.

As the prison bus ferrying Naga was en route towards the USDO HQ, a short, muscular and oddly-shaped creature was leaping from rooftop to rooftop in stealthy pursuit of the vehicle. Despite being organic, it was able to match speeds with the vehicle easily, and with stoplights slowing it down, caught up with it very quickly.

A red light came up just as the prison bus was about to turn a corner in a T-junction. Leaping from a shorter building a taller one, the oddly-shaped creature clambered up to the edge of the roof's ledge, looking down on the prison bus. There was no rush - and plenty of time for what came next.

The creature didn't even need to exert any strength to leap, nor brace itself for the task of falling off eight floors and down on a vehicle made of steel. Nor was it afraid as it fell, descending down upon the bus as gravity allowed, putting a huge man-sized crater on the roof of the bus.

USDO security officers and soldiers were scrambling within the bus, shouting. Shotguns, submachineguns, and rifles were pointed upwards. A staccato of rapid gunfire aimed at the crater came next, but the bus rocked as whatever was on the roof skittered on top. The bullets followed its vague path on the roof, putting holes in it but hitting nothing and revealing not a single part of the attacker, but every part of the USDO operatives' fears. Whatever that was attacking them was no ordinary human being. Or even a human being, for that matter.

The driver took the initiative, ignoring the red light to respond to the emergency. The skittering on the roof, however, was coming closer to him. Drawing his pistol even as he steered the bus with his other hand, he fired it upwards at the sound of the skittering. A furry, gloved hand, clearly not human, burst through the roof and seized him by his pistol hand, crushing it against his own weapon. The driver screamed. The inhuman arm was relentless, next seizing the driver by the throat and with a squeeze, crushed his windpipe and slammed him against the steel back of the bus cab section.

Without a driver, the bus swerved at the whims of the attacker as he gave the steering wheel a spin. It went over the curb and on the sidewalk, crashing into an apartment building. Before that happened, however, the attacker had punched another hole in the roof of the bus, pulled it wide open and jumped into the bus. Bracing himself for the crash, he watched as the officers and
soldiers within the bus were thrown all over the passenger compartment while he remained rooted to the floor.

The commander of the prison bus had been sitting to the left of the driver in the large cab section of the prison bus. Like all the others, he had been thrown forward when the bus had crashed - his attempts at intervening when the driver was attacked had damned him to severe injury as he was out of his seat, and he was sent flying into the windshield. However, as he was strong and well-protected by helmet and kevlar, he wasn't out for the count.

Groaning, he was able to take a good look at the attacker during the lull after the crash: exposed brain covered in a reinforced glass dome, black fur, green discolored skin. It was wearing a cape over a bullet-resistant, loose-fitting uniform. White gloves, white boots. He lifted his XM4 carbine with difficulty as blood and cranial trauma clouded his vision. The thing turned to him and bashed the assault rifle away before he could fire. The commander's last memory was of the glowing, dark brown eyes of the beast now known as Mojo Jojo as there was a sudden laser flash from a weapon it pointed at him. He was instantly liberated from his own body as he felt a burning pain in his neck, tumbling back into his seat skull-first as he watched his body - which he could no longer control, tumbling to the floor of the bus. He could not breathe, nor shout orders and warn his comrades, and when enough blood had spurted from the arteries of his severed neck, he was finally granted his final rest.

Mojo Jojo continued to fire laser into the USDO guards surrounding Naga, beheading those who dared to stick their neck out and fire at him like their commander and slicing into them through the bus seats even when they didn't.

Before long, what was once a proud and dutiful twenty-strong squad was a mere fraction of it, both in manpower and spirit. Mojo Jojo strolled up the center aisle of the bus, clutching his chest. Out of the hundred or so bullets that struck him, a few had managed to dig into his skin, or even cause a hairline fracture or two, he imagined. It was a constant source of his jealousy for The Three – their creation using Chemical X as opposed to Chemical W, followed by exposure to Chemical X had given them better physical enhancements than him. But no matter – he knew he could bridge the gap with his intellect where the Girls would wallow in their own willful ignorance and flounder to learn even basic facts.

As the enhanced Chimpanzee neared Naga, who was crying in pain from her broken arms, another USDO soldier stood out and fired shots at the sapient animal, shots that ultimately did nothing as Mojo Jojo returned fire, cutting through the brave soldier's XM4 carbine and severing the brave soldier's arm, the wound spurting blood as the soldier grabbed at it as if his arm was still there, screaming as he fell.

Mojo Jojo walked up to him, pointing the laser pistol at the man's bald head, about to fire when Naga intervened:

"Wait," she said, before turning to look at the fallen man. "He's mine."

"The concept of revenge. A little payback. Tit-for-tat. I can understand vengeance, the close cousin of justice," Mojo Jojo lifted his weapon as he stepped back. "I saw what he was doing through the windows of the bus. Hitting you, striking you. He's yours."

With that, Mojo Jojo pointed his laser device at the chains of the shackles restraining Naga and fired, freeing her. With her one good arm remaining, the four-armed woman grabbed hold of the bar her chains were connected to and, with immense difficulty because of her injuries, broke it free with a loud 'thunk!' She held it menacingly over her USDO tormentor with a victorious grin on her face.
"Fuck you!" the soldier spat as he grimaced in pain while writhing on the floor. Naga swung her metal bar down at him wordlessly, striking him in the bald head, the sound of bone crunching loud and impossible to miss. She repeated the stroke multiple times, caving the man's skull in until he stopped writhing. Until the only thing moving on him was his twitching eyelids and cheeks. Naga thought she liked him better that way. True, he was one of the nicer security officers back then before she killed all his friends, but he was just as guilty as them by association. He was USDO, and that was enough of a reason to kill him.

She brought the steel bar down on him one last time, smashing his face to a pulp until there wasn't even any twitching left.

"I am glad you had your fill," Mojo Jojo said as he put a hand on Naga's shoulder, tugging gently. "But we must go now – bolt, flee, retreat!" There were sirens in the distance as if the city was coming alive and coming for them.

"No! I want to take this all in," Naga said, shrugging the Chimpanzee's gloved hand off. "I don't ever want to forget this beautiful scene."

Seconds later, she turned around.

"Thank you – for everything," Naga said.

"You saved me in my darkest, lowest, most terrible hour," Mojo Jojo said as he stood back to look Naga from head to toe. "It is only fitting that I do the same. It looks to me that our new ally does not value our lives and limbs." Mojo Jojo gestured at Naga's broken arms when referring to 'limbs'.

"It doesn't matter, as long as we have an ally as powerful as him," Naga said as she stumbled over the dead bodies on the floor of the bus, brushing past Mojo Jojo. "Pretty soon, Townsville, and even the entire nation, will bend to the Foundation's will."

"But in the meantime, Mojo will fix your arms," Mojo Jojo said. Naga smiled at him. They both clambered out of the corpse-filled bus together and ran. With their enhanced speed, they were long gone before the police could arrive on the scene.
Chapter 24: Wrongs Righted

Chapter Summary

Things come to a head after Bubbles had saved the day (with the help of the fairy godmother).

Chapter 24: Wrongs Righted

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

10 FEB (Friday) 1989. 2105.

The Girls, even Bubbles, had to undergo surgery again because of their fight in the Silver Age Cineplex. Blossom's slash wounds required dozens of stitches. Buttercup needed to have Naga's Duranium blade removed from her thigh, and the damage to the artery, muscle and skin there repaired. Bubbles was crying all the way home when the pain started flaring up like forest fires in her jaws and chest. As it turned out, Naga's punches had fractured her lower jaw and a few ribs, though the fractures weren't serious and needed no surgical intervention - the surgery part came in only when it came to the cut in her forehead and lower jaw, involving at least two dozen stitches.

The fact that she was feeling pain again, and as a result, fear and anxiety, worried Bubbles. The fairy godmother had blessed her with her magic tonight - but what about other nights? As naive as Bubbles was, she knew that crime wasn't going to disappear overnight just because she had defeated Naga. Without more of her magic, she was going to be afraid and anxious again, and she was going to fail and fight poorly at every turn. Blossom's love and forgiveness and Buttercup's acceptance, two things she had fought so hard for, two things she treasured the most, other than Dad and his love, would likely evaporate once more until things would go back to how it was.

The fairy godmother had made no mention of how she would help her from now onwards, but she could only hope that she would provide her with a steady supply of her magic.

Because there was one other thing she needed from it. The drug for the sake of itself. It'd felt good - so good. Pleasurable. Addictive. How it banished her fears and anxieties entirely. For now, even as she sat in the lab, it was as if the fear and anxiety in her were stronger than before - mostly because she knew that she would feel the worst of it next time, without the fairy godmother's magic. But there was something more. Somehow, her fears and anxieties were less controllable than ever.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

10 FEB (Friday) 1989. 2215.

"Dad, there's something I need to tell you," Blossom said to her father as she was alone with him in the bathroom, getting a sponge bath from him as usual.

"What is it, sugar plum?" Professor Utonium said as he carefully wiped away the soap around her stitches with a sponge.
"I've been hurting Bubbles," she said, her voice shaking with a combination of sadness, regret, and fear of her own father. It was something she had to do - she knew that apologizing to Bubbles wasn't enough.

The professor stopped, and put down the wet sponge he'd been wielding, shocked at the implications of Blossom's confession.

"I… know. You pushed Bubbles in The Strip when you didn't like how she smelled," the professor said, hoping that that was the end of that. How could Blossom, the nicest and smartest of The Three, possibly be abusive to her sister?

"No, Dad. Even before that. And after, and… and it wasn't just because she smelled bad," Blossom said, tears rolling down her cheeks. "I slapped her when she didn't save me from the Purple Man… And I didn't just push her once when she didn't save those children in The Strip. I slapped her at the movies today and… she fell and hit her head on a car because of me."

"Oh honey…" the professor said, unsure of how to react to this.

"I'm sorry," Blossom apologized "I've changed, Dad."

"No… You haven't," the professor decided. "You're still my little Blossom. You're a good girl, sweetie."

"But I've hurt Bubbles so many times!" Blossom said, unable to believe her Dad's reaction.

"And you told me about it instead of hiding it," the professor said. "I won't deny that you've made a serious error in judgment - a series of it. But it's only human - and you've been going through some terrible things."

"I won't do it again, Dad," Blossom said. "I promise."

"Did you apologize to Bubbles?" he asked.

"Yes…" Blossom said.

"And did you promise Bubbles too that you won't hurt her again?" the professor asked.

"Yes," Blossom said.

"There will still be consequences though," the professor, however, said firmly. "I'm sorry."

"I know," Blossom agreed. They hugged after that.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

11 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 1412.

The next day, when the Girls had recovered enough, Professor Utonium left The House with Bubbles and Buttercup, taking them out for a puppet show extravaganza - something that would help them forget about the week's struggle.

Blossom, however, was excluded from the day's entertainment excursion as punishment. She was left behind at home with Selicia, whom the professor had entrusted with the parental duty of further providing some form of penalty for hurting her own dearest sister. Thomas and Selicia had agreed on an entire day's worth of house chores. As such, while Bubbles and Buttercup spent an hour
laughing at puppets, many more on rides and games and chomping on burgers and fries, Blossom had to tidy her room, vacuum the rest of The House, mop it, clean the entire family's armory and every bathroom in The House. Lunch was oatmeal. Dinner was worse; a bowl of vegetable salad that Selicia had deliberately made plain and unappetizing.

What Thomas and Selicia did not agree to, which Selicia had kept secret, was when she'd asked Blossom to strip naked and sit on the toilet. Selicia, who was in her USDO security uniform because she had to report to headquarters in the morning for a security review, had brought her stun baton up. She'd kept her uniform on throughout the day for the authority it loan her. Now, she stood imposingly over Blossom, who was rendered helpless by her own guilt and Selicia's power over her as a parent. Furthermore, she was tired from slaving through chore after chore from lunch to dinner and demoralized from the lack of fun and a good meal.

It was the perfect set-up. Toilet aside, should the rest of the family return home unexpectedly, she could just hide the baton, clean Blossom up and claim that she was just about to give her a sponge bath.

"Do you know why I'm doing this, honey?" Selicia asked as she pushed a tab on the handle of her USDO-issued stun baton all the way up, setting the stun baton to maximum charge – which would be excruciating and paralyzing for a normal adult human being, but 'just' plain excruciating for any of the Girls.

"Because I've been a bad sister to Bubbles…" Blossom said, downcast.

"And Buttercup too," Selicia added to Blossom's list of guilt as her stun baton hummed with electricity. "Remember when I said your punishment will come? Well, this is it. You've been a very bad girl, Blossom."

"I know…" Blossom said, her eyes closed as she tried in vain not to cry. She had found it difficult to sleep last night because of it. "I'm sorry."

"Save it. Are you afraid?" Selicia asked, intending to stretch out the punishment and terror for as long as she could.

"Yes…" Blossom said as she took shallow, frightened breaths when she heard the scary electrical sizzling noise from Mom's stun baton. She recognized it from that time when she gave her a shock from it at the lowest setting during training, just so she and her sisters knew how it felt like.

"Now is that right?" Selicia said as she marched forward and jabbed the stun baton at Blossom's shoulder. Blossom inched back, but there wasn't much distance before she could feel the water tank of the toilet behind her.

"You don't know what is fear yet. Here, let me teach you," she said as Blossom was taking shallow breaths and crying in fear and expectation of an electric shock. Without warning, Selicia pushed the button, shocking Blossom and making her scream – not that there was anyone at home to hear it but Mom.

And she had a very good reason for putting Blossom on the toilet.

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

**11 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 2053.**

Blossom had been in bed ever since suffering Selicia's brutal punishment regime, curled up in a
fetal position, her ample, fiery orange hair covering her like a blanket as she sobbed in her dark room, alone. It was imprinted in her memory now – how Mom had shocked her with the baton for half an hour straight, sometimes just waving it in front of her to scare her. She remembered falling off the toilet after her forced defecation and scrambling to a corner between the bathtub and the toilet, smearing the floor with her filth.

Her Mom had continued calling her names and shocking her regardless with her baton, and on top of that, blamed her for dirtying the toilet floor with her shit and urine.

By the time it was over, Blossom could barely remember being bathed by the same Mom who had been tormenting her and put to bed, spick and span as though nothing had happened at all. Selicia had intended this – even warned her that there would be more if she ever spoke of it, that she would further destroy the family if it was no longer a secret.

Despite her terrible ordeal, however, Blossom was able to force a smile through, in between sobs. She had been punished – and therefore free of her guilt. She had been a good girl, like what Daddy said. She had been honest about her mistakes, and that had set her free. She couldn't bear to imagine what it would be like to have to hide her terrible mistakes and look her Dad in the eyes every day, with her evil secret on the surface of her mind. She couldn't bear to imagine how she would face her sisters and lead them again, knowing that she was guilty and unworthy.

It was all over. And now, she was alone in her misery. But not for long.

Blossom did not hear the front door of The House open at first, but she did hear Dad's footsteps coming up the steps. For some reason, it'd made her anxious. Despite expunging her guilt, she was no longer sure of how to face him, or her sisters.

And speaking of which, her sisters had likely flown up the stairs as she didn't hear their footsteps. The door to her room had opened and the light switched on before she could react to them. Turning in bed, she saw that they were both clutching paper bags in both hands, smiles plastered on their faces.

Bubbles' smile quickly disappeared the moment she saw how obviously Blossom had been crying in her room – her face was still flushed, her cheeks were still wet, and her hair was uncharacteristically messy. Her red bow was askew and bent like the ears of a depressed bunny. Putting down her paper bags, Bubbles immediately rushed to her side.

"Blossom! Please don't cry, Blossom!" Bubbles comforted her sister the moment she saw how miserable she was. At a loss for what to do, she turned to Buttercup, who shrugged her shoulders – knowing little about emotions and empathy even within herself, she was even more hopeless when it came to comforting others.

But it didn't take long for Bubbles' to figure out a solution.

"Don't cry, Blossom, I've brought you something nice," Bubbles said.

"What is it?" Blossom sniffled, already doubting that anything could cheer her up. Bubbles' smiled at her mysteriously before turning around and, even more mysteriously, started rummaging through one of her paper bags. Carefully, she pulled something out of it before turning around and showing it to Blossom.

Blossom had been observing Bubbles with mild interest, her punishments, and mistakes still fresh on her mind.
Bubbles held up a pair of puppets in front of Blossom. They were puppets of the traditional variety, with handles for controlling the head and limbs. The puppets were styled after the Girls' favorite puppet show, Puppet Pals. Mitch had a purple bonker for hitting Clem, while Clem had a hat with a flower for Mitch to bonk. Blossom sat up, somewhat fascinated by this.

"Dad got one just for you. But you get to choose since you've been staying at home," Bubbles offered before flashing a toothy smile. Blossom considered the puppets and reached for Mitch at first before going for Clem. She remembered how Mitch would always hit Clem with the bonker, and she didn't like it – it had resembled her mistake too much.

Holding the puppet possessively, she played with it a little as if it was a doll before giggling and smiling back at Bubbles.

"Don't be sad, Blossom," Bubbles comforted her sister. "Maybe you could join us for a puppet show next time…"

"I don't deserve it," Blossom said instead and stopped smiling instead. In the back of her mind, however, it wasn't just her guilt weighing heavily in her mind. Her Mom's secret abuse was a constant source of emotional turmoil - but she couldn't tell anyone that. Like what Mom said - it could destroy the family if she did...

"Or we could play with our puppets together," Bubbles tried harder. "I find it hard to control Mitch – maybe you could teach me since you're smarter…"

Blossom had started sobbing again. She didn't like this. How things had resolved itself so quickly. How easy it was for Bubbles to come back to her. It had taken far longer for their classmates to like them again after their mistakes. It felt… wrong somehow. Like there's a price she hadn't fully paid up yet.

"Why are you being so nice to me, Bubbles?" Blossom said. "After everything I've done?"

"Because sisters are sisters, Blossom and love is love, just like Daddy said," Bubbles said. "I shouldn't have given you a reason to hit me…"

"No, Bubbles, it's all my fault…" Blossom swiftly corrected Bubbles. "I shouldn't have treated you that way no matter what."

What she didn't say, however, was the fact that she understood what it was like to do something really, really wrong. Like taking drugs.

Buttercup didn't like the looks of things. It was lost on her how good it'd made her sisters feel. It concerned her, however, that Bubbles was going to undo everything she had been doing to Blossom, not that the supposedly smartest of the three of them knew what was happening. Without Bubbles, Blossom was ripe to be influenced by someone else. Buttercup had hoped to turn Blossom into someone more like her and get on her good side so that she could extract favors from her and even be given the freedom to do as she wished – including grievously injuring criminals and killing them.

As much as Buttercup admired Bubbles' new power, she saw her as competition now – and somehow, she knew she would have to get closer to Blossom than Bubbles ever could. It was no easy task, as it was something she was never good at. This was contrasted with Bubbles, who didn't even need to try to be sweet and gain everyone's love and attention. Oh, how she hated that about Bubbles.
"Now isn't that sweet?" Blossom heard a male voice coming from the door. Turning to it, she saw that it was Dad, smiling at them. He laughed when he saw the silly look on Blossom's face – that in-between look in the middle of happy and sad. Blossom flew towards him for a hug.

"I'm sorry," the leader of The Three cried. "For everything."

"There, there, Blossom," Dad comforted Blossom as he patted her on the back as they hugged. "It's over now. You've served your 'sentence', so to speak. Now, how about supper?"

"Do I get to eat with you? And Bubbles and Buttercup?" Blossom asked hungrily, finally accepting the fact that she had paid her due for her mistakes.

"Of course, sunshine. We're a family after all," the professor agreed. "Now, chocolate pudding or cinnamon rolls?"


12 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 0820.

Elodie 'Princess' Morbucks had been awake for hours - how many, she didn't know. Twelve? Twenty-four? Thirty-six? It felt like forty-eight this time, not that she cared. She had been lying in bed for the past… She had lost count of the number of days she had wasted away in bed. Had it been four days? Or seven? Perhaps even more.

Terrible memories continued to assail her the moment she realized she was still awake. She sobbed, having cried for hours since calming down yet many hours ago. Pulling a piece of tissue out from an ornate tissue box placed beside her, she blew her nose, and a mix of snot, both new and old, mixed with a dash of blood, dirtied the tissue. She balled it up and threw it aside ungracefully - no longer caring about the lady-like behavior she had been cultivating since she was old enough to walk and talk. The tissue ball joined a mountain of others next to her bed.

There was pain in her forearm. Friendly old Doctor Bill had inserted an IV drip into her to keep her hydrated and nourished. There was no other way she would drink or eat - what was the point? She knew that not doing any of those things would result in a lot of discomforts, then death, but she no longer cared. What was the purpose of living? When there was nothing for her in life - when she had no mother, no daddy who could stay with her for long, no friends, neither health nor future? When the person she called her BFF had abandoned her, just like all the others?

And the worst part was, Bubbles and her sisters had abandoned her for a very good reason. For days upon days now, Elodie had been playing and replaying the masquerade ball like a computer game - like one of those adventure RPGs. She would keep wondering what she could have done differently - and the terrible thing was, it felt as if she was locked into that single road by… everything. She couldn't disobey her father, and she couldn't convince Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup to abandon the party. She wouldn't even have found out that her dearest dad had been planning a demonstration of the Girls' abilities anyway. Even in her dreams, she kept wondering how she could have done something differently, and when something too fantastic happened and the problem was solved and she and the Girls would remain as friends, she would wake up from the dream only to cry and wish she was back in it.

In fact, she wished that she would fall asleep forever, never to wake up again. Sometimes, she was even convinced that her dreams had been the reality, and her life was the nightmare.

The sunlight had crept into the room an hour ago. But with half the curtains drawn, the room was
dimly lit. Anything more would seem like an insult. The birds outside sang as if nothing bad had happened to her - all it did was to make her feel worst, not better, and there was no way to express the deep regret and sadness she felt as she had cried her eyes to aching exhaustion and desert-like dryness.

It was at this time that the door to her room swung open. Three sets of eyes pierced through the darkness in the corridor outside to look at her. One pair was glowing pink, another glowing baby blue, and the last pair was glowing lime green. The Princess stared at it for a long time, before turning in bed, deciding that they were just more of her hallucinations, manifestations of her wishful thinking. On the worst days, if there could be such a thing, she would think that she saw them, only to realize that she had mistaken certain things for one or all of the Girls. One of the butler's cat eyes, for example, or kites in the distance, flown by her neighbors.

"Princess?" one of them spoke. It was Bubbles - Elodie remembered the voice all too well. In the first few days, she'd clung to the memory of her voice for hope.

'We're best friends forever, Elodie. I'll be there for you forever and you won't have to be sad again,' Elodie remembered what Bubbles said word-for-word as they danced together in a waltz, savior, and victim hand-in-hand.

"Princess? It's me," the hallucination spoke again from the darkness. The eyes floated closer, like ghosts coming back to haunt her, until…

"Go away…” the Princess warned the hallucinations off hoarsely. "You're not real…”

"What are you talking about, Princess?" the hallucination of Blossom pressed on.

"Go! Away!" the Princess shouted and flung the ornate tissue box at the three sets of glowing eyes. They dodged it with ease.

"Hey, what gives!?" the hallucination of Buttercup exclaimed.

"Why won't you leave me alone!?" Princess shouted again with renewed sobbing. Taking a purple pillow, she hid her head under it, muffling her sobbing. "You're not real - you're not real - you're not real!"

"C'mon, let's go - she doesn't want to be our friend anymore," she heard the Buttercup hallucination say dismissively.

"You could be right…” the Blossom hallucination agreed.

"But… We've come all this way," the Bubbles hallucination said. "We have to try harder…”

"Hmm…” the Blossom hallucination wondered. "She doesn't think we're real- Bubbles? Bubbles, what are you doing?"

Elodie took a peek out of her pillow, only to find the three hallucinations of her best friends, who were now lost forever, floating closer to her such that she could see them fully, and they were wearing the same kind of dresses as they would normally wear whenever they came over to play, or when they were here on a stay-over. Each of them in a color matching their eyes, with a black sash around their waist - tall white socks and black Mary-Jane shoes. They were just like how she remembered them.

And the Bubbles hallucination was getting closer. The Princess bolted up when she realized it, looking like she had just seen a ghost.
"No! Stay away!" she screamed at the phantom-apparent, afraid of her because she was afraid of getting her hopes up only to realize that she had been talking to a hallucination, which would then dig open her wounds once more and make her regret and depression worst.

Wielding her purple pillow as a weapon, she threw it at Bubbles, who dodged it. The pillow didn't fly far - the Princess didn't even have the strength to hurl it across any real distance. Bubbles let herself drop to her knees in the Princess' queen-sized bed.

"Princess - it's me, Bubbles…" the memory manifestation said, still coming closer, walking on her knees. "Don't you recognize me?"

The Princess backed away, only to meet the huge, oaken headboard of her bed, a look of abject terror in her face as she feared getting her hopes up with just another hallucination.

"No! Go away!" Elodie screamed as Bubbles came closer. "You're not real! No!"

Elodie threw a slap at what she thought was a hallucination, only for it to seize her by the wrist. Bubbles then took her by the arms and gave her a tight hug.

And it felt real. It felt very, very real. There was warmth, and the familiar sensation of touch - the touch of someone who cared, who was her friend for sure. Elodie sobbed hard and shook with the release of emotions when she realized that maybe, just maybe, it was real this time.

"Shh… Elodie, it's okay…" Bubbles comforted Elodie as the depressed little girl hugged her back, and couldn't get enough of it. "I'm here now."

"Is this another dream?" Elodie would then say, still delirious from her week-long act of self-destruction. "Is this real?"

Bubbles looked her in the eyes and made eye contact. Elodie's eyes were entirely red from hours of crying and a couple of days of sleeplessness.

"Yes, I'm real, Elodie," Bubbles said as she hugged her again. Elodie held on tightly to her, as if afraid that she might be whisked away by something again – whether it was fate, ill luck, or duty.

"It really is you- I- I've- missed you so much!" Elodie struggled to speak through her sobbing and exhaustion.

"I told you I'll never leave you alone," Bubbles comforted. "I'm sorry I didn't visit. I was just…"

Bubbles' voice had trailed off, taken away by her demons. Elodie was sad, but so was she.

"It's been a terrible week," Bubbles finally managed, herself shedding tears and sniffling.

"But I'm sure things are going to get better from now on," Blossom encouraged the two as she floated over to them, ever the leader. She put an arm around Bubbles' shoulder. "Right, Bubbles?"

"Of course she's right – you got your cool new power and all that!" Buttercup joined in and tried to blend in, not wanting to be left out and lose out.

"Right…" Bubbles agreed reluctantly, still acutely aware that she had done something terrible to gain her sisters' approval. She had obscured the truth about her 'new powers'.

Together, the four girls hugged, and for the moment, they were happy.

END OF ACT 1: PRICE OF PEACE
Act 2 of The Powerpuff Girls: Declassified is coming right up. In the meantime, here's a preview of Act 2's cover:
Chapter 25: Leap of Faith (ACT 2: HIS SECRET)

Chapter Summary

The Girls get a slight reprieve from a surprising development in Townsville, and the professor continues to agonize over the salvation of his adopted daughters' future.
"All sins tend to be addictive, and the terminal point of addiction is damnation." - W. H. Auden

Chapter 25: Leap of Faith


12 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1130.

After parking the family saloon on the side of the road, Professor Utonium turned the ignition key and switched off the engine of the car. It sputtered into silence. Getting out of the car, he could only wonder if he was at the right location - after all, one does not normally find a church in the middle of an industrial or warehousing district. And yet, the address that was given to him clearly indicated a warehouse to be the 'Church of the New Trinity' itself.

Selicia got out of the shotgun seat while Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup hovered their way out of the passenger door on the driver's side. They were all dressed formally - the professor in a suit and tie, Selicia in a black dress while the Girls were in formal versions of their favorite color-coded dresses, puffier than the everyday dress, but less so than their party dresses. Their waist sashes had bows tied at the side rather than at the back. Blossom had additional red ribbons adorning her hair. Bubbles' ponytails were held together by shiny-blue ribbons. Buttercup was wearing the same green hair band she wore to Elodie's Masquerade ball, which she hated.

A fair distance away, several humvees and an APC stopped, disgorging USDO soldiers taking up defensive positions. The location was so suspicious that the Powerpuff Task Force detail guarding the Girls had to consider it a potential trap and ambush and send in more troops than usual. Undercover agents had already been sent in from the nearest USDO outpost beforehand - and while the entire city block had been scoured for enemy presence only to reveal none, Captain Scott, the man in charge, had still decided not to leave anything to chance.

"Are you sure this is the place, Thomas?" Selicia asked as she studied the warehouse that was supposed to be a church. The first thing that caught her eye was the name of the church, proudly displayed on the facade of the warehouse. 'Church of the New Trinity', it read. She couldn't recall what could possibly be the 'New Trinity'. She knew only about the usual trinity in Catholicism.

"Thirty-seven Chester Road - Olson Warehousing," the professor had pulled a card out of his suit's chest pocket and read the address from it. "Yep, this seems to be the place."

"Odd place to have a mass," Selicia said as she took her handbag out of the car.

"It looks dirty…" Bubbles said as she came up next to Dad, holding his left hand.

"It kinda looks boring, too," Blossom added as she followed her Dad, holding his right hand.

"Do we have to, Mom?" Buttercup whined as she came up next to her, holding her right hand. "I'd rather stay at the Princess' mansion. I was stuffing myself with lots of good food..."
Selicia did not answer. It felt as if there was no choice in the matter when it came to religion. The bishop at the Cathedral Basilica of The Most Pure wasn't happy when Buttercup had practically threatened one of his priests with death, and although he hadn't expressly forbidden Buttercup nor the rest of the family from visiting again, she didn't want to find out what the reception would be like after that.

Right before they left the cathedral, the kindly old woman sitting near them had pulled them aside, and given them a card - the card Selicia gave to Thomas, which was what led them here. The card had introduced them as the Church of the New Trinity. She assumed it to be another Catholic church. Only, the warehouse before them didn't look like the usual kind of church. For one thing, the shape of it was completely wrong. It'd reeked of all kinds of wrong - but her security friend, Captain Scott, had provided a certain degree of assurance if things were a certain kind of wrong.

As the family approached the main entrance of the 'church', which was a huge set of double-door large enough and tall enough to accompany a forklift with a triple stack of crates (which was likely the original purpose of the entrance), two attendants on either side, one a woman, the other a man, both wearing white suits, smiled at them, or specifically, at the Girls. For some reason, Blossom found it a little creepy but smiled back regardless. Bubbles, although traumatized by her time in The Strip, did not let it break her stride, and smiled back too. Buttercup didn't care and simply frowned with her arms crossed as Selicia pulled her along as if she was a balloon.

Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup, and their assigned 'parents' were backed up by an excess of eight USDO guards, who stared menacingly at the attendants in their full combat gear. Four of them flanked the family, the other four were right behind them. It didn't seem to intimidate the attendants.

"Greetings to the Three of You, Holy Ones," the woman welcomed the family as they approached, taking a deep bow. The male attendant did the same. "And to the nurturers of the Holy Ones."

"Welcome," the male attendant echoed. "Please, we humbly invite you to our House of God - Your house."

Professor Utonium could not help but to raise an eyebrow at the way they were referring to them. The change in tone was obvious even to the Girls - whose previous encounter with religion did not put them on a pedestal. If anything, they were treated with suspicion in the previous church and they knew it, though they didn't hold anything against the bishop as he was nice since he taught them a prayer, and got his friend, the priest, to listen to their troubles.

Still slightly bowed, the attendants then proceeded to open the wide and tall doors. The Girls and their Dad and Mom were about to make a move when they were politely interrupted.

"Before You enter Your House, may You please bless us with Your touch?" the female attendant beseeched the Girls, mainly asking Blossom as she was closest.

"Yes, please bless us with Your touch," the male attendant repeated, directing his question to Buttercup.

Blossom responded wordlessly by hovering up to the female attendant's chest level and sticking out a hand for her to shake. The female attendant took it with both her larger hands, brought it to her lips as she bowed and kissed it. Blossom retracted it, shocked at the extreme display of adulation.

"Thank You… Thank You so much!" the female attendant gasped, her smile graduated to a fulfilled, toothy grin as she was on the verge of tears.
Meanwhile, Buttercup had stuck out a hand – the male attendant was more reserved, and he shook it. Buttercup gave it a squeeze, which caused the man to grimace in pain.

"Thank You kindly," he groaned as he retracted his hand, rubbing it.

"You're welcome," Buttercup said with a mischievous grin as she returned to her Mom's side. Selicia had seen what had happened, and she chuckled to herself because she thought it was funny – and that Buttercup was cute when she was playful. Cute and playful was better than psychopathic and homicidal.

Bubbles approached the Catholic cultist Buttercup had hurt and opened wide her arms for a hug. The man gasped as he realized what she was offering. He mirrored the gesture, and Bubbles proceeded to give him a brief hug, which melted him. Bubbles had seen what Buttercup did, and she felt sorry for the attendant. He seemed nice and didn't deserve to be hurt for it.

The inside of the warehouse-church was unexpectedly well-kept and furnished. Where there used to be industrial shelves, giant crates, and forklifts, there were rows upon rows of pew, each row eight or ten pews long from left to right – none within the family could decide how many exactly as they couldn't see where each pew started and ended.

Many hundreds, perhaps even a thousand church attendees stood up when they saw who were coming to their Church, approaching them. A pair of ushers came up to them, gesturing kindly for them to follow. The USDO guards were watching them like hawks, ready to pick apart their prey at the slightest provocation.

"May I ask what's going on?" the professor questioned one of the ushers, who looked sheepish, too calm considering the black-geared, no-nonsense black ops soldiers surrounding them. The usher looked at him as though he didn't know what Newton's three laws were.

"Don't you know? You're the Father of the New Trinity. Just as Saint Joseph is the father of Jesus." the usher said. She was a mere teenager, perhaps all the better to be indoctrinated. As a boy, Professor Utonium had been to the church, not a Catholic church, but the kind with a Sunday school in it. He didn't find the experience pleasant nor tolerable.

"What, and am I supposed to be Mary, Mother of Jesus?" Selicia said sarcastically. She didn't like that these people - whoever they were - had butchered the Catholic faith.

"Yes. It is known," the other usher, also a teenage girl, concurred.

"It is known," the first usher repeated. Selicia couldn't help but raise an eyebrow.

They were led through the center aisle. Every single pair of eyes in the warehouse-church were on them as they approached the front, looking like royalty marching in with a contingent of honor guards. There was a stage up front, with a podium, where an aging man stood. Bubbles thought he looked familiar. She blinked her eyes a few times to make sure she was seeing him right.

Yes - he was the same priest she had saved back in the Battle of Morbucks Industries Research Labs. Behind him, where the stage ended, was stained glass, three of them specifically, created in the image of the Girls. In the center was Blossom, the glass representing her in various shades of red, orange and beige. Bubbles was on the left - or the right hand of stained glass Blossom, in shades of light blue, gold, and beige. Finally, Buttercup was on the right - or the left hand of stained glass Blossom, in shades of lime green, black and beige. They were depicted as angels, complete with a halo hovering above their heads. Sunrays coming from the skylight illuminated them for all to see.
"Welcome to the Church of the New Trinity, Holy Ones," the bishop at the makeshift pulpit greeted, then turned to Bubbles. "And thank You, once more, for saving my life, o' Holy One, and gracing me with Your presence once again."

"Urm… I'm just glad to help…" Bubbles said shyly, feeling her cheeks turning red from the language being lavished upon her.

"Please, allow me to introduce myself. My name is George Luther - I was once blind to the truth, and now, cast out as a heretic by those I formerly called friends, I seek to spread it," the old man spread his arms out as he identified himself. "And now the three of You stand before me. What do you think, Holy Ones? What do You think of my work?"

"Why do you keep calling us Holy Ones?" Blossom asked, flattered but confused. She had a feeling that something wasn't quite right. Her one day in church had taught her enough about religion to know that 'holy' tend to be a word associated with God, Jesus, or the Trinity.

"But You are the Holy Ones, are You not?" George asserted. "Angels sent down to Earth by God to do battle against evil?"

"I don't know about angels and god, but I am here to fight evil…" Blossom tried to clear things up with the church founder, though she herself was distracted by her blushing - the church leader sure had a way with words. "Crime, I mean. And so are my sisters, right?"

"Right!" Buttercup replied enthusiastically, with power in her voice. In her mind, she cared nothing for what the priest thought. The bare mention of fighting evil and crime had brought back fond memories of how she had erased certain criminals physical - for good.

"I guess…" Bubbles said - still with reservations about everything. She didn't feel 'holy' in any way, not with what she had done in secret to help her sisters and the citizens of Townsville.

George Luther the cult leader smiled at them - it was an oddly fatherly kind of smile. Behind the Girls and their Dad and Mom, the congregation was listening intently, taking in every single word from the Girls as though it was gospel.

"I'm glad to hear that," George said. "Now please - I have seats prepared for the five of You…"

And they were led by ushers to a kind of VIP corner by the stage - except it was probably reserved for the apparently divine. The seats were expensive sofa surrounding a coffee table, like a part of a living room transplanted to the warehouse.

Professor Utonium had something to say about this - a lot, in fact. There was just too much going on, much of which infuriated him to the point where he didn't know whether he should be laughing or blowing up. However, seeing that the Catholic cultists seemed friendly enough, he decided not to trash the occasion - however misguided he thought it was - and got along with the program.

Selicia, on the other hand, was feeling something similar, except with an infusion of confusion thrown in. Moreover, she couldn't help but to wonder if there were benefits to be had by practically being declared a living saint, with the Girls being considered divine…

The rest of the day was one of exploration and surprising excitement, even for the skeptical. The Girls and their assigned 'parents', in the meantime, were treated like royalty - this was even extended to the USDO soldiers guarding them, who were constantly being referred to as the 'Knights of the Trinity'. Their every whim was catered to, though they were restrained in asking for anything, sometimes with the professor's influence. The Girls were given drinks and snacks - fizzy sodas and biscuits - on request when the professor allowed it. The 'servants' would offer all sorts of things - a change of clothes, meals, massages, soft toys - but those offers were ultimately rejected,
either because the Girls (with the exception of Buttercup) were too shy to accept them or the professor wouldn't allow it.

The former bishop, George, in the meantime, had been preaching from a refreshingly different angle, one that was never explored in the Catholic orthodoxy, and they were all tied to the Girls one way or another. His sermon could only be described as grounded and earthly, despite the religious context. They were, however, a jumble of half-conceived rhetoric and points fused to one another on the fly. According to George, the Girls were sent down from heaven the same way Jesus was - through the USDO and Thomas and Selicia (whom he thought were the biological parents of the Girls). The professor couldn't help but crack a condescending smile at this.

According to George, the Girls were also doing God's work by banishing crime from Townsville, and he believed that it was through them that all of humanity's sins would be cleansed once more. A new era of world peace would result in the conclusion of the Girls' campaign against crime and evil. The only useful thing the professor thought had come from the preacher's mouth was that he advocated total cooperation and conviction with the Girls as they continued their divine work of cleansing the city. It meant a few thousand less hateful citizens arrayed against the Girls, no matter what the future held, and potentially more if the Catholic cult did not wither away for one reason or another.

The rest of the mass was conducted similarly to a typical Catholic mass, except with the whole 'New Trinity' slant, with the Girls included into their prayers, whether they were prayed for or prayed to. For the latter, the Girls were even invited up on stage so that they might 'receive their prayers'.

When the prayers were over, the Girls were asked - with the professor's approval - to 'bless the congregation'. Men, women, and children would flock to them and form a queue. Some would bestow upon the Girls gifts - anything from food to thank-you cards, to trinkets and toys and even money (which the professor rejected). Some would merely ask to touch them or ask that they kiss their children and babies. Some would offer quick prayers. The Girls were thrilled, if guardedly so, as they expected politeness and appreciation at most, not literal worship and utter devotion. Blossom thought that it was a welcome reprieve from the harshness of crime fighting, Bubbles was blushing so hard she thought her cheeks might actually start a fire, while Buttercup just enjoyed the chocolate she was getting.

---

**The City of Townsville. Townsville Industrial Park. Church of the New Trinity.**

**12 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1255.**

"It's not that I don't appreciate how you've been treating the Girls, George," Professor Utonium said as he sat in the guest chair before the bishop-turned-heretic's desk, which was located in what was once the warehouse foreman's office. He caught a glimpse of the man's self-styled title printed on a stand placed on the desk: Saint George Luther. "But don't you think you've gone too far? The Girls - they don't need to be worshiped. There's no telling what that would do to their prepubescent minds!"

"But the Angels of Justice are angels, sent down by God himself," George explained with infinite patience, leaning back calmly on his comfortable-looking boss chair, which was high-backed, and as white and expensive as the living saint looked in his white suit. "And even if their flesh is as weak and young as they look, surely being showered with love can't have any deleterious effects on their minds? Do you not agree?"

"With all due respect, 'saint','" the professor pressed on - he did not have infinite patience where
once he thought he possessed it. "You don't understand a single thing about them! I can appreciate that you've taken a leap of faith when you left the Catholic church - but faith can only get you so far. The Girls - they're each suffering in their own way. Crime-fighting has taken a toll on them - I've heard your rhetoric, and you're going to add pressure to the Girls when there's no need." By this, he was largely referring to Blossom and Bubbles, who each were succumbing to the pressure of fighting crime in their own ways. "-and you're encouraging certain behaviors that shouldn't be encouraged. Frankly, you're getting in the way of my parenting!" And by that, he was thinking of Buttercup, who certainly did not need religious backing for her violence.

"But they're the Angels of Justice - they can do no wrong," the saint said, too serene for the professor's own liking. So calm that the professor wanted to yell at him. Or even manhandle him. "And even if they appeared to have erred, it is likely to be part of a great plan. After all, even Jesus himself could be tempted. Even Jesus, when given the flesh of man, needed to grow up."

"The Girls are a product of science and technology, much of which even the brightest of the USDO are still struggling to understand!" the professor corrected the man, feeling his blood boil.

"And God has worked through their hands," the saint added reflectively. "I do pray that the Girls will be here next week… My congregation would be thrilled to have them again, and the church will always welcome them. I am not blind to the Girls' struggles, Father of Angels. It doesn't take much to imagine the trials and tribulations one must go through to face evil… Perhaps this church could be a sanctuary for them."

"Don't bet on it," the professor said as he rose from his seat. Looking around at the saint's office, he could see that it was finely decorated. The desk and the chairs were only a start. Then there were the marble statues, a fountain, pedestals with books - mostly religious text, as well as paintings and posters… It irked him that Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were in some of the paintings and posters, depicted as larger-than-life angels. "But I'll bet you must be pretty well off by now, 'saint'."

George Luther had been signing a few documents when he heard the title a second time. Sighing, he put his fountain pen down and paused for a second, as if tired - for once acting as old as he was.

"I didn't choose to be canonized as a saint - this is not 'my cult','" the religious figure said, his voice heavy, and even the professor had to admit that he could detect sincerity in it. "My flock wanted it - needed it. We're surrounded by unbelievers, some of whom will do us harm. You say that I do not understand the Girls and the science behind them, but heed me when I say that you don't understand the workings behind my faith, and the movement I started to tell the truth of it. All this - it's just to look good. Some people need to be drawn in before they would hear the truth."

Without a word, the professor turned around and walked away.

"Can I still convince you to bring the Girls here next week?" the cult leader asked, without raising his voice, without even a hint of a forceful assertion. He was humble, even. The professor stopped.

"No," he said without looking back.

"As you wish, Father of Angels," George said, surprisingly compliant. "It is your decision - and this must be part of God's plan. We will pray for you and your wife, and to your Holy Children."

"Whatever. If that's what you believe in," the professor said nonchalantly, and with that, left the saint's office.
Ever since returning from a family lunch outside and after the encounter with the Catholic cult, the professor had been busy with his very own leap of faith. Carefully inserting a tube into a machine, he locked it in and tapped a few buttons on it. The tube contained a version of the Anti-X he manufactured, and he had decided to just move on from the theories and calculations to the practical tests, cutting short the development time of the Anti-X by a week or two.

It was a dangerous gamble, but it had to be done. Bubbles was barely hanging on, and even if she had found confidence with her new power - which he had yet to investigate - he felt that it was all but certain that something would emerge to destroy it again. Buttercup, on the other hand, did not need to be exposed to violence and crass adult behavior that would worsen her psychopathy and cause her to act on it. Even Blossom was feeling the effects of doing an adult's job hard - mainly, the pressure that came with deciding the life and death of family, friends, strangers, and enemies. The mistakes she made and the punishments he and his 'wife' was forced to mete out had likely changed her for life if her experience in crime-fighting hadn't already.

Despite the corners he was cutting, the Anti-X in its current form was by no means crude nor simple to make. Based on his Chemical X Unifying Theory, Chemical X was made more reactive to all other forms of matter by the use of bridging molecules bonding with Chemical X itself, which also had the effect of stabilizing the Chemical X such that the mutability of its molecular structure was better controlled and the molecular structure of the enigmatic substance had a greater degree of permanence. The use of chemicals code-named 'Sugar', 'Spice' and 'Everything-Nice' had achieved such an effect.

His ideas for Anti-X was focused on this property of stabilized Chemical X, and he had several just in case one or more of them would fail to achieve the intended effect or would even go on to cause some nasty side effects.

The most straightforward idea he had was to destroy the Chemical X itself. While indestructible even with a concentrated blast of gamma radiation or even a nuclear bomb, different kinds of Chemicals were known to destroy each other on contact. This was discovered by accident years ago when there was a mix-up on the part of a research assistant and the resultant cross-contamination between Chemicals U and V causing the partial destruction of both. The destruction itself, however, wasn't explosive - there was a discharge of an as-yet-unknown form of energy resembling light and electricity before an amount of mass would disappear. The mechanisms for this was still unknown, and as a reconstruction of the incident yielded no real data that could suggest practical applications for the effect beyond a curious light show, investigation into this was discontinued in the past.

It was only now that the professor thought that it was a grave error on his part.

While Professor Utonium had no idea if Chemical X could be destroyed using other Chemicals, he was confident that it might, based on his Unifying Theories - he knew that the chemical reactions could be extra-dimensional, not just within the known dimensions. The possibilities as to what could happen, thus, were limitless. However, he also knew what could stop it from happening - the stabilizing chemicals that anchor Chemical X to this dimension could be too strong for other Chemicals to overcome. Thus, his other ideas were born.

He had devised the necessary experimental set-up and processes required to synthesize the catalyzing agents and reactive compounds necessary to 'plug' the stabilizing agents, which also acted as bridging molecules necessary for Chemical X to react with mundane molecules. Once the bridging molecules were 'plugged', the Chemical X would be rendered inert - unable to form new
reactions. In theory, this could disempower the Girls.

However, in case that fails, he also had plans to synthesize enzymatic compounds and accompanying catalysts to disconnect and destroy the bridging molecules instead, achieving the same effect, leaving the Chemical X dormant in the Girls. There was no telling what effect any of his methods would have on the Girls, however.

Which was why he couldn't cut any more corners. While he could just wing it with the theories and calculations in their third or fourth draft, to inject the Girls - any of them - with his Anti-X without previous testing was basically a gamble with their lives as chips on the table. As much as it pained him to do so, he would have to test the various Anti-X iterations exhaustively, starting with tests on cells, then plants and animals and finally, the Girls.

The machine the professor had inserted with the Anti-X had thin hoses running into the bell jars arranged on a table containing the Chemical-X-infused plants. He had been testing his Anti-X iterations on cells for long enough. He knew he had to move on to plants when all three of his devised Anti-X variants were successful in disempowering individual cells. Pressing a few buttons on the machine, the professor aerosolized the Anti-X, before dispersing them to a third of the plants. He'd repeated the test with all three Anti-X variants.

It was a long and slow process to discover if his various Anti-X solutions worked. Physical observations of the plants weren't enough. He had to obtain cell samples from all his plant subjects, dye them, put them under the microscope and finally use his supercomputer to analyze the concentration or status of the Chemical X in the cells. All the while, he'd held much hope and anticipation in his heart, and when all three Anti-X alternatives failed in their intended purpose so early in their developmental phases, he'd lost it. The perceived failure, in his state of mind, meant more suffering for his beloved Girls - unable to swallow it, he'd taken it out on his desk, sweeping its contents to the floor and kicking the bottom drawer multiple times even if it hurt his foot, until it gave way, until all three drawers on that stack tumbled to the ground in a domino effect.

That was when another idea struck him, and this time, he was much more confident it would work.

But even a successful Anti-X wasn't enough to free the Girls. There was still the matter of creating a replacement for them, a replacement or replacements, approved by the USDO, who would ensure that his treasured little girls would never have to lift a finger to defend people many times their age again.
Chapter 26: Rules To Follow

Chapter Summary

Bubbles now has to live with the facts related to her 'new power'.

Chapter 26: Rules To Follow

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

12 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1610.

Selicia had taken the opportunity to train the Girls during their free time after church, and Bubbles was terrified – no, not just terrified. Words could not justify what she was feeling. What was once an anxious affair had become nerve-wracking. She could see her guilt riddled all over the lab, with every change of expression her sisters and Mom made, with every word they said. Bubbles had been suspicious of her family since the day she used her fairy godmother's magic to defeat Naga. She was afraid that they would know about her secret, or that they'd found out all along. She was paranoid, even, that they were just waiting for the right moment to pounce on her and jump down her throat for using the drug. Even worse; in her terror, she could imagine Blossom and Buttercup abandoning her once more, even beating her up for her mistakes, which was the next logical step from Blossom hitting her, even if her leader sister had promised not to hurt her anymore.

Bubbles had been sitting on the sideline as she watched in horror as Blossom and Buttercup sparred – for every fanciful punch or kick they hurled at each other, time was ticking by, counting down to her turn on the arena. And she knew she couldn't even put up a half-convincing performance without a dose of the fairy godmother's magic.

Buttercup had been going at Blossom aggressively, as usual, doing a spinning kick before landing and executing a series of butterfly kicks and forcing Blossom to back away. Blossom, on the other hand, was much more reserved. Strategizing with the time she had. Like a hawk watching its prey for an opportune moment to strike, like a spider waiting for its prey to falter or draw closer, Blossom was biding her time.

And it eventually came. After a third Butterfly kick, Buttercup stumbled, having lost her balance from dizziness. Blossom needed simply to tackle her, forcing her to the ground, and when Buttercup tried to punch her way out on the floor, Blossom parried them, redirecting them, before pinning her arms to her chest.

"Not fair!" Buttercup growled in frustration after Selicia declared Blossom the winner. It was the third time in the row. "She's using the same trick over and over!"

"So find a way to beat her trick, Buttercup! Instead of charging at her blindly like a bull!" Selicia said as she patted Blossom on the shoulder to get her to let go, which she did. As much as she liked Buttercup the most, she was frustrated with her lack of cunning. In this training session, she was hoping that Buttercup would at least become Blossom's equal, but it hadn't happened. If anything, Buttercup had regressed from being Blossom's near-equal. The first six matches had been a back-and-forth, with Blossom winning the first round, then Buttercup the second. The pattern repeated itself, until the seventh round, when Buttercup had won a second time in the row. Just when Selicia
thought that she had it, Blossom had then gone ahead to win the next three rounds by simply being much more careful and tactical, letting Buttercup's arrogance and tiredness get the better of her.

"But- but- If the same trick works over and over, shouldn't mine do that too?" Buttercup argued back.

"Sit your butt down and use that head of yours to think Buttercup!" Selicia shut her down impatiently. Her comment had stung deeply. She had never criticized her so harshly before. Crossing her arms, Buttercup hovered away to the sideline, sulking.

"It's your turn, Bubbles! Get over here!" Selicia called out to her. Even before she did, Bubbles had already become an unnerved quivering wreck, with sweat running down her forehead and the blood drained from her face as if she was back in that panic room where the Morbucks and their acquaintances were nearly crushed to death had it not been for her.

Meekly, she stood up, and when she found that her knees were buckling, took to hovering to the center of their makeshift arena in the middle of the lab.

"Bubbles? Are you okay?" Blossom whispered to her sister when she realized something was wrong, still unable to come to terms with her past mistakes. Bubbles shook her head, unable to find the will to even speak.

"Bubbles, are you ready?" Selicia asked the blue-eyed of the two. Despite being clearly unready, Bubbles nodded her head. Although Selicia knew that she wasn't entirely truthful, she allowed the match to go ahead: "Begin!"

Blossom raised her fist in a defensive posture and waited. Bubbles did the same but did not attack.

"What are you waiting for?" Blossom mouthed cautiously at Bubbles – she knew that her Mom would not like any form of 'staging' or 'collusion'.

At being egged forward, Bubbles tried to let out a brave shout only for it to sound frightened and anemic. She charged forward with a fist wound up for a punch, attempting to imitate her less fearful self. Blossom was able to sidestep her with tremendous ease and trip her, then pin both her arms behind her back.

"You're learning all the wrong things from Buttercup, Bubbles!" Selicia yelled at Bubbles, exasperated. "Get up and try again!" Buttercup, in her corner, couldn't help but break a tear from what her Mom said, but it was only a momentary spurt of empathy from the silver lining in her head, brought on by Bubbles' intense anxiety and misery.

"What about your new power, Bubbles?" Blossom suggested as she dusted her meek sister off. "Why not use it?"

"But- it's um… ur…" Bubbles searched everywhere desperately for an answer. She sort of found it while she was looking at Selicia, who was looking sternly at her with her arms crossed over her bosom.

"It's against the rules to use our powers…" Bubbles finally said, knowing very well that she was misinforming her sister. It was the second time she had outright lied about her new 'power', and the umpteenth time she had passed up an opportunity to tell the truth. She'd never liked lying - and the only reason it was bearable for her was that the fairy godmother's magic was the only thing that could free her from fear and give her the strength to fight crime and by extension, preserve the sisterhood between her, Blossom and Buttercup.
"Oh, right," Blossom said. "Why didn't I think of that?" Despite being the smartest between the three of them, Blossom was none the wiser when it came to Bubbles' secret - and it made Bubbles feel worse. Her leader sister had placed complete trust in her - trust that she had to constantly betray from now on.

Bubbles would go on to lose the next two rounds trying to invoke her 'new ability' without the drug. On her second try, she charged Blossom with a whiny shout and a spinning kick - with the latter actually well-executed but futile - before getting taken down in a tackle mid-spin. On her third try, she went in with a flying kick and missed, before taking a punch to the side and the neck. She went down after getting forced to her knee when Blossom kicked her in the thigh and was restrained with an arm lock.

By the sixth round, Selicia had given up on Bubbles, and called the whole thing off as it was a one-sided wipeout every single time.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

12 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1923.

Bubbles had spent the rest of the day miserable and being afraid, despite the victory she had won for Blossom and Buttercup back at the cinema. Holed up in her room, she was having a tea party with Blossom and (reluctantly) Buttercup, but she was hardly paying attention, unable to enjoy it, knowing that everything she had gained could just disappear with just a buzz of the USDO hotline.

"Are you okay, Bubbles?" Blossom asked as she was putting down the kettle - she had noticed that something wasn't right with Bubbles all day. In training, she had put it down to nervousness and over-reliance on her powers, but she had no clue what could be causing it while they were just playing. Bubbles looked the same either way - sweating even when as enhanced individuals, they were highly resistant to heat, and going pale despite a supercharged adaptive circulatory system that could work even with half her blood gone.

"I'm fine," Bubbles lied and flashed a fake smile. However, beyond the surface lie, she struggled to think of a reason for her current freak-out. Their Dad had conducted a medical and scientific examination of them before dinner, and he'd remarked that they were in perfect health. "Just… tired, I guess."

"I'm sorry about the training," Blossom apologized as she took a sip from her tea. "I tried to make it end as quickly as I could."

"It's fine," Bubbles said and added nothing more. Silently, she took a sip from her tea as well, while leaning on Octi’s chair.

"Maybe I'll talk to Mom," Buttercup said unexpectedly, after downing an entire cup of tea, hating the taste but liking the hydration it provided. "Maybe she'll let you use your new power. I really wanna see it again!" Perhaps that way, she might find a way to beat it and win back her Mom's favor.

Buttercup had inadvertently added nothing but more pressure on top of the crushing boulder on top of Bubbles. Her toughest sister wanted to see it, but it was uncertain if she could ever provide an encore, and she couldn't imagine what would happen when she couldn't provide it again not if, but when it was required of her.

"I'm going to bed…" Bubbles said weakly and meekly as she got up from the table and walked
away. Blossom stared after her, worried.

"Bubbles- the party just started!" Blossom objected.

"It's not like a real party anyway," Buttercup said as she took the opportunity to get up and leave too. "Not like Elodie's."

"Oh, fine…" Blossom sighed, resigned that there wasn't much fun to be had tonight. She took a sip of her tea alone, and without the distraction of her girlish fun, felt the pressure of being a leader once more. What if Bubbles' new power was just a one-off event? How would she keep Buttercup from harm? How would she keep Bubbles away from harm? How would she even do all that and save innocent lives at the same time? Or do well enough in an operation? How would she even achieve anything?

Disapproving voices were beginning to swirl around Blossom as she leaned against her pink kiddy table, clutching her forehead as she was beginning to feel overwhelmed again.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

12 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 2359.

Despite Bubbles' fears, the clown phone did not ring, and so the Girls got to stay as little girls for the rest of Sunday. It didn't make it any easier for her, however, as she knew that the next one was coming anytime, anywhere. Even if Miss Keane would take the class to an excursion to the Townsville Zoo the next day, General Blackwater or Agent Blake could call Blossom through her cell phone.

She tried to sleep, but sleep would not come. Dad's story time did not do her any good. It didn't help that it was a story about Pinnochio, whose nose grew longer the more he lied. She couldn't help but see herself in Pinnochio, wishing once again that she was a real little girl and not some puppet controlled by General Blackwater, or everyone else.

For an hour or so, she thought she'd even fallen asleep and dreamed that she was Pinnochio, and every time she told a lie about her new power, her nose would grow longer over the tea table, except Blossom and Buttercup wouldn't notice. She'd dreamed that she had turned into a literal puppet, controlled by strings from high up above, leading into the dark sky above.

"Bubbles," a familiar feminine voice had whispered her name when she realized that even her face had become wooden and unresponsive, and only a single tear had managed to escape that entrapment. "I'm here. It's going to be okay."

That was when she woke up, though she still wasn't even sure if she'd fallen asleep. Out of the corner of her eyes, she could see white light coming in from under her door. She sat up, gasping in surprise.

'The fairy godmother is here?' Bubbles thought, worried that her secret would be exposed by a visit from the fairy godmother. Looking at her sisters, she saw that they were soundly asleep - they wouldn't have seen the white light. Did they? Could they? Bubbles was really afraid of being found out.

Buttercup snored and drooled where she was. Blossom turned in her sleep, mumbling to herself as she shook her head. Blossom thought the way Blossom looked was troubling. Was she having a nightmare?
Bubbles caressed Blossom in her ample scalp, before gently and quietly throwing off the baby blue side of the Girls' blanket and ascending into a stealthy hover. Gliding to the door, she opened and entered the corridor - and as it just so happened, there was light coming from the stairs. Bubbles followed it, turning the corner to begin the descent on the stairs, only to discover that the light was gone.

"Where did she go?" Bubbles wondered as she continued down the stairs and into the living room. Looking around, she wandered the living room, searching blindly - looking under the coffee table, the couch, peering into the kitchen. She didn't have to search for long when there was another burst of white light, this time coming from the backyard, shining through the glass sliding doors leading into it.

Excited, Bubbles flew towards the sliding doors thoughtlessly, creating a streak of baby blue light and a small whooshing noise in her wake. There, she saw her: the fairy godmother. Bathed in a glow of white light, she was highly visible and standing beside the family tree, her golden hair, blue dress and angel wings shining, sparkling. Bubbles slid open the backyard door and floated towards the fairy godmother in awe, forgetting that it was cold outside and not even feeling it.

"Hello, Bubbles," the fairy godmother greeted her god-daughter serenely. "It is nice to see you again."

"You came back!" Bubbles exclaimed gladly as she rushed to the sparkly-dressed being, hugging her in the legs. "I've been so worried that... That..."

"I will not return to your side?" the fairy godmother completed Bubbles' sentence for her.

"Yes..." Bubbles admitted. "I'm afraid, miss. I can't help Blossom and Buttercup without your magic!"

"Silly little girl," the fairy godmother teased lovingly with a laugh. "Since when does a fairy godmother ever abandon a child? Yes... yes... I will forever be at your side. That's a promise..."

"Is there anything, in particular, you need from me?" the fairy godmother asked with a mischievous smile, despite knowing exactly what Bubbles wanted.

"Your magic, fairy godmother! I need it, please!" Bubbles begged. "I need it or Blossom and Buttercup will hate me again!"

"Why, of course, dear," the fairy godmother said, a kind of triumphant smile replacing her previous smile. She reached into her dark blue pouch and pulled out a familiar brown leather pouch, but there were two of them this time. "Anything for you..."

Bubbles snatched them from the fairy godmother's hands desperately, smiling when she got them as if she had found some buried treasure.

"Oh thank you, thank you, thank you so much!" Bubbles squeaked with joy as she hugged the two pouches of 'magic'.

"Your welcome," the fairy godmother said. "But there are some rules you need to follow from now on, dear Bubbles..."

"I'll do anything for your magic!" Bubbles exclaimed, but her excitement was beginning to die down a little once rules were mentioned. "What are they?"

"They are simple to follow... yes... yes... Are you with me, Bubbles?" the fairy godmother said.
As if her wand was a pen, she used it to write sentences down using white light as ink and the air as paper. Despite facing Bubbles, she was able to write it mirrored such that Bubbles could read it without coming up next to her.

"Rule #1: Do not reveal my magic to anyone…" the fairy godmother read to Bubbles as she pointed out the first rule.

"Not even my Dad?" Bubbles asked.

"Not even him," the fairy godmother said.

"But why?" Bubbles asked.

"They do not believe in me as you do," the ethereal being said cryptically. "So make sure you hide my magic from everyone, dearie…"

"Okay…" Bubbles agreed submissively, knowing that everything hinged on the magic in the syringes.

"Rule #2: Return the pouch and syringe to me," the fairy godmother read the next rule after pointing it out. Bubbles thought it to be fair and square that she didn't even say a word. It was the least she could do.

"Rule #3: Let yourself go, Bubbles, when you are under my spell – have fun, do not think," the angel-like being read from her list – and it was written as it was read, for some reason. Bubbles thought it was funny. It made the fairy godmother out to be a fun and playful person, and she liked it.

"But what if I… hurt someone I shouldn't?" Bubbles asked. While she was under the influence of His Secret 2.0, she had no fear, no restraint and so much anger and pleasure and need for more stimulation, and she knew it – during the Battle of Silver Age Cineplex, she was aware of what was going on and what she was doing – but the intense desire to pay blood for blood, to avenge her sisters, to simply hurt for the sake of pleasure, was hard to resist. She simply didn't because she thought it was the only way to save her sisters and rekindle the sisterhood between them. Furthermore, the godmother's magic had removed the consequences of her actions – there was no pain and exhaustion as she fought in ways her normal self would have fainted from, replaced only by a constant, throbbing pleasure and rendered the rest of her insensate.

In other words, it felt as though her control of herself was slipping and easy to lose. Thinking back, she didn't really want to kill the cultist who had attempted to ambush her.

"But you won't – you'll have a very good reason for every person you attack," the fairy godmother said with that smile of hers, that hard-to-read smile. "Yes… yes… have confidence in yourself. After all, everyone you've banished in your last battle deserved it, do they not?"

Come to think of it, Bubbles thought the fairy godmother's point was reasonable. It was because of all the bad guys involved that her sisters were wounded quite badly in that battle. They deserved it. All of it.

"Rule #4: You will do everything I ask of you," the fairy godmother finally stated the last of the code. She paused after that to let Bubbles take it in. Bubbles had only looked at her with those wide eyes, as though expecting more rules to just be written in the freezing air. "Is there anything you wish to ask?"

"But what can I do for you, miss fairy godmother?" Bubbles asked enthusiastically.
"Oh, that. Just… small things." the fairy godmother said with what looked like a devious smile, but Bubbles was none the wiser. "Tiny tokens to show me appreciation for the help I provide you. It's only polite, yes?"

"Like what?" Bubbles pressed, not out of suspicion for she was smiling innocently as she asked, but out of an eager need to please her benefactor.

"Oh, my weary old bones…" the fairy godmother exclaimed as she placed the back of her hand on her forehead, arching her body in a show of tiredness that was stereotypical of a lady. "I help from the kindness of my heart and receive nothing in return. All I'll ask for are just tiny things that will make me smile… yes… yes…"

"I'll do anything you want, fairy godmother," Bubbles said. "You've helped me so much – I should help you too, even if it's just to make you smile. My Dad taught me that people should help each other to make the world a better place…"

"Speaking of doing everything I ask of you – how about one tiny little thing, right now?" the fairy godmother requested.

"What do you want, fairy godmother?" Bubbles asked with an enthusiastic smile, eager to please. Tokens of appreciation for the magic - that was the rule, set in stone.

"Hugs and kisses?" the shining angel said. Bubbles floated up to her without a word and wrapped her arms around her savior's neck as the angelic being embraced her, then planted a peck on her cheek.
Chapter Summary

Professor Utonium and his colleague, Psychiatrist Alice, continues to bear the burden of knowledge...

B47, B48 & B49 W12 Medical & Experimental Report

DOC: 12 FEB 1989 (Sunday)

Created by: Professor Utonium

Title: Important Developments in B47, B48 & B49

Medical Report - Intelligence Quotient

It is now almost 3 months since the Girls have been created following the lab accident caused by Jojo, and they have been developing at a rapid pace. Time, however, does not seem to fly, and I am afraid that I have some potentially disturbing news, though it could just be my own bias as the Girls' guardian exaggerating things.

I have administered a second IQ test to the Girls, 2 weeks after the first. The IQ test in question has been adjusted to the Girls' mental development. Though their mental development is incredibly uneven compared to that of other children (for full details, please consult my earlier reports on the Girls' development), I have decided to place them at 4 years old.

Their previous IQ are rated as such:

Blossom (B47): 181
Bubbles (B49): 113
Buttercup (B48): 164

At previous rates, even Bubbles, who suffers from genetic factors reducing her intelligence (note: see the report on Bubbles' genetic source, Ester Olofsson for full details), has a level of intelligence considered to be high-average.

This is the result of the current IQ test:

Blossom (B47): 165
Bubbles (B49): 108
Buttercup (B48): 147

There appears to be a relatively steep decline in their intelligence quotient, across all Girls. I am deeply worried about this development. MRI brain scans have revealed nothing so far.
To explain the origin of their heightened intelligence: Chemical X is the causal factor in their increased intelligence. I suspect that their brains and nervous systems have been tapping on Chemical X's vast energy reserves to propel chemical and electrical signals in their brains and nerves to their maximum speed and efficiency. This also means that they don't get tired as easily from sustained thought. I even suspect that Chemical X's high incidence of quantum tunneling has been utilized somehow to transmit information throughout the Girls' brains and nervous systems faster than the speed of light.

I fear that somehow, this ability of theirs is receding. I don't know how, and I don't know why. This is a worrying development. As it is, the Girls are having difficulty navigating the complex and often confusing world of law enforcement out there. I cannot imagine what will happen if the Girls were to revert in intelligence back to their genetic sources' baseline. Bubbles, who will revert to an IQ of 81 if this is the case, would barely be able to even function as an average human being, much less fight crime.

I have consulted the Girls and USDO's own early childhood development specialist, Miss Keane, and she will be attempting to counteract this trend by focusing especially on methods to improve logical thinking and creativity, in addition to the usual enhanced curriculum she has arranged for them. However, she has stated that she believes their absence from class to be a contributing factor. I have spoken to Psychiatrist Alice on the phone about this as well, and she believes that it could be a symptom of mental stress and the many mental issues the Girls are facing.

Medical Report - Growth

I have another potentially dire issue to report. I have performed another physical examination on the Girls, and although I have found no abnormality in their cell and blood samples or any part of their bodies, I have made a discovery that could potentially have severe implications for the Girls and their role as long-term law enforcement agents with the USDO and Townsville. Below is some information to illustrate my point:

30 NOV 1988 Height/Weight Results

Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43 Pounds

Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42 Pounds

Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45 Pounds

2 DEC 1988 Height/Weight Results

Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43 Pounds
Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42 Pounds
Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45 Pounds

5 DEC 1988 Height/Weight Results

Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43 Pounds
Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42 Pounds
Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45 Pounds

11 DEC 1988 Height/Weight Results

Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43 Pounds
Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42 Pounds
Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45 Pounds

17 DEC 1988 Height/Weight Results
Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43.4 Pounds

Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42.1 Pounds

Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45.5 Pounds

(It is only here that they have put on weight, mainly additional muscle mass, likely from training)

29 DEC 1988 Height/Weight Results
Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43.5 Pounds

Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42.2 Pounds

Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45.6 Pounds

(I had to skip multiple height/weight measurements because of the operations the Girls have been taking part in and the injuries they suffered)

7 JAN 1989 Height/Weight Results
Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43.5 Pounds

Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42.2 Pounds
Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45.6 Pounds

14 JAN 1989 Height/Weight Results

Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43.3 Pounds

Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42.1 Pounds

Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45.4 Pounds

(They appear to have lost some muscle mass, likely due to the lack of any challenging law enforcement operations. Sergeant Selicia Goodwin had also given them a training break for a week)

21 JAN 1989 Height/Weight Results

Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43.3 Pounds

Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42.1 Pounds

Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45.4 Pounds

28 JAN 1989 Height/Weight Results

Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43.2 Pounds
Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42 Pounds

Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45.3 Pounds

4 FEB 1989 Height/Weight Results

Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43.2 Pounds

Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42 Pounds

Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45.3 Pounds

12 FEB 1989 Height/Weight Results

Blossom (B47)
Height: 44 Inches
Weight: 43.3 Pounds

Bubbles (B49)
Height: 43.5 Inches
Weight: 42.1 Pounds

Buttercup (B48)
Height: 44.5 Inches
Weight: 45.4 Pounds

(This is today. I had to delay the physical examination until today due to the Girls' recent security operations and injuries.)

The reason why I took constant, careful measurements of Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup's height and weight, much to their annoyance, is because of their explosive growth upon creation, from
mere micrometers as stem cells to their present height and weight as fully-formed 5-year-old equivalents. I had long suspected Chemical X to have a side effect on the Girls' growth patterns, and I was deathly worried that it could rapidly age the Girls until expiration, resembling cases of the Progeria group of diseases, except hyper-accelerated to the point where the Girls' lifespan would be measured in the months. I was also suspecting Chemical X of negatively affecting the Girls' pituitary glands, resulting in abnormal growth and even gigantism in the long run. Thankfully, neither proved to be the case. However, I have discovered something else.

The Girls' height has not increased even a fraction of an inch ever since their creation. It is now 10 days away from their 3rd month's birthday. There should have been at least a 0.3-0.5 inch increase in their height, or 1 inch maximum. However, there is no recorded increase at all. I have been observing careful experimental etiquette for the procedures. I have taken several measurements each time to eliminate human error. Machines, calibrated on a weekly basis, were used for the measurement. Human error, I don't think, is the issue here.

It is possible that the Girls are locked in some kind of growth stasis. Should that be the case, knowing Chemical X, the best case scenario is that they remain in their current physical state with no abnormalities. They will remain as children forever – while this is not exactly optimistic, there could be a chance that they might be effectively immortal. This, however, will depend largely on the effects Chemical X have on the integrity of their genetics, particularly their telomeres. More investigation is required before any conclusions can be drawn.

The worst-case scenario, however, is what I find it hard to type here. Chemical X could have induced a condition causing Dwarfism, along with other symptoms that have yet to surface, that are pathological and debilitating to the Girls. I will keep a close watch on the Girls. I will have to run some tests focusing on their hormones and do more bloodwork to ascertain this.

However, I believe that I might have a solution to this, though the original intention has not been to alleviate their growth stasis. I will keep the council updated on this.

I believe it is prudent not to tell the Girls about this condition. Over the months, I've been very optimistic about the future. The subject of growing up and adulthood comes up often in my conversations with them. They are all optimistic about the prospects of growing up. I fear that I might have painted myself into a corner here. They would be devastated if they find out that they will remain as children forever. Especially Blossom.

I hope my solution to their growth stasis works. It has to.

---

**Capabilities Report**

Ever since the near-disastrous operation in the Silver Age Cineplex last Friday, the Girls have developed new powers. In a previous report, I mentioned that adversity appears to be a major motivational factor in the Girls' development in terms of enhanced abilities. It appears to be the case here. Below is a summary of my experiments and testing involving their new abilities.

**Buttercup (B48)**

New Ability: Laser Vision - split into Laser Drill & Laser Slice (Note: I know it sounds corny, but this is essentially what it is.)

Description: Buttercup appears to have developed the ability to fire laser from her eyes. In my lab tests, she appears to consistently emit a spectrum of laser about 531nm in wavelength.
The mechanism for this appears to be similar to Blossom's Infrared Vision and zooming vision. On close analysis, multiple vortexes consisting of transmuted Chemical X would form before her eyes, with the closest ones being 0.1-0.3 inches from her pupils. I believe these vortexes act as lenses to focus the laser beams released from her eyes.

The laser beams are capable of cutting through anything from paper and leather to Kevlar and steel, the time needed to do so is near-instantaneous for the thinnest widths. Steel and Kevlar up to an inch thick could be cut through with ease. Anything more requires seconds of sustained bursts. Much of this depends on numerous factors, however. Buttercup was able to cut through 3 inches of steel instantly regardless by pushing herself harder, all the way to exhaustion since it appears that she is getting used to the new ability and it is taxing in the time being.

Usage: I have advised Buttercup to avoid cutting people with her new Laser Vision ability unless her life is threatened. I have also advised her on its possible applications as a tool for breaching and surgical cutting, especially if she needs to execute these actions quietly. Furthermore, she could use her Laser Vision in several ways - either 'drilling' or 'slicing'. Drilling could be used to go deep into an object, while slicing is better for separating large swathes of material into two. Please ensure that she does not 'drill' and 'slice' people up on a whim. I will advise Blossom to watch Buttercup.

Bubbles (B49)

New Ability: BerXerker (Note: This is the tentative name as my investigation into this has not yet yielded any conclusive results. I think I am getting very good at naming the Girls' abilities)

Description: My report on Bubbles' elusive BerXerker power will come mainly from the Girls' account. Most of the information I have had come from Blossom, who recounts that Bubbles was 'different' when she used this ability. She was much more daring, vicious and hyper-aggressive, even reckless and ruthless.

Bubbles did not want to talk about it at first, but when I approached her, I guess she knew that she had to. She believes that it is her new ability. When I asked her about what it does, she stated that she believes it makes her stronger, faster and more able to take pain and injuries. She made no mention of her aggression and recklessness until I brought it up.

This BerXerker power could not be replicated in the lab. The set-up was simple: I pitted Bubbles against both Blossom and Buttercup (for safety, in case she overwhelms one of them) - heavily kitted out in their riot gear (heavily armored and padded versions of their tactical gear), and instructed her to spar with them. She attempted to attack, only to the restrained by both Blossom and Buttercup with ease. This was repeated three times.

Bubbles believe that she couldn't do it against her sisters - this could extend to all friendly targets. This could mean that her new power appears to have some sort of in-built IFF (Identify Friend or Foe), which is fortunate, considering how difficult to control it sounds like. However, this is inconclusive as she had given other reasons for her inability to reproduce her new power: ranging from exhaustion, 'not feeling like it' and being upset. The experiment is a failure.

I do not wish to push Bubbles any further as she indeed seems upset at losing control to it, I have decided to delay my investigation of this to a later date. In the meantime, I am more optimistic of Bubbles' outlook in law enforcement, even if as her assigned parent, as it means that she will cope with it better.
Psychiatrist Alice: I'm sorry we're doing this late today. We won't do this often at all, promise. You sure you don't want a marshmallow?

Bubbles: No, thanks…

Psychiatrist Alice: I thought you like marshmallows? Is something wrong, Bubbles?

Bubbles: I… just don't feel like eating. Besides, Dad said not to eat sweet things when it's late.

Psychiatrist Alice: Huh. Okay. How have you been, Bubbles?

Bubbles: I think I'm okay.

Psychiatrist Alice: (scribbles something on notes) Really? That's good news, sweetie.

Bubbles: You sound disappointed… Aren't you happy that I feel better?

Psychiatrist Alice: Yes, of course I am. It's just- you sound very different from the last time we meet, Bubbles. Do you know what caused that change?

Bubbles: I guess it's because… urm… (pauses) I've done better in crime-fighting, I guess.

Psychiatrist Alice: I heard about everything, Bubbles. The Purple Man in the forest, the mission in The Strip. Are you sure you're okay?

Bubbles: (Begins crying)

Psychiatrist Alice: I'm sorry, Bubbles. Do you need some time?

Bubbles: (sniffling) No, I… I'm fine. It's over and Blossom has forgiven me.

Psychiatrist Alice: Yes, I've heard about Blossom too. How are things between the two of you?

Bubbles: We're fine now. She's forgiven me and I… guess I've forgiven her too. Poor Blossom wasn't allowed to go to the Puppet Pal show with us and I feel sorry for her.

Psychiatrist Alice: You guess you've forgiven her?

Bubbles: Yeah.

Psychiatrist Alice: Is there anything more you want to add to that?

Bubbles: N-no, not really…

Psychiatrist Alice: I see. Never mind. Now, about your battle at the… (flips through notes) Silver Age Cineplex. I heard that you did well that day, and it's due to a new ability, is that correct?

Bubbles: Who told you about that?
Psychiatrist Alice: It's not important-

Bubbles: I need to know, Miss Alice. Please. Who told you about my new power?

Psychiatrist Alice: (hesitates) Your father did.

Bubbles: W-what did he say?

Psychiatrist Alice: Oh, that you've discovered a new ability. Something that makes you stronger and fight harder?

Bubbles: Oh…

Psychiatrist Alice: Were you expecting me to say something else?

Bubbles: No…

Psychiatrist Alice: How does this new power help you feel better, Bubbles?

Bubbles: (nervous) I… urm… I just feel safer since I know something new…

Psychiatrist Alice: I see. What exactly does it do again? This new power?

Bubbles: It's like what Daddy said. It makes me stronger. I don't want to talk about it anymore…

Alice: Bubbles, you're sweating and shaking. Are you sure you're okay?

Bubbles: (shouting) I don't want to talk about it, okay!?

Alice: (shocked) Bubbles!

Bubbles: I'm sorry… I'm so sorry… (cries)

Alice: No, I should be the one apologizing – I didn't mean to be pushy.

Bubbles: Can I go now? (cries)

Alice: Do you want a hug?

Bubbles: I just want to go… (cries)

Alice: Of course. (Pattering of feet, before there is the sound of a door opening and closing)

Alice: (louder, facing voice recorder) Is it just me, or has Bubbles' personality changed completely? She's never acted this way before. She seems really nervous and defensive, even secretive when we're talking about her new power. I doubt she's hiding anything but… this requires further investigation. My next obvious lead will be Thomas Upton himself. He might know what's going on. It could be this 'Anti-X' he's been talking about that could be causing this.

_____

Timestamp: 2221

Blossom: Hi, Miss Alice.

Alice: Hello, Blossom. How are you?

Blossom: I'm fine… I think things are getting better now.
Alice: That's great. What's that you have in your hands?

Blossom: I made this just for you. (Hands something fluttering like paper over)

Alice: They're beautiful!

Blossom: I spent a whole day making those papier mache flowers. I'm sorry for what I did last time.

Alice: It's all but forgotten, Blossom (laughs). It'll take a lot more than that to get rid of me.

Blossom: I don't want to get rid of you…

Alice: I know. (sound of paper getting set down on a table) So, I heard that you're having problems managing your anger?

Blossom: Yes. It's just so hard… I know I'm wrong.

Alice: How?

Blossom: I've hurt Bubbles because of it. I'm afraid of hurting her again.

Alice: It's not all bad.

Blossom: Really?

Alice: You know what's wrong. That's how you know how to change yourself. It's how we grow, and learn.

Blossom: But I don't know if I can take it the next time…

Alice: How do you mean?

Blossom: It happens whenever I think about all this crime-fighting and how people are getting hurt. It's worst when it's our fault…

Alice: It's not. It's never your fault. You keep blaming yourself for it - even your dad said so. You shouldn't.

Blossom: (shouting) But we're supposed to help people! Of course it's our fault! Stop telling me I'm wrong!

Alice: I understand where you're coming from.

Blossom: (crying) I'm sorry… I've done it again, have I?

Alice: No, Blossom. Hey, it's alright. Blossom, you don't have to go. (sound of sofa crinkling and distant crying) Shh… It's okay. Hey, I'm fine, see? Here, sit back down and let me show you something.

Blossom: (upset) What?

Alice: A perfect little girl like you… I bet I can pull something nice out of you – here!

Blossom: But how did you-? Did you just pull a chocolate coin out of my ear?

Alice: But of course I did. It'd be impossible for me not to. Everything about you is nice, Blossom.
You could do a lot worse. Here, the coin's yours. I took it out of your smart little brain, after all.

Blossom: (shyly) Thank you…

Alice: You see? It's not all bad. Whenever something bad happens, just remember that sometimes it just sounds a lot worse than it is. Sometimes, you just need to avoid thinking too much about it. You're a leader in your own right – and at such a young age! That's a real achievement right there. So all you need to do is just focus on the problem. And as you do, remember the good times. Like right now, and with your parents, and sisters.

Blossom: Like just now? When Bubbles gave me a puppet? (Laughs)

Alice: Yes. Did you talk to your Dad about this? About getting angry?

Blossom: Yes…

Alice: What did he say?

Blossom: A lot…

-TRANSCRIPT PAUSED-

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

11 FEB (Saturday) 2019. 1340.

"What are we doing out here, Dad?" Blossom said as she was scratching herself near her battle wounds. "And why are you bringing those nails? What's the hammer for, Dad?"

Dad did not answer immediately. He continued walking out into the backyard – he did not have his jacket and snow boots on. He was just in his lab coat and office-wear. Blossom followed and had no idea what was going on and what her Dad was trying to do.

"I'm going to show you one of those things my own dad did right," Dad said the moment he stopped, right next to one of many fence posts marking the boundaries of the house. "Put out your hand, Blossom."

For some reason, Blossom could feel her blood running cold when her Dad had ordered her so. Reluctantly and apprehensively, she did as she was asked. Ever since that night when her Dad had acted as if he wanted to throw her out to make his point, she'd been more guarded around him.

Dad put the handle of his hammer in her hand. She took it, her heart still thumping vigorously.

"You okay, Blossom?" Dad asked, concerned, his voice slightly shivering from the winter temperature. Blossom nodded her head. He handed her a nail, which she took with her other hand. "Here, put the sharp end of this nail against this fence and hammer it in."

Blossom had never handled carpentry tools before, and so her Dad had to guide her hands and teach her how to do it.

"Gently now – I really don't want to have to fix this fence just because you sneezed," her Dad said when he was finally confident that Blossom was going to do it right.

Blossom did as she was told, still wondering if her Dad was going to act again to put his point
across to her. Gently, she began hammering the nail in, taking care not to activate her enhanced strength and ruin half the fence.

"Was that difficult, Blossom?" Dad asked cryptically.

"No... It was actually easy," Blossom said.

"I see. Here's the rest of the nails. Hammer all of them in," Dad continued. Blossom took them and hammered them in one by one. By the end of it, there were five nails in the otherwise pristine white fence post.

"Do you know what the fence and the nails represent, Blossom?" Dad asked mysteriously.

"I don't know… a fence post and nails?" Blossom answered. Despite her vast intelligence, she was still limited by her age – had she been a normal little girl, she would be spending most of her time in a rocking cradle, ignorant of even the alphabets and single-digit numbers. Metaphors were still a tough concept for her to grasp, but her Dad would have a hand in making it easier.

"Think of the nails as the things you say when you're angry, Blossom, or the things you do when you're mad," the father explained patiently. "And this fence post is whoever it is you're talking to or doing something to when you're mad. Now remove the nails with your bare hands, Blossom."

Blossom proceeded to grab a nail by its head using her tiny little fingers, and with the tiniest application of effort, rip the nail out of the fence post. Dad stared at the feat, his mouth agape. It wasn't supposed to go like that.

"Was it harder than hammering it in?" he asked purposefully, trying to keep his fatherly, sagely straight face on.

"I don't know," Blossom said, ignorant of the moral lesson her Dad was trying to teach. "It was kinda easy to pull out."

"Urm- nevermind. Look, it's supposed to be harder to pull the nail out than it is to drive it in," Dad would go on to say, before demonstrating that he couldn't pull the nail that Blossom had hammered into the fence out. "Do you know what it means?"

It was at the tip of Blossom's tongue. Try as she might, she couldn't quite put it all together immediately. For seconds, Blossom tried, and for seconds she'd only gotten that uncomfortable feeling of not-quite-getting-it. It was a feeling she hated, whether she'd encountered it in school or at home while trying to understand a story on her own. She had to know everything and anything she encounters.

While Blossom was trying to make sense of it, Dad had taken the hammer from her, and with some difficulty, pulled the nails out with the claw side of the hammer, further driving home his point.

"Do you see the holes these nails made, Blossom?" Dad finally said. Blossom nodded when she saw the unsightly holes in the fence. It'd reminded her, for some reason, of poor Mister Wilbur, or 'Boomer', as most people liked to call him. "It represents what happens every time you act poorly on your anger. For every wrong thing you say or do, you're hurting someone or something, and sometimes, it can be permanent like these holes."

It didn't happen immediately, but when it dawned on Blossom what Dad meant, it'd hit her like a barrage of submachinegun bullets from an execution squad. She gasped and her eyes had gone wet.

"Bubbles..." Blossom cried as she felt the holes on the fence post with her tiny fingers. "I did this
to her…"

"I'm afraid you did, Blossom," Dad said regrettably. Blossom's hand had gone up to her mouth to stifle a gasping sob as she tried to control herself. Her tears, however, had broken through and froze on her cheeks. They hugged after that. "I'm so sorry you have to learn this lesson now, flower puff. I wish you had more time before you did. But you know what?"

"What?" Blossom replied in dismay.

"Bubbles isn't entirely like this fence post. Sure, you might have changed her a little, but she will heal, grow and accept what you did. Before you know it, the two of you will put this behind you, maybe even laugh about it in the future. You'll just have to be nice to her from now on, okay?"

"I'll be the nicest, sweetest sister to her ever," Blossom promised.

- TRANSCRIPT RESUMED -

Timestamp: 2229

Alice: Your dad is right you know.

Blossom: I know…

Alice: It's really good advice right there. You should listen to him.

Blossom: I just wish I hadn't done all those things to Bubbles.

Alice: What's past is past, Blossom. The most important thing is that you've stopped. Think about what I said, okay? You look tired. Why don't you go now?

Blossom: But I want to stay and, you know, talk to you. (Yawns)

Alice: You're tired. We can always do it next week. A growing little girl like you needs her beauty sleep. (Laughs)

Blossom: (Laughs) Okay… Thanks, Miss Alice. Can I have a hug?

Alice: Sure - You know, Bubbles asked for one too - well, last week, anyway. The both of you are so alike, it's impossible for the two of you not to get along.

Blossom: I hope so. See you next week, Miss Alice.

Alice: Goodbye, Blossom. (Sound of footsteps, before the door opens and closes)

Buttercup: (Sound of eating) Thanks, Miss Alice. You promised to bring marshmallows and you
Alice: It's not a problem, Buttercup. Are you sure you should be eating so many of them at this hour?

Buttercup: I won't tell my Dad if you don't.

Alice: Right. How's your leg, Buttercup? I heard that you've been a brave girl.

Buttercup: It's nothing. It's still hard to walk and fly with it, but it's getting better. I'm tougher than Blossom and Bubbles!

Alice: Haha, of course you are. So, I've heard… nothing about you lately.

Buttercup: What do you mean? Is that good?

Alice: Yes, Buttercup, it kind of is. I'm proud of you for being patient and restrained.

Buttercup: (Pause) It's… nothing. I'm happy too.

Alice: Still, I believe we should continue with our exercises.

Buttercup: You mean the thinking games?

Alice: Yes, Buttercup.

Buttercup: But I don't wanna think about those things.

Alice: You have to, Buttercup, if you want to be loved more by your parents and sisters. You'll be a better girl because of it, and we all know that girls like that deserve a lot of good things, right? Presents and affection and attention…

Buttercup: Okay, fine…

Alice: Now, close your eyes (ruffling through handbag) and wear this blindfold. (sound of cords snapping) Now, the first thing I want you to imagine is your dad's face…

(20 minutes of psychotherapy has been skipped in this transcript. For the full transcript, consult the Psychiatry and Social Services Department, USDO.)

Buttercup: (snoring)

Alice: Buttercup? Buttercup!

Buttercup: (startled) Huh? Hmm?

Alice: You fell asleep.

Buttercup: I did?

Alice: Yeah, it's not a problem. It's getting late. You should go to bed.

Buttercup: Sure, Miss Alice. Thanks for the marshmallows.

Alice: No problem. (Sound of rapid footsteps and the door opening and closing.)

Alice: Supplemental notes. Buttercup is still lying about her activities on the outside. It is all but
certain by now, based on her behavior, that she had killed recently. The verbal and physical tics I noticed had come up too often and whenever I introduce a trigger. I'm just glad she's not threatening me with death or bodily harm. She was probably too sleepy to do that.

Timestamp: 2304

Alice: Hello, Thomas.

Professor Utonium: Evening, Alice. (Sound of sofa surface depressed) How are the Girls?

Alice: Well, to start, good job with Blossom, Tom. That hammer and nails trick you used sounds like something I'd do, except with a folk medicine kind of spin to it. I think you've taught her a valuable lesson and it's easily as effective as any therapy session.

Utonium: Should I sign up as a counselor then? (Laughs)

Alice: (Laughs) You're fine where you are, Tom – with the Girls.

Utonium: So, how is Blossom?

Alice: It'll be tough for her to control her anger for now, but she'll get there. I think she's doing very well as it is since she's just coming to 3 months old. She's smart for her age. She'll learn quickly.

Utonium: I hope so.

Alice: Bubbles is doing really well. Did you have anything to do with that? Did you inject her with Anti-X and somehow give her a new power accidentally?

Utonium: That's not what the Anti-X does. She discovered her new ability all on her own.

Alice: It seems to be doing Bubbles some good. While I was speaking to her, crime-fighting no longer bothers her as much.

Utonium: Really?

Alice: But there's something else. I don't know why, but she seems… changed. She's really defensive when I asked her about her new power.

Utonium: Oh, she's just shy. She was really shy about her Sonic Scream too. I think it had something to do with Buttercup making fun of her.

Alice: I don't think Buttercup made fun of her this time. While I was working on Buttercup, she even mentioned that Bubbles was cool with her new power.

Utonium: I'm sure it's nothing. I think she'll still be shy about it even without Buttercup's jokes. It's Bubbles we're talking about here. I'm sure she'll open up to you about it next week. I'll probably run some tests on it tomorrow.

Alice: She mentioned that it made her stronger. Did she say anything else to you?

Utonium: Well, actually, she did say that it'd made her faster and braver too.

Alice: Braver?

Utonium: Yeah, she said she didn't feel fear when she used her new power – it allowed her to plow
right into the bad guys.

Alice: Isn't it coincidental that she'd suddenly learn a new power that could just magically take away her fear?

Utonium: Borderline miraculous. I know what you mean. I know how it looks like, but I have a theory, Alice. I think it's possible that the Chemical X in the Girls is adaptive. The Girls could harness it for whatever it is they want to achieve. It's why they hadn't grown stronger last month, and all of a sudden, Buttercup's shooting lasers out of her eyes and Bubbles goes berserk when she's been pushed around for too long.

Alice: Buttercup can shoot lasers out of her eyes now?

Utonium: Yes.

Alice: (pause) That's…

Utonium: Yeah, I know. This is why I'm going to go full speed ahead with my Anti-X. It's becoming easier and easier for Buttercup to just hurt and kill people now.

Alice: She's been lying to me.

Utonium: About what?

Alice: About killing. She's been killing people. Someone. I wasn't sure the previous session, but I've been seeing signs of dishonesty in her during my sessions.

Utonium: She wouldn't. She knows how I feel about taking lives.

Alice: Thomas, she's suffering from severe psychopathy.

Utonium: (tense) I don't need you to remind me about that. Don't you think that I, as her father, would remember that? You think I don't blame myself for personally ordering the stem cell samples that became her?

Alice: I'm sorry.

Utonium: No, I'm just- (sighs) I should be the one apologizing. I know what you mean. I just don't want to suspect Buttercup of breaking her word without any real evidence.

Alice: What about my observations?

Utonium: I'm talking about real, physical and observable evidence.

Alice: (pause) I didn't expect that from you. I guess we've gotten off on the wrong foot today. I should go. It's getting late. I'll send you a psychiatric report over the USDO internetwork.

Utonium: Alice, I didn't mean it that way.

Alice: (packing things up) I'll see you next week.

Utonium: Alice- (sound recorder has been switched off at this point)

-TRANSCRIPT END-
Chapter 27: Red (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

As Bubbles continue to hold off on her drug use and Buttercup tries to pretend as if nothing has changed, Blossom leads The Three to a mission that will continue their fight to put away the Amoeba Boys and cripple organized crime in Townsville.

Chapter 27: Red (Part 1)


13 FEB (Monday) 1989. 0935.

"Miss Keane, is it ever right to do something wrong?" Bubbles asked as she sat before her teacher's desk, for some reason unable to look at her. "To help people?"

"Can you give me an example?" Miss Keane replied, looking up from the report cards she'd been scribbling on.

"I don't want to say…" Bubbles said secretively, her eyes flitting to Miss Keane's, only to look away when the teacher tried to make eye contact with her.

"You don't have to if you don't want to. I understand," the teacher replied gently with carefully enunciated words, setting an example as she always did. "Well, it really depends, doesn't it? You've been fighting crime. You should know that sometimes, to save innocent lives, you'll have to hurt someone or even..."

Miss Keane had fallen silent. The idea of advocating violence with children didn't sit well with her. She had yet to come to terms with her employment under the USDO, and how it had turned her life topsy-turvy.

"But how do I know when to do it?" Bubbles asked as she continued looking down at her lap, playing with her fingers, always afraid that something could go wrong, even though there was no chance of it. Sweat was streaking across her face, despite the temperature in the room - the heater was set to a comfortable range. She was dying to use the fairy godmother's magic ever since getting them, not just for the edge it gave her in combat, but for the intense pleasure as well, and it was the only thing that could ever make her forget her worries. At the same time, she was afraid that, somehow, Miss Keane or someone in class would find out about it. She could acutely feel Blossom and Buttercup's eyes down her back even though, in reality, they were laughing with their classmates and concentrating on their own art and craft.

"If you find yourself being forced to do something bad, you're not wrong," Miss Keane revealed. "You'll know it when you have no other choice."

No other choice. Bubbles thought hard about it. Did she have a choice? Could she decide between whether to use His Secret 2.0 or not? Bubbles thought that she didn't. If she forgoes the drug, she knew she would be useless in crime-fighting, especially in Buttercup's eyes. She could try fighting without the drug, but she knew she would end up messing up and then Blossom would be mad at
her. She would be alone again, unwanted and cast out. Furthermore, the magic was incredibly…
enticing. She knew the first time she took it that she had to have more of it. Now, to be without it
was torture. The world was terrifying and dull at the same time when she was unaffected by the
dark, red liquid. Surely it wasn't wrong to escape this pain and fear and boredom? They'd do it all
the time with toys and TV and puppet shows.

Buttercup, in the meantime, had lost all interest in making paper frogs. No amount of jumping fake
frogs made of flimsy colored paper could make her forget. For days, she had been distracted by
either fun or fighting or both. But now that both of them was gone and replaced by school
activities, there was time enough for her to think. And remember. And brood.

She couldn't help but to feel she had lost everything. When Bubbles had fallen out with Blossom,
she had an opportunity to get on Blossom's good side and 'change' her to become more like her.
She was hoping that by the time she was done with her, she would be able to openly maim and kill,
and even get Blossom to join in too. But now, it was no longer a possibility. Bubbles had somehow
 gained an edge and now she was in her glorious leader sister's good books once again. Predictably,
Blossom had gone back to playing with dolls and holding tea parties. Everything she had done for
days was gone in a matter of hours.

But that wasn't even the worst part. That night after Mullens had yelled at them and brought them
home in his smelly little car, Daddy had blamed her for Blossom's mistake. Before this, she had
been nothing but willing to forget about the things her Dad had said whenever he thought she
wasn't listening, but now, she found that she couldn't help but to bear a grudge against her Dad, not
just for misjudging her but also for everything he did – talking behind her back and calling her all
sorts of names (even though she didn't know what most of them meant) when he thought she was
out of earshot, always choosing her to go first whenever there was a test or experiment to run –
favoring Blossom and Bubbles over her! That last bit had been most unforgivable. She suspected
that everything had something to do with her being the least loved.

Buttercup hadn't forgiven any of the wrongs her Dad had done to her, owing to her photographic
memory, second only to Blossom's. And it'd started right when she was born. Her very name,
'Buttercup', had been chosen only because it started with a 'B'. And when she brought it up, all he
did was to find an excuse for his wrongdoing and add a new meaning to it as an afterthought,
saying that it was the name of a beautiful flower. And she hated flowers! Her room had been
painted and furnished with Blossom's favorite color in mind – which was another unforgivable fact.
The color of the room had never failed to remind her that she was second to Blossom, and even
third with Bubbles in the picture.

No, Buttercup hadn't forgiven her Dad. Forgiveness wasn't something that came easily to her, if
ever. Although she never really loved her Daddy in the same way that non-psychopaths would, she
had thought of him as someone important to her and their interactions and relationship, such as they
were, were meaningful and beneficial to her nonetheless. With his recent actions, it now felt less
so.

On that night after Bubbles' undercover mission in The Strip, Dad had come down on her hard.

'You should have defended your sister!' he'd yelled at her in front of everyone and told her to go to
his room, essentially isolating her and grounding her. He'd left her in his room for something like
half an hour before he finally deigned to see her. And for what? They argued after that. Buttercup
could still remember the argument right down to the tone her father used, and she did not
appreciate how he'd yelled at her one bit.

'I am very disappointed in you, Buttercup,' he'd said the moment he entered the room.
'But Dad!' she had objected only to be so rudely cut off.

'No buts! Remember what I told you on your very first day? ' her Dad had gone on. 'That out there, as long as the three of you stay together, you'll always have a family?'

'Bubbles isn't the kind of sister I want. I wish I have a sister who's more like me,' Buttercup remembered clearly what she said - she thought she could be honest. She thought it was what her Dad wanted. Instead, he'd turned into something else.

'Now you listen here, young lady!' Dad had yelled at her again the moment he heard her. 'You don't get to choose your family! What you have is what you get - instead of pushing her away, you should help her find herself instead. She looks up to you! As a… a role model! And you're disappointing her!'

Buttercup remembered that she was extremely annoyed with her Dad for lecturing her. Who was he to tell her what to do when he was never there? He was never the one who had to fight crime, and sometimes struggle to survive and get injured anyway, sometimes severely enough in the process that she had to roll around like an idiot in a stupid wheelchair. She remembered letting him know exactly what she thought, and it made Dad really, really mad. She couldn't understand why he would be since she was just telling the truth.

'What do you know, Dad? All you ever do is walk around the house and play in the lab,' Buttercup had said. 'You're worse than Bubbles. At least she'll get shot by the bad guys instead of me.'

'No more desserts for you, Buttercup!' he'd declared her punishment upon hearing with disbelief what she had said to him. 'You're not getting supper either until you apologize to Bubbles and me!'

What she hated most was that she did eventually apologize, not because she wanted to, but because she wanted her desserts and supper back. Missing a few of them had made her cranky. She hated that she had to come crawling back to him, in tears, before he relented, and she hated that she had to apologize to Bubbles even though she knew that she was clearly wrong to have broken her cover while they were searching for her in The Strip. She hated that she had to pretend that she was wrong - something she had to keep doing until forever.

And now, she was uncertain about the future of her relationship with her Dad.

The City of Townsville. Central District. Above City Hall.

13 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1521.

School had been uneventful; the hotline there hadn't been ringing, much to Blossom and Bubbles' relief, and Buttercup's annoyance. The former Girls needed the peace and quiet and routine, but Buttercup wanted to hurt and kill in secret and to escape her own mind by participating in some USDO-sanctioned chaos.

It had been over an hour since they started their daily patrol across the Townsville sky, and there hadn't been any real crime committed. Buttercup was becoming increasingly impatient, and to add salt to the wound, Blossom and Bubbles were chatting between each other happily, unaware of her need - not that she would want them to know. Bubbles had swiftly reasserted her position as Blossom's 'favorite', leaving her out once more.

The only thing of note was the street robber they apprehended for snatching a woman's handbag, but Blossom had stolen what tiny little fun there could have been by being the one to punch the
criminal out.

Bubbles, on the other hand, had no choice but to get used to the fact that she would have to pretend as if everything was normal for the rest of the foreseeable future. She'd been chatting with Blossom and putting on her most convincing smile ever, yet all the while, she'd been carrying the fairy godmother's magic in a couple of her magazine pouches, and she could feel them in there since. She could feel her skin burning where she had kept them, and the intense desire to just take one out and jab herself with it.

Passing by the City Hall, they waved at Mayor Wilford and Miss Bellum, who happened to be standing at the balcony outside the mayor's office.

"This is Flight Control Four to Bravo-Four-Seven, over," the Girls' radio came alive once more with the voice of a woman, stern and almost robotic. Buttercup's heart leaped with excitement at the prospect of a possible mission, and with it, the chance to hunt for prey, and kill behind Blossom's back. Bubbles couldn't help but be excited either, as it meant an opportunity to use her syringe of His Secret 2.0.

"Hi, Miss Flight Control Four, how can we help you?" Blossom replied on the radio.

"Bravo-Four-Seven, there is an operation requiring your participation. The police and USDO are waiting for you," the flight control officer stated. "Adjust heading by thirty-five degrees to the right, and continue straight to a large group of police officers and USDO soldiers near a farm. Fly low. They will signal for you. Over and out."

"We're going to a farm?" Bubbles said, genuinely interested in the idea. She had never been to one, even though she had heard about it in Dad's stories, whether real or fictional.

"I wish we could do it without fighting crime," Blossom added. "But crime does not sleep."

"I wonder who do we get to pound this time?" Buttercup asked. Each of them had their own guesses. With the current climate of crime, there was no telling what they would end up fighting - But Blossom was optimistic. With Buttercup's new laser beam and Bubbles' BerXerker frenzy, she felt that the three of them were ready for anything.

---

The City of Townsville. Outskirts. Towards Cult of His Arm Compound.

13 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1536.

The USDO had been meticulous in maneuvering the Girls towards the operation that needed them. Multiple flight control towers had reminded them of their heading and helped adjust their flight path whenever they strayed.

Where they had landed, the police and USDO were hushed and staying low, as if children in a room full of boogie men. Where they were, the trees were stripped of even dead leaves, even snow. They shot up from the ground like the hands of the dead. The moment the Girls were there, they knew that they weren't on friendly grounds.

They were met by Detective Mullens, along with Stanley Talker. Someone was missing.

"Hey Mister Mullens, where's Olivia?" Blossom asked while the detective was pulling a shotgun out of the trunk of his car and loading it with shells.

"She's pursuing a different lead this time," the detective answered after pumping his shotgun.
"Besides, I can't have her here. It's too dangerous."

"Who are we kicking today, Mister Mullens?" Buttercup asked as he was stuffing his pockets full of shotgun shells.

"You gals remember those red-robed cultists? The ones who messed you three up in the cineplex?" the detective explained as he shut his car trunk and rested his shotgun on his shoulder. He stretched his shoulders for a bit, and cracks rippled throughout his body. "Yeah, it's them. The Cult of His Arm. They're partly responsible for all the crazy drugs strewn around Townsville. We're going to their compound to haul 'em all in and search their place."

Bubbles had fallen silent. The mere mention of drugs had brought about a mixed reaction in her. It'd reminded her of the tough spot she was in - choosing between a clear conscience and performance in combat for the sake of her sisters. It'd also gotten her wondering if she could 'borrow' a few syringes from the cultists.

"I don't mind a little revenge…" Buttercup snarled dangerously as she grinned - some of them did shoot her during the Battle at Silver Age Cineplex, even if one of them allowed her to rip him apart. She was hoping that there were more volunteers.

"Revenge is bad, Buttercup," Blossom lectured her sister quickly before turning to Detective Mullens again: "Do you want us to sneak in and fight first?" Behind her, Buttercup glared at her as if she'd been slapped in the face.

The detective had intended to lead his police officers off but paused at the thought.

"No. We're doing things differently for now. We're going to make a show of force - we roll up to their compound like an army with humvees, with the four of you next to me," the detective explained, including Stanley Talker into the conversation. "It shouldn't end up like the last time at The Strip since it's going to be the five of us - and an army."

Detective Mullens was thinking back to the last time he tried to arrest a large group of criminals without firing a single bullet. It was at The Strip, and he'd tried it with the Girls, still very inexperienced, by his side. He had hoped then that his reputation, combined with the underground's knowledge of the Girls' lethal nature, would get the Lombardi gangsters to come quietly.

It didn't work, and it ended with the Highway 13 Incident in which the Girls had accidentally caused a series of pile-ups on the highway, resulting in over 60 injured. The Girls were hated for it, and it took multiple feats of heroism during the Battle of Morbucks Industries Research Labs for the city to forgive them - and even then, there were still people holding grudges against them. He himself was shot multiple times in the arm and had to be off-duty for way too many days, and even when he dragged himself out of the hospital bed, he'd done so before he was fully recovered, and had gone back to duty with a single arm.

He wasn't going to make the same mistake again. His reputation had been tarnished - and now he was deadly in the eyes of Townsville's criminals once more. The Girls were inexperienced then - and now they could hold their own. He had no backup then - and now he had an entire army at his disposal. And Stanley Talker, of course.

---

**The City of Townsville. Outskirts. Cult of His Arm Compound.**

13 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1549.
Detective Mullens had ordered the operation to start, and now he was marching along with his army of police officers and USDO personnel - Agent Blake wasn't with them today, as he was needed elsewhere. Together, they followed the road into a dirt path. The farm could be seen in the distance, with its manor on top of a little knoll. A windmill was spinning with the wind, rickety and looking worn from both weather and age, lending an air of Gothic foreboding to the scenery.

"Ri don't rike the srell..." Stanley Talker remarked as they approached the farm. "Reminds re rof the men from the sewers and cinera. Reeks rof drugs!"

"Stay close, boy," Detective Mullens said. "We might need your help if all hell breaks loose."

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup had been walking beside him too, opposite Stanley Talker. Blossom enjoyed walking once in a while, feeling the unique ground beneath her feet. She loved peaceful moments like these, before the inevitable chaos. Bubbles was just trying to get her mind off the possible upcoming battle, and the terrible thing she must do to contribute. Buttercup was shaking with anticipation.

"Mister Mullens?" Bubbles suddenly said as she came up next to the detective and held his hand.

"What is it, Bubs?"

"Do you ever think about the bad things you have to do to help people?" Bubbles asked. By experience alone, Mullens knew that Bubbles was suffering from guilt - though he could only guess the cause of it. However, he thought it was her recent killing of a cultist in the Silver Age Cineplex that might have something to do with it - Bubbles wasn't like Buttercup, who enjoyed killing.

"Sometimes," Detective Mullens finally answered, though with so many decades of bad memories to drudge through, some a blur while others clear, some quite vivid, it took him time. "Whenever I'm at home, putting on a game show or movie. Not so much these days, you know why?"

"Why?" Bubbles was eager to know what he was about to say - she was still unsure about the fairy godmother's magic.

"Because I know what I'm doing is right. It don't matter if I killed a few criminals here and there - I'll bring most of them in. Either way, they won't be causing trouble for a while - at least until a corrupt judge reduces their sentence," the detective said, reminiscing. "That means people who would have become victims won't be. Yeah, I can sleep with that."

Bubbles thought it was eye-opening, too. She thought Miss Keane and Detective Mullens were right, and supportive of her drug use even though they didn't know about it. She believed she had no choice, and if the drug could help her, was it truly wrong to use it? Still, being a very emotional creature, she couldn't help but feel apprehensive about it. The wrongness of it all was unshakable. She wished that the walk to the cult compound would be over quickly as she felt that it was hard to contain herself.
Chapter 28: Red (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Violence erupts as a mysterious cult refuses to obey the law. The Girls are forced to enforce it with extreme prejudice.

Chapter 28: Red (Part 2)

The City of Townsville. Outskirts. Cult of His Arm Compound.

13 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1609.

There were explosions everywhere. Fire burning. People were shouting over the rattle of machinegun fire and the piercing report of other gunshots.

Bubbles had been separated from her sisters in the ensuing conflict. Though she had hoped that the cultists would just turn themselves in like good people, they were anything but good people. She and her sisters had immediately dived into combat the moment they saw guns raised with ill intent after the cult speaker had declined to surrender to the police and USDO.

Mullens had gotten into cover quickly – thankfully. She didn't want to see him hurt, as the last time was enough. Stanley Talker had sprinted forward to join them in combat. She was concerned at first, but he'd turned out to be just as impervious to bullets as they were.

Bubbles remembered how exactly it had happened, despite the traumatic turn of events. Mullens had been negotiating with a cult speaker – who wasn't the same cult leader who had assailed them in the Silver Age Cineplex...

"You see this paper? I'm here to search your premises, so if you'd cooperate with me and get all your junkies and bird-brained wizard-wannabes out here, I'd be much obliged," Mullens had demanded of the cult speaker in his usual, rough fashion as he stuck a warrant in her face.

The cult speaker was a tall woman, about the same height as Mullens. She appeared attractive and would have looked better had it not been her sunken cheeks and eyes and pale face. Covered in a red cloak, she promised only danger, not titillation, unlike some other members of her cult. Her eyes and sharp teeth gave the impression of a predatory creature. Or a vampire.

She wasn't alone. The compound was huge, and it used to be a farm, now converted for residency and cult worship. In the empty, untilled field before the manor, there were several campfires and the cultist guards surrounding them rose from their seats, picking up their firearms. In the manor, there were red-robed cultists at every window, each clutching one type of firearm or another. Bubbles was shaken by how many shotguns were between them, and could only think about using the fairy godmother's magic.

"You wish that we assent to your will?" The cult speaker laughed. "We 'submit' only to insects such as you only if it benefits us. No – we give in only to Him. So allow me to put to you a counter-offer: you will join us or leave. This offer extends to the four of you especially, Blossom, Bubbles, Buttercup and… Stanley Talker. The master would be pleased to have his fellow shadow-kin on
his side…”

What she said had made the talking dog growl aggressively, as if ready to bite and strike at any moment.

"Who is this 'master' even?" Blossom asked aloud, annoyed at how the cult was keeping their apparent ‘leader’ a secret. Why couldn't she be honest just like everybody else? The vampire lady in red turned to Blossom.

"He is a being of great power, dear Blossom," the cult speaker divulged. "Same as you, and He desires to transform this world in His image, and bring about a new paradise for us all. Join Him, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup… and Stanley – it is only fitting, for the four of you are the same as Him."

"But your friends attacked us…” Bubbles asserted shyly. "It's not very nice…"

"Yeah, why should we join you and your 'master' if you've been hurting my friends?" Blossom said, still unsure of what 'master' meant.

"Friends? You call these insignificant blanks your friends?" the vampire-like speaker said condescendingly, and Blossom and Bubbles didn't like that. They frowned at her. Buttercup, too – she could always use a few more heads to smash, whether they were voluntary or involuntary. "They bred you in captivity like livestock, put you in these laughable vessels that they would call 'cute' and 'friendly'. They've enslaved you and made you do their bidding. They've forced you to adopt their primitive and meaningless ways - and you call them your friends!?"

"Okay, enough of this mumbo jumbo," Detective Mullens dismissed the cult speaker's offer brashly. "I'm giving you one more chance. You see that army behind me?" Mullens pointed with his thumb behind him, over his shoulder. Police officers and USDO soldiers, supported by humvees with machinegun mounts and grenade launchers, were arrayed against the cult compound. "They're itching to bust your place up, maybe even plug a few of you crazies with lead. It'd go a lot more peaceful-like if you surrender now."

"There will be no surrender unless it's to Him! You can't stop the inevitable!" the cult speaker screeched without warning, her eyes glowing bright red, shocking everyone in Mullens' parley party. From within her red robe, an arm shot out, an old pistol in her hand. Blossom, who was closest, reacted the fastest, flying straight into her and tackling her to the ground and pinning her pistol arm to the ground.

Gunshots rang out. Mullens dived into a group of gnarly trees nearby after firing a couple of shotgun blasts on the move, putting down one of the more aggressive cultists. Bubbles and Buttercup crouched low on the ground, one terrified while the other pumped and ready, as they waited for Blossom's direction. Stanley Talker kept himself prone, ready to pounce as he growled.

Cultists were running towards them, shotguns and rifles and SMGs blazing.

"This is Mullens, begin the assault now, now, NOW!" the detective bellowed into his radio as he scrambled into a better cover position behind a tree while a bullet grazed his arm while he was down.

"Buttercup, with me to the left!" Blossom ordered quickly after punching out the cult speaker. She was a tough one and needed several blows before she finally fell unconscious. A sniper bullet slammed into her skull as she turned to Bubbles, knocking her on her butt. Nevertheless, she carried on despite the pain and eyes misting: "Bubbles, take the right! Go!"
"But- I can't do it on my own!" Bubbles whined, halting the Girls' counter-attack singlehandedly.

"Just use your new power, dummy!" Buttercup scolded.

"I'll help you as soon as I can, now go!" Blossom instructed, and without waiting for Bubbles' reply, she plowed straight at the group of cultists she was targeting, alongside Buttercup. Still caught in a dilemma between fighting clean or under the influence of the fairy godmother's drugs, Bubbles was only forced into action by the sound of Buttercup's battlecry and gunshots flying in her direction, bouncing off her Kevlar armguard as she shielded her face.

Not wanting to fail her sisters once more, she kicked herself up into a high floating position and flew at her targets, realizing too late that Blossom had assigned her a group that wasn't small.

Several gunshots tested her resolve. It was almost whittled down to nothing by several shotgun blasts – without the drug, her old fears were easily as damaging as Duranium bullets.

There was something wrong with the cultists. Their eyes were red, some dull, others were glowing… reminding her of her own eyes when she took the fairy godmother's magic.

Winding up a half-hearted punch, Bubbles was nonetheless able to floor one of them. She immediately felt another clubbing her on the back with a shotgun stock. The blow hurt far more than usual - which was almost paralyzing. Twisting around, she grabbed the shotgun, pulled it out of the cultist shotgunsmer's hands and broke the weapon in two with her knee – oh, how she hated those infernal weapons! But turning to another cultist, she was too slow to react to another cultist pointing his shotgun directly to her face and pulling the trigger. Pain exploded in her face as she lost control and dropped to the ground, her last flash of thought being regret that she hadn't drugged herself with the magic and her sisters would hate her for it.

At the same time, Stanley Talker had taken it upon himself to take down some of the more isolated cultists to protect Mister Mullens. Sprinting forward, he launched himself at a pistol-wielding cultist, knocking him down before biting him in the wrist to get him to let go of his weapon. However, even when he did, the talking dog had no way to follow up on his disarming attack. A rifle slug, in the meantime, had slammed against a side of his body, penetrating his canine Kevlar jacket. It did nothing - being a recipient of Chemical W, he was almost as resistant to bullets as the Girls.

Taking advantage of his enhanced strength, Stanley dragged the downed, screaming cultist by his bleeding wrist, and on surging forward, threw him at the nearby rifle-armed cultist, knocking him down with his own fellow new age believer. While the second man was down, the talking dog sprinted towards him, biting him in the arm as well.

Blossom and Buttercup were quickly putting down their group of cultists. But something was different. Something was wrong. After punching one cultist in the side of the neck, she expected her to be knocked out, as the rest of the criminals she faced usually did. Instead, the cultist had gotten back up and put pistol shots in her back while she had moved on to someone else.

Buttercup had noticed the same thing – despite putting a blow in a cultist's chest and hearing some cracks from the force she was putting in her punch, and throwing him several yards away, he'd gotten back up as if he'd just tripped and went back to business as usual, pulling out some kind of machete to re-enter the fray.

"What is with these people!?" Buttercup yelled as she pushed aside another cultist's shotgun before driving a foot in between his chest and stomach. She followed that up with a drop-kick to his head, knowing that they were harder to knock out.
The police and USDO forces were lined up behind trees, stone fences and vehicles - as the Girls were in the way, they had started trading shots with cultist shooters in the manor instead. Machinegun fire peppered the windows as rifle-armed SWAT officers and USDO soldiers picked off targets at the windows. Grenade launchers mounted on humvees fired smoke grenades in a high arc, which landed yards before the manor and exploded in clouds of smoke, blocking the view of most of the cultists at the first-floor windows. This was followed up by explosives, launched at more remote corners of the field to take out the snipers there.

The cultists fought back with their own long-arms. Combatants fell on both sides. But the cultists were something else entirely - somehow, even without the same protection and training as the law enforcers, they were entirely unaflraid of the firepower the police and USDO were putting out. Cultists who were gunned down would get back up again to continue their zealous struggle. Even those who had lost an arm or a leg had continued fighting.

The battle, however, was not confined to a frontal assault. Mullens had arranged for some men to raid the compound from the back and sides. It was meant to be a surprise, but the sound of distant gunshots and shouts meant that they were prepared for it.

"Just- Hit them harder!" Blossom yelled as she strained to keep the eight or so cultists she was fighting against under control as well. She had been firing her infrared eye beam at point-blank range at them, strong enough to knock out adult human beings, but it was no longer enough. As she struck down a few, only to be beset by several more, those few would get back up again.

After getting peppered with a burst of SMG shots, she'd began searing them with greater heat, enough to burn their robes and injure them - it'd saddened her that she had to resort to such harsher measures, but it was the only way.

The cultists, however, weren't deterred. Some were even wearing expressions which were a mix of grimaces and smiles as if the pain was a pleasure, to be sought out, and to be struck down was an achievement.

But Blossom's desperate measures were yielding fruit. The cultists she burned did not get up. Things were still getting hotter, however - she heard Bubbles screaming not far away, and looking over at the group she was supposed to take down, she found a most terrifying sight: Bubbles was surrounded by cultists, who had resorted to the brutal and barbaric use of bare fists, feet and gun stocks to pummel and bash her. They were all over her, and Blossom couldn't even see her sister in that forest of frenzied red-eyes and ill-meaning limbs.

The leader of The Three flew immediately towards them to aid her sister, bowling into them like a cannonball, sending cultists flying everywhere. It was only then did she got a look at Bubbles - and she looked haggard, with her vest askew and her uniform torn in places, probably from the cultists clawing at her. Bruises were actually starting to form on her face, proof that the cultists weren't quite normal. Somehow, they were stronger than the usual bad guys they were facing.

"Are you okay, Bubbles?" Blossom asked urgently as she pulled her sister up to her feet.

"I'm sorry..." Bubbles mewled, unable to even look her as she clutched her arm.

"Why aren't you using your new power?" Blossom asked. Mad screams coming closer to the both of them ensured that she wouldn't get an answer, however. Both Girls turned to the source and saw a topless, barefooted man clothed only in cargo pants charging at them, and he was strapped with blocks of explosives on his chest, a detonator in one hand.

Detective Mullens had tried to work around the Girls and shoot him down, but the suicide bomber
continued screaming his way towards the Girls even with a few shotgun pellets to the stomach. The cultists of a saner variety all around them fled as the suicide bomber got close enough, and promptly detonated his payload before the Girls knew to react properly. Blossom and Bubbles were sent flying in different directions. Blossom backward, while Bubbles had crashed through a stone wall separating different fields.

Blossom, with her uniform on fire, was rolling on the snowy ground, stopping only after a distance. With her ears ringing and vision a blur, she saw her cultist opponents rearranging their positions, putting themselves behind cover to conduct conventional warfare against her police and USDO friends. In the distance, Buttercup had stubbornly continued the fight solo, having graduated to firing her newfangled laser beam at her equally stubborn enemies. Straining her eyes, Blossom was touched that she had avoided killing anyone - opting instead to reduce the strength of her beams such that it was enough to tear skin and cause bleeding, but not sever limbs and kill.

Buttercup would sweep her laser eyebeam across multiple enemies at once, hurting them as well as putting enough fear in them to push them back. But she was getting tired - panting, and sweating and reduced to standing rather than hovering. It was a new power, which meant that it was harder to use.

Sensing that Buttercup needed her help, Blossom flew in her direction, firing her own eye beams, adding burns to her enemies' wounds besides laser cuts. But she, too, sensed that she was beginning to tire from her excessive use of enhanced abilities.

And that was how Bubbles had ended up separated from her sisters. Getting up with her ears ringing and her vision blurred, like Blossom, she sat behind the stone wall and leaned on it, badly shaken and terrified. The fear felt incredibly raw, worse than before. It was outright disabling. Despite the cold, she found herself sweating profusely, her sweat turning into crystals on her skin.

It was happening all over again. History was repeating itself. Soon, she heard her sisters screaming - in pain and in fear. Something had bested them, and she was powerless to stop it.

Unless.

There was no other way. Miss Keane and Mister Mullens were right. She stared into the distance as she shuddered in pain while taking a deep breath. And in the distance, on a knoll, was the fairy godmother standing among some trees, visible from her dress and wings. She saw her nodding her. The fairy godmother knew all along - Bubbles surmised - that she needed her magic.

Reaching into her leftmost magazine pouch, Bubbles pulled out a metal syringe with 'His Secret 2.0' written on it. Pushing her Kevlar arm guard out of the way and tapping on her forearm, near the crook of her elbow, she found a vein and promptly jabbed herself with the needle and depressed the plunger.

She felt her blood boil almost immediately as she hid her face behind her hands, both ashamed to show even the trees and vegetation what she did, and just as regretful of the expression on her face as it changed to one of excitement and elation as pure, concentrated pleasure washed over her. The pain inflicted upon her became a thing of the past. Fear no longer held sway in her heart. Anger began rising in her as she remembered what the cultists had done to her, and what they were doing to her sisters. That anger became rage, and as she got to her knees, taking in the addictive sensations that dispelled all worries in her, she turned that rage into destruction as she stood up and punched out the stone wall she had been leaning on, completely blowing up that section of the old masonry.

The moment she did, several cultists had turned to her, their eyes shining equally as hellish red as
hers. Not all of them were frightened. Some smiled as if welcoming relatives into their homes. All of them shot at her nonetheless. Ignoring shotgun pellets and pistol rounds, Bubbles zipped forward to the nearest cultist with a crazed screech before killing him with a single swipe of her fingernails, opening up windpipe, arteries, and veins. The fingers of her right glove were torn because of it.

Another shotgun blast informed her of who to slaughter next. She launched herself into a flying kick at him, connecting with his upper arm within a second, sending him flying to the ground and tumbling. The cultist had suffered it with an odd, masochistic laugh, despite his shattered shoulder and pulverized upper arm. Bubbles silenced him by following his tumble, landing next to him and stomping on his neck, completely flattening it with blood splattering underneath as if she had stepped on a fruit.

A third cultist, the frightened one, started running. Bubbles launched herself into her, fist-first, breaking the cultist lady's spine in two, who dropped to the ground like a broken twig, wailing in pain. Bubbles touched down, tilting her head as she observed the result of her artwork. She thought the lady looked funny that way and laughed maniacally.

"You look funny!" Bubbles laughed as the broken lady continued to scream.

But the screams of her sisters, despite her dosage of His Secret 2.0, took precedence, not that she'd remembered her sisters after she began ripping at her enemies under the influence of the fairy godmother's magic.

Bubbles searched the field for her sisters. They were surrounded by cultists, some writhing in pain on the floor, slick and smooth with snow melted and refrozen as ice, some not moving at all.

Blossom and Buttercup were being assailed by a hulking, topless man in a jawless mask, wielding a giant axe that shimmered faintly in all sorts of colors. There was also a woman wielding dual swords of the same metal, covered only by a cloak, and as it fluttered, it could be seen that she was barefooted and naked underneath. Several other cultists of various eccentricities in their gear and cult uniform were coming. Her sisters were bloodied – the blades the cult wielded were Duranium. They were barely holding their own with the police and USDO still exchanging shots with the snipers in the manor, afraid to intervene on the Girls' behalf because they were in melee with the strangest of the cultists, their champions.

Bubbles didn't care – all she saw were more bodies to rip and tear, more people to make scream and beg. Flying to the cultic axeman, he delivered a fly-by punch to his cheek. The axeman fell to the floor on one knee.

"Bubbles!" Blossom and Buttercup shouted gladly in unison. Bubbles did not reply and instead continued counter-attacking the axeman. It didn't take long for either Girls to notice the change in their sister's eye color, and they each gasped their own surprise and fear when they did.

Bubbles delivered another right hook to the axeman's jaw before he could recover. There was an audible crack. Yellowish-brown teeth were scattered on white snow, trailed by the maroon of blood.

The axeman swung his weapon upwards at Bubbles, only for her to chop the handle of the axe in two. She finished him off with a kick to his mouth, further causing ripples of cracks. He crashed into the ground after that - alive or dead, no one knew, not even Bubbles - and Bubbles cared only about who she could hurt next.

"Bubbles, look out!" Blossom warned her sister but it was too late – neither was she, weakened by
injury, fast enough to intervene. The Twin-swords cultist had swung both her swords at Bubbles, slicing her in the arm before Blossom could tackle her to the ground.

Buttercup, in the meantime, had to fight on against another cultist with what appeared to be a Duranium claymore when more of them had entered the fray. The cultist swung his large two-handed sword at her despite her laser, slicing her in the cheek and giving her a Glasgow smile.

"Not the face, you dung!" Buttercup shouted and fired a stronger laser in response, shearing the cultist down to the bone in his arm and chest before tackling him and while she straddled him, punched him in the face, scattering yet more teeth for her trophy collection.

Blossom backed away from Twin-Swords, looking over at Bubbles as she was more concerned about her sister.

"Bubbles! You're hurt!" Blossom gasped, flying over to her BeXerked sister to do something – anything to help, only to be pushed roughly to the ground by an out-of-control Bubbles who snarled at Twin-Swords, who was just getting up.

Bubbles charged the woman in a cloak with reckless abandon, who performed a scissor-strike with both her swords. The drug-crazed little girl intercepted both blades with her forearms and pushing it against the lady, threw her off-balance and pinned the cultist down with her back to the snow and pressing the flat side of her blades against her throat. With both her arms occupied, Bubbles headbutted the cultist instead, which stunned her hard enough for her to let go of her twin swords. Straddling the woman, she began punching her in the face repeatedly, and there was a sickening crack every time she hit the woman. Blood had covered Bubbles' gloved knuckles.

"Bubbles! No! You'll kill her!" Blossom shouted, unable to believe that Bubbles had gone the Buttercup path. Flying to her, she took Bubbles by the arms from behind, only for her to throw her off.

"Leave me alone before I kill you too!" Bubbles screamed without thought at Blossom. The hostility and rage in Bubbles' face, the way it was scrounged up in pure fury and hatred - how red those eyes were - had shocked Blossom beyond words.

But she had to try to stop Bubbles. She was the leader, after all. Grabbing her by the arm before she could continue her work and kill Twin-Swords, she tried to restrain her, only for Bubbles to twist around and punch her in the mouth.

Blossom fell back, cupping her mouth with both her hands, writhing on the ground as she felt as if her teeth might have all fallen out. For one insane moment, she thought this to be a reality, until she felt, gently, that her teeth were still in place if hurting. But on withdrawing her hands, she saw that they were covered in blood. She broke into a panicked sob when she realized that her sweetest sister had injured her intentionally.

And she was standing over her, those hellish red eyes staring down at her, such that Blossom actually believed that Bubbles might make good on her words and kill her. For the first time in her short life, Blossom was actually frightened of Bubbles - and she had previously been one of the most harmless people she had ever known, despite her enhanced abilities.

Bubbles stood over Blossom, her hands clenched into tight fists that her knuckles were cracking. She looked unhinged.

"Bubbles, don't..." Blossom begged as she cringed away from her. Bubbles' hellish red eyes searched her pink eyes. If there was any restraint left in the blond little girl, it was like thin ice,
threatening to break at the slightest provocation. The sadistic smile on Bubbles' face wasn't particularly encouraging.

But before anything could happen, a sniper bullet had bounced off of the back of Bubbles' skull, which caused her to turn around and charge back into battle.

"Woah! What did she do to you!?” Buttercup, who was covering her Glasgow smile with a hand, had only just noticed Blossom as she was busy fending off more cultists - having only just managed to gain the upper hand against several swords or machete-wielding red robes and a few gunners.

"We- we have to follow Bubbles-" Blossom mumbled as she tried to speak with her teeth still so tender. Off in the distance, Bubbles had continued her rampage - hurling herself into a group of three rifle-armed cultists before breaking both legs of one, punching another so hard in the stomach that he was sent flying numerous yards away and slashing and puncturing another with her nails.

It seemed as though Bubbles had gone off the deep end, and was beyond hope, even far beyond the evil Buttercup was capable of committing. But there was something Blossom noticed - the men she was hurting were still writhing on the ground. They were still alive. Had she gotten through to her? Through that thick, red haze of rage and hatred? Blossom could only hope that Bubbles was pulling back her punches.

And just as Blossom sprung after Bubbles with Buttercup next to her, Bubbles had launched herself into another group of cultists in another field - the last group, actually - before slamming into one of them, knocking him into a tree. She proceeded to kick another in the face, breaking nose and teeth. The last man standing, whose eyes shone red and thus was pretty strong, had managed to grab Bubbles from behind and perform an arm choke. Bubbles, however, was able to wriggle around in his grasp, slippery as any little kid tend to be. When her arms were still restrained, she lunged at the man and bit him in the neck before tearing a chunk of flesh out with her teeth alone.

The man screamed - screamed like something never to be expected from a well-ripped overzealous cultist. Blood poured out of his neck, coloring his red robes redder - Bubbles was unfazed as if it was just like taking a warm shower. Licking her lips, Bubbles continued flying towards the manor.

Blossom and Buttercup had seen it all. Giving that man a bite in the neck was a whole new level of depravity altogether. And did Bubbles just drink some of that man's blood? The pink and green Girls were shocked to the point of non-action, to the point where they were unsure if they'd want to be anywhere near their sister while she was still using her new BerXerker power.

Bubbles barrelled through the Manor's front door alone, her mouth and chin and fingers dripping with blood, sending cultic men and women scrambling away in fear, escaping from whatever direction that would put any appreciable distance between them and the crazed little girl. Few stood and fight.

A red-robed woman at the foot of a wooden flight of stairs was shooting an old Grease Gun submachine gun at her. A couple of men at the corridor beside the stairs were letting off shots with bolt-action rifles. They weren't even the toughest the cult had to offer - Bubbles had long crippled or killed them outside.

Zipping towards the woman, Bubbles parried her SMG before smashing her through the stairs, breaking her back. Blossom's plea for mercy was all the way at the back of her mind - blood, violence, anger, and hatred were her only preoccupations with the fairy godmother's blessing.

Stealing the Grease Gun from the cultic woman, Bubbles unloaded it one-handed at the other two
cultists, having all but forgotten Blossom's words within seconds. She didn't stop with them. She continued firing when she saw a few cultists running away towards the end of the corridor. Bodies were hitting the floor at an alarming rate.

And when the Grease Gun was out of bullets, Bubbles slapped at it as if it was some cheap toy.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid!" she screamed madly as she pounded at the Grease Gun before breaking it in two and tossing it aside, annoyed at the limitations of the toy. Unslinging her own MP5, which she had neglected to use for so long because of her single-minded pursuit of personal violence, she continued to terrorize the cultists, giggling madly as she did...
Chapter 29: Red (Part 3)

Chapter Summary

Despite winning the battle, Buttercup and Bubbles are anything but happy...

Chapter 29: Red (Part 3)

The City of Townsville. Outskirts. Cult of His Arm Compound.

13 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1625.

Blossom and Buttercup had reached the front door of the manor too late, as they had to knock out a few straggling cultists before they could get to the building. By the time they got there, they couldn't stop Bubbles, only see the needless destruction she had caused.

There was a woman in the stairs, literally, stuck in a hole there as if a giant had shoved her halfway through it. She was still groaning in pain by the time the two Girls saw her and passed out before they could question her. In the corridor next to it, there were six bodies, some barely moving, some not, and Blossom was surprised that the former was still breathing because of the number of bullet wounds in them.

The sound of gunshots exchanged between the manor and the law enforcement units outside had significantly lessened, reduced to one deliberate potshot every few seconds. It was becoming quiet. The battle was concluding.

The Girls couldn't hear Bubbles. She had been maddeningly loud before.

"Buttercup, search upstairs – I'll look for her here," Blossom said to her sister nervously.

"Sure thing, sis," Buttercup was exhausted, so she had to run up the wooden stairs like a normal kid, except faster and less awkward. The thing with her was… she knew exactly where Bubbles was through her enhanced hearing, and she certainly wasn't where she was going.

Blossom started searching by using her x-ray vision, looking through the walls of the manor as she ran from room to room, shouting Bubbles' name desperately. At one point, she had bumped into a wall she was looking through, forgetting in her anxiety that it was there. But there was no Bubbles, only whatever remained of the cultists she had gone through. Most were alive, some vaguely so. A few weren't so lucky. Blossom could only hope that the gunshot wounds they suffered weren't from Bubbles.

After a few rooms over and still no sign of Bubbles, Blossom found a few SWAT officers. Two of them were dead on the ground. One of them had bullet wounds all over him, but he was still alive if heaving his breath as if drowning. His helmet was off and his balaclava was rolled up even though it was a combat zone. He knew he was living his last hour.

Blossom came up to him and knelt down beside him, unsure of what to do. Their eyes made contact. It reminded Blossom of the first time she fought crime at the Townsville Central Bank, when she was, again, the last person a SWAT cop saw before he died. It'd made her tear up, just
seeing a good man – a police officer – die just because he tried to make the world a better place. Standing up, she gave the dying cop a hug. He didn't even have the strength to lift his arms before he heaves his final few breaths, gasps and entered his death throes, before finally stopping – forever.

Meanwhile, as Blossom was comforting a dying policeman, Buttercup was racing upstairs, towards a sound she heard. And it wasn't on the second floor. The second floor was quiet – the cultists sniping from there were either dead or hiding like cowards. But Buttercup could hear an even bigger coward, hiding much further away.

The sound was a restrained weeping, but there was a second sound. A baby was crying – why it was there and why it was crying, Buttercup didn't care.

The little girl, with a grin plastered on her face, looked up. It was all coming from above the second floor. The attic. Her House had one too, though they had never gone up there except for during a tour around The House that Dad gave them on their second week's birthday.

Flying up fist-first, Buttercup smashed through the ceiling to enter that dark place up above. Landing next to the hole she made, she saw who had been making that noise. A woman next to a cradle, practically naked as she wore some kind of a see-through red silk dress, with only her bra and panties really covering anything at all. A baby was in the cradle. They were the family of The Cult of His Arm's leader, though Buttercup did not know, nor would she have cared who they were.

Bubbles wasn't anywhere to be found on the first floor, so after saying goodbye to the dying policeman who was now dead, Blossom had to wipe her tears away and go on, no matter how much she just felt like bawling away on the ground.

After checking the immediate vicinity around the manor, only to find more SWAT cops and USDO soldiers advancing on the house and cuffing any surviving cultists, then the garden, which was full of dead cultists with tight-fitting bags on their heads and no gunshot wounds or injuries, Blossom decided that she could be in the basement.

Descending down into the dark underground, Blossom had to think twice about it – Bubbles would never have entertained the idea of going to such a place – but she remembered what Bubbles had become with her new BerXerker ability.

There was almost no light at all. Blossom could only make out vague, colorless shapes and she had to descend down the steps on foot due to her exhaustion. Unable to find a switch, she had to light up her eyes instead, shining the way ahead.

Blossom thought she could hear sniffling and weeping. She found that her heart was beating and screaming more than it did when she was just facing cultists.

At the foot of the stairs, she was afraid to turn the corner, despite all her enhanced abilities and infrared beam and track record. But after swallowing a slimy glob of saliva, she finally did…

Buttercup was flashing her usual predatory shark smile when she found the woman and baby in the attic. She scanned the nearly-naked woman from head to toe. She was voluptuously beautiful, with perfectly shaped limbs, toned in color and muscles to appear not too harried by the pressures of staying in shape but not too weak. But Buttercup wasn't staring at her hungrily for her beauty. Her flesh was her toy, like the Play-Doh Daddy got for her. But those colorful slabs of dough could
only last for so long before she got bored of them. The human body, on the other hand, was so much more fascinating.

The woman started forward, pointing a pistol that she had hastily taken from a dressing table next to the cradle. The baby cried as usual, and Buttercup thought derisively that it reminded her of Bubbles.

Buttercup was unfazed by the woman's reaction, even as she cocked her pistol with trembling hands and threatened with a shaken voice that she would shoot.

Buttercup kicked off into a hovering position, a slight aura of green light was emitted around her, visible in the dim attic. It was just to show her her power, or at least what was at the tip of the iceberg.

It was enough to break the woman, who burst into unsightly tears as the pistol fell from her trembling hands. In truth, Buttercup's eyes, which glowed menacingly green in the dark, was already enough to scare her senseless – her breaking was just a delayed response, slowed by maternal instinct and futile hope.

"P-please… don't hurt the baby!" the woman cried and begged. "Its all I have left – take me instead… Please, just leave my precious alone…" Buttercup thought that it was a treat, having another person volunteering to be mutilated and killed by her.

"Bubbles?" Blossom called out in the dark basement. She had rounded the corner after plucking up whatever remained of her courage.

She was just right there, and she wasn't even trying to hide at all. She was kneeling in a pool of blood, surrounded by the corpses of eight cultists.

"Bubbles? It's me, Blossom – don't punch me again, okay?" she said to Bubbles. She wasn't sure if she heard it as there was no reaction from her.

Bubbles was facing away from her, so Blossom only knew that she was crying from the sound of her sniffing, sobbing, and trembling. Her face was in her hands, as if ashamed, or afraid – even though the only frightening thing in the basement was herself.

Blossom inched closer to her. The closer she got, the more afraid she was of coming closer to what was supposed to be her sweet, harmless sister.

"Bubbles?" Blossom said her name one last time, and it was as if she'd finally heard, as she had removed her face from her hand and turned her head, not all the way to the back to face her, but enough such that Blossom could see her left eye. It was still hellish red, screaming lethal danger.

Buttercup had taken the cult leader's bride at her word. When she ordered the woman to turn around, which she reluctantly did so, Buttercup gave her a kick in the small of her back so hard that it'd broken her spine and caused her to fall to the wooden ground. Next, Buttercup landed over the woman's leg and stomped it in the back of the knee, crushing her knee cap against the hardwood flooring. There was a crunching sound as she shattered it. She followed this up with a kick to the woman's ribs when she flipped around. There were more cracking sounds. Buttercup knew that she had broken a few ribs. The woman screamed.

"No- please!" the woman begged, and her contradictory request confused Buttercup. Didn't she just ask that she kill her rather than the baby? Buttercup knew what it meant, and it'd given her an idea.
Walking over the woman to the cradle, Buttercup floated up to take a peek at the baby - it was still crying non-stop. Buttercup found it annoying and wished that it would shut up. At the same time, the woman had somehow crawled up to the cradle, in a feeble attempt to get the baby before Buttercup did, but her broken back and left leg had made it impossible for her to stand up and rescue it. "No! Not the baby! Please! Don't hurt her!"

"You're funny, missus," Buttercup simply said as she picked up the baby, surprisingly gentle and instinctively savvy in holding the baby, which wriggled in her tiny arms. Even more surprisingly, the baby had stopped crying. Touching down, Buttercup stood a distance from the woman, who had pulled herself up to a rough sitting position using the cradle. "You said you'd let me kill you, and now you didn't want it. Should I kill your baby then?"

"Please don't!" the woman screamed. Buttercup enjoyed seeing her like this. Her desperation and agony were amusing. The little girl had never liked being forced into the same position by Blossom, and it felt cathartic to do the same to someone else. It felt good, knowing that someone else would look worse than her when threatened. "Not my baby! Please, you can take me! Just not her! Don't kill her!"

Buttercup gritted her teeth in a sadistic smile the moment the word 'kill' was mentioned. Shifting the baby to one hand, Buttercup pulled her pistol out of her holster and pointed it dead center at the baby's forehead, the muzzle pressing against the baby's skin gently. Her finger was on the trigger. A slight pressure in the wrong direction would have dire consequences.

"NOOOOO!"

When Bubbles heard Blossom, she stood up and turned fully around. Her eyes were still red, and she had been bleeding from them as if the blood in her eyes were too much. But mixed in with the blood were tears.

"Hello, sister!" Bubbles greeted Blossom with so much venom that it sounded exactly like pure hatred for her.

"Bubbles?" Blossom said, her voice a near whisper. "What's happening to you?"

"Blossom…" Bubbles' expression had swung around all of a sudden, from one of pure rage and hatred to one of intense sadness and shock and fear. And pain. The red in her eyes began fading until it was blue once again in a sea of blood. Blossom took it as a sure sign that Bubbles was 'better' again. She noticed, too, that she had been injured, having suffered multiple cuts from Duranium blades.

"Bubbles - I've been so worried about you!" Blossom said as she came up to her for a hug. Bubbles accepted it, needing it badly.

"I'm so sorry I've hurt you! I didn't mean it!" Bubbles cried. "I… couldn't control myself!"

"It's okay," Blossom comforted her. "I guess I… deserve it, in a way."

"But you don't…" Bubbles said. "I wouldn't have hurt you if I-" Bubbles couldn't continue. There were no words for the rampage she had committed, and any mention of her drug would destroy her. Probably set Blossom off, and then it'd be back to square one, with her becoming hated and useless once more.

"Bubbles," Blossom suddenly said firmly as she withdrew herself from the hug. "You can't go around hurting and killing people like this - no matter how bad they are. They weren't like the
"You're not going to tell Dad, are you?" Bubbles asked, a small part of her enraged and insane self still within her, afraid that Blossom was going to tattle on her. She thought that if Dad knew, he'd find out about her secret, somehow.

"Promise me you'll control yourself," Blossom demanded, her face and voice gone cold.

"I'll try…" Bubbles promised, though deep down, she knew that it was an empty one. As much as she wanted to do good by her leader sister and listen to her Daddy - the fairy godmother's magic was wondrous. She'd felt so much more pleasure this time, and the thrill of fighting without fear was equal to none. The very act of killing and hurting others had enhanced it, and the biggest secret of all this time was that she'd felt ecstatic when she'd punched Blossom in the mouth. True to what Blossom had said, it felt like justice - and revenge, she wouldn't admit. Not that she would admit either that it was justice, too. It was only by her love that she'd held back on hurting her more. "I'm sorry…"

What was worst, however, was the fact that when all her bad emotions had returned - the fear, depression, and anxiety - they felt even worse next to the intense ecstasy while she was under the influence of the magic. Moreover… did the magic last longer this time? It would partly explain why it'd felt so much more pleasurable.

"NO! Please don't!" the cult leader's bride had been begging for what felt like forever. Buttercup had been threatening to kill her baby time and again. The best part? It never got old.

"But you said 'no' when I was kicking you," Buttercup repeated herself, acting shallow and coy just to get at the woman, giving her reasons to believe that her baby was in peril, though to be fair, Buttercup had been seriously considering killing the baby anyway. She had never done it before, and it felt like something she should try. 'We should try everything at least once in our life' – wasn't that what Mommy and Daddy would say?

"I'm sorry – please!" the lady pleaded and cried. "Take me instead! Not her, please! She's innocent!"

"I don't know," Buttercup continued to taunt the woman. "I think I'm bored of you." She lifted her pistol from the baby's forehead only to press it against the baby's stomach. "I wonder if your baby would sound like one of Bubbles' toys if I press her belly button with a bullet?"

Instead of the usual reaction however, the woman had started clawing at her chest, at the ribs she broke as she was gasping for air, before convulsing.

"Buttercup, just what are you doing!?" Blossom's voice had suddenly boomed out of nowhere. It'd shocked Buttercup that she had nearly pulled the trigger. Turning around to the sound of her glorious leader sister's voice, hoping that it was just her imagination, Buttercup was very quickly disappointed.

Both her sisters were floating over the hole she made.

"What are you doing with that baby?" Blossom questioned again, with her hands on her hip and a very cross look on her face.

'Ooh no,' Buttercup thought as she felt nervousness rise up in her like never before. She shifted her gaze to the near-naked woman before turning back to Blossom, betraying another of her crimes to her sisters. Bubbles, who herself was dripping with blood, flew up next to the woman to check on
"I- But I was just- It's not what it looks like!" Buttercup stammered, already imagining the consequences with Dad. No, she could already see it. "I was just playing with the baby, really!"

"By pointing a gun at it!?" Blossom bellowed - or what amounted to a bellow from a little girl. "Don't you know how dangerous those things are to normal people!?"

She felt like slapping herself, not for endangering a baby for amusement (not to mention seriously considering killing it) nor for injuring and planning the death of an unarmed civilian, but for growing overconfident and not listening to her surroundings for Blossom when she should have known better.

"I… forgot," Buttercup tried to salvage the situation by lying. All it got her was an angrier Blossom who shook her head in disbelief. "Honest!"

"Blossom!" Bubbles shouted from the side. She'd been checking the woman on the floor for a pulse on her neck and wrist, just like how Mommy and Blake had taught her. "The lady's dead and she's hurt really badly."

Blossom glared at Buttercup, feeling anger boiling inside her. With Bubbles' BerXerker ability going out of control, the last thing she needed was Buttercup suddenly acting up and killing when she had been fine for more than a month! At least, that was from Blossom's perspective. She was still none the wiser when it came to her sister's other homicidal activities.

"Did you do this, Buttercup!?" Blossom interrogated her wayward sister, pointing at the recent corpse on the floor.

'Oh no, oh no, oh no!' Alarm bells were ringing in Buttercup's head. Double trouble! And things were going so well too - she'd been able to kill quite a few people before Blossom had caught on.

"I didn't- It- She was already there when I got here!" Buttercup lied even further. "I didn't kill her!"

Blossom closed her eyes, trying to control the anger inside her. She knew that Buttercup was lying. She'd heard Buttercup threatening the lady on the way up to the attic.

"YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO KILL ANYONE, STUPID!" Blossom yelled at Buttercup, throwing out her hands as she did.

"But- But-" Buttercup was grasping at straws, looking for a way out. Any way out. The way Blossom blew up had shaken her - previously, it'd been funny when it happened to Bubbles, but now she knew how it was like to be on the receiving end of it. "Why does Bubbles get to kill and I don't!? It's not fair!"

"Bubbles couldn't control herself but you can!" Blossom fired back. In the meantime, the turn the argument had taken, which had evolved to involve her, was upsetting to Bubbles. She hated what she had become - a killer. And she could remember every single bit of it too. "Hand that baby over, Buttercup!"

Buttercup did not listen immediately. Instead, she'd backed away from Blossom instead, holding the baby closely, her gun coming back up to the baby's head. At this point, Bubbles was biting her fingernails. It looked as though Buttercup was holding the baby hostage.

"I'm not doing it! You're going to tell Dad about me, aren't you!?" Buttercup shouted, her pistol hand shaking, just a twitch away from firing.
"I'll tell Dad about you if you don't give me the baby!" Blossom warned her misbehaving sister, turning cold. With her arm twisted, Buttercup walked over to Blossom and handed the baby over. Blossom carried it with both arms, tightly - afraid to drop it. She had seen pictures of babies and real ones out on the streets, but she had never held them before. It was then that she noticed that there were bruises on the baby's arms. Buttercup had held it too tightly. Regular adults and children were fragile enough - what more for babies? The sight of those injuries, though minor, had made Blossom mad again.

"Blossom- Sister- My sweet sister- Please don't tell Dad about me," Buttercup continued to plead, putting on a fake smile in an attempt to appeal to Blossom. "Have I ever told you I love you?"

"I'm still doing it," Blossom said her coldly, trying her best to keep her anger inside, no matter how difficult it was. Alice had warned her about it - how anger could do a lot of damage, especially with her enhanced abilities. She jumped down the hole in the attic after that and landed softly with a barely audible thump. Bubbles followed.

"But- you said! You promised not to tell!" Buttercup cried, following Blossom, pleading like a hungry or wounded puppy.

"Just like how you promised not to kill!?" Blossom exploded as she turned and yelled. The baby had started crying because of it.

"She- It wasn't as if- the woman- she tried to shoot me first! She shot me!" Buttercup tried again to lie her way out of the problem. Bubbles crossed her arms as she glared at Buttercup; even she had detected the half-baked lie immediately.

"You're a big, fat, stinking liar, Butter-mouth!" Blossom scolded, before resuming her walk down the manor hurriedly. It was far too obvious a lie that it was impossible to miss - she hadn't heard any gunshots from the attic while she was on the way there. The woman was on the floor long before she had caught Buttercup red-handed. It was obvious from her injuries.

"Blossom, please! I- I lost control too! I couldn't- sometimes I just get so mad-" Buttercup continued to plead with her leader sister as they descended the stairs down to the first floor. "I mean I wasn't mad- I was just- I was just playing- I mean-"

Blossom continued to ignore Buttercup even as she continued to plead and find excuses and appeal to her merciful side and their sisterhood and becoming more aggressive and desperate at every turn. She didn't stop even as they were met by Mister Mullens, who was nursing the graze wound on his arm. Stanley Talker, whom Blossom and Bubbles were glad was fine all along, was right beside him.

"That a baby in your arm?" Mullens asked rhetorically.

"We found it in the attic, Mister Mullens," Bubbles said. She was leaning on Blossom's shoulder, looking at the cute little thing. Talker got up on his hind legs by using Bubbles as support. Buttercup had kept quiet here for fear of revealing her secret to her police friends.

"Hrrr… a cute lil' pup ris rhat rit ris," the talking dog cooed with what amounted to a kind of doggy purr if there was such a thing. He soon got off Bubbles after taking a whiff of the surroundings. "Rrr… you srell funny, Rur-rles. Rhat did you get mixed rup rin?"

"Nothing, it's just blood," Bubbles claimed. It took her long to figure out what the talking dog meant. The moment she remembered that dogs had a good sense of smell, she realized that he might discover her dirty little secret with the fairy godmother's magic.
"Hrrr… That rakes sense," the talking dog spat out some saliva and said before padding away. "There's something rin re cultists' rlood that stinks…"

Bubbles' hand had gone up to her chest. She could feel her heart thumping as if she had sprinted across the entire breadth of Townsville. It was a close one. Too close. She took peaks at her sisters, afraid that they might put two and two together with what Stanley Talker had said, but they appeared more disgusted or confused than anything even remotely resembling suspicion.

"Could you take care of the baby, Mister Mullens?" Blossom continued on with the baby. "Its mother is dead and I don't think I can do it…" she glared at Buttercup while saying this.

"I'll take it," Mullens said. Bending low, he put out his arms and Blossom handed over the baby to him. He straightened out again, looking at the young little thing with a kind of warmth rarely ever seen in the hard-boiled detective's eyes. The blanket cocooning the baby was loose under Buttercup and Blossom's watch, so the detective wrapped it around tighter.

"It's sad…" Bubbles cried - the baby had distracted her from her own troubles. "Now she has no more mommy and daddy…" Bubbles would know, because she had cornered and killed the father, who was the leader of The Cult of His Arm, in the basement.

"Might be cold for me to say this, but… This might be for the best," the detective said. It wasn't just cold. It was rock-bottom absolute zero. "Those cultists wouldn't have made good parents to begin with."

"What's going to happen to her?" Blossom asked.

"She'll probably be put up for adoption. I hope the next pair of parents are better than the last," the detective said. "Good work, Girls. I'm glad the three of you aren't worse off today. Although… Bubbles, I think you need to tone it down a little. My fellow boys in blue reported too many dead. We need as many of them alive as we can. We need as many signed confessions and accounts as we can get. The more damning, the better."

"I'm sorry…" Bubbles simply said, holding her arm. Her wounds were starting to hurt again as the effects of His Secret 2.0 was starting to wear off.

"Still, that's some crazy stuff you just pulled. I'm glad you finally found your courage," the detective added. It'd hit Bubbles like a dump truck without him knowing it. She knew she didn't deserve the praise.

"I'm glad too…" Bubbles mumbled shyly, keeping her eyes away as she was afraid it'd tell him or anyone things she didn't want to let slip. Blossom put an encouraging arm around her shoulder, smiling, though even she knew that what had happened in the cult compound wasn't something to be entirely proud of. She thought that it was better than the alternative - to have Bubbles chicken out and cause everything to fall apart. In fact, the operation was nearly a failure had it not been for Bubbles' new power.

"Thanks to the three of you, we've hit the jackpot here. Their compound's full of this stuff," the detective added, before pulling out a syringe out of his pocket. It'd attracted Bubbles' attention immediately. It was a syringe of His Secret. "You know what this means? Fewer people are going to get jacked up with it. The three of you have done this town a favor. A big one."

But Bubbles was less than proud of it. She knew exactly where Mullens had gotten it from. It was from the basement, which was full of the drug. While she was dodging and taking bullets and Duranium blades in the basement, she'd taken the opportunity to 'borrow' a few syringes herself,
Buttercup was staring at the syringe in Mullens' hand too, secretly just as guilty of pilfering the crime scene of the drugs. There had been a few syringes in the attic that she took while she was in the middle of torturing the woman. She had collected about two dozen of those throughout her stint as an Angel of Justice - she had always treated them like trophies, just like how a raven would collect shiny things to build its nest with. While she knew nothing of what the drug could do, the syringe itself was shiny as it was made of metal, and it looked good.

"I'm just glad to help, Mister Mullens," Blossom said, ever the girl scout. The detective smiled at her sincerity and goodness.

"I'm sure you do. Now go home, get yourselves stitched up and crack open a soda or something, okay? I can see it now - soon, we'll see the Amoeba Boys in them zebra shirts pretty soon, and the three of you'll be free," the detective said.

At least, that was what Detective Mullens hoped. It was the least he could do for Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup. Once the Amoeba Boys were sent into the slammer, the Lombardi and their criminal enterprise would quickly fall apart without their protection and guidance. They would split into numerous factions, all keeping each other busy by squabbling over the remains of the Lombardi empire. The two hundred or so tiny gangs of Townsville would join in the chaos, and then it was a matter of picking them off one by one. Divide and conquer, as Julius Caesar used to say.

"I hope so..." Bubbles mumbled to herself. Dad had promised her the same thing too. All she had to do was to lie for a few more weeks to be free. But then a feeling of entrapment set in - in the back of her mind, she knew she wouldn't stop taking the fairy godmother's magic even if she didn't need it anymore.

Because it felt so good, and everything else paled in comparison to it. Even if she'd punched Blossom in the mouth.
Chapter 30: Screens

Chapter Summary

Home is where the heart is...

Chapter 30: Screens

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

13 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1721.

"Blossom, please!" Buttercup had continued to beg for clemency just as the Girls had touched down on the lawn of their house. "It's not that I- It didn't happen that way- I was just doing it for us!"

Blossom, however, continued to ignore her as she strode up to the stone path to the front door of The House. The windows were lit up - it gave Blossom a feeling of warmth and homecoming, but to Buttercup, it was like a furnace that she would be thrown into. It was death inside, waiting for her. Bubbles followed, trying her best to ignore Buttercup's pleas. She felt sorry for Buttercup even though she had killed a woman for no reason and threatened to kill a helpless, innocent baby. They were sisters; sisters felt sorry for one another no matter what.

But it wasn't the first time Buttercup had gotten innocents killed. Through her negligence, Buttercup had failed to protect a whole group of civilians - men, women, and children all, during the Battle of Morbucks Industries Research Labs, deciding instead to bathe in blood, wading through a battle that wasn't even necessary, all the while ignoring a flanking force of Foundation terrorists who swiftly overran the few normal human defenders who knew better and killed the innocents. Bubbles couldn't bear to defend Buttercup, not after everything she had knowingly done wrong. Even if as her sister, she felt sorry for her.

"Blossom! Please! Don't tell Dad about me!" Buttercup pleaded, tears streaming down her cheeks, tears that none of her siblings knew were real or faked. They had all caught her lying one time or another. Blossom herself hadn't forgotten how Buttercup had lied to Daddy about her just to look good. "We're sisters! I love you! It's not- I killed that woman because I love you!"

Blossom stopped at the front door, standing on the welcome mat as she took a dismissive glance at Buttercup. For a moment, both Buttercup and Bubbles thought that she was going to relent and help hide her secret.

"You were going to kill that baby, Buttercup," Blossom said impassively. "It's wrong to kill babies." With that, Blossom let herself hover and reached for the doorbell.

"YOU'RE NOT TELLING DAD ABOUT ME!" Buttercup exploded as she grabbed Blossom by both legs and pulled her down to the ground before she could ring the doorbell. With both hands, she lifted Blossom off her feet by her throat and slammed her against the door out of desperation and anger.

"Let- let me go…" Blossom struggled to speak, discovering too late, and shockingly, through the
pressure in her neck, that Buttercup's hands had gone to her neck, and she was choking her. She had done it such that her eyes were out of the way and she couldn't see her, which meant that she could not use her thermal beam. Blossom tried to fly away, but after getting beaten and cut up so soundly in the last battle, she couldn't overpower Buttercup.

"Not until you promise not to tell!" Buttercup growled at Blossom even as her eyes were rolling up in pain and asphyxiation as she struggled. "I'll break your neck if I have to!"

"Leave her alone!" Bubbles shouted with equal fury before she tackled Buttercup, forcing her to let go of Blossom, who coughed and sputtered as she was clutching her throat and leaning against the wall.

On the ground, Buttercup was shocked by what she saw – Bubbles' pupils had gone glowing, hellish red and the look on her face was pure hatred. Before she could take a good look, Bubbles had swiped at her, making three long gashes in her cheek. And then it was all gone in a flash, and Bubbles seemed as shocked as she was that her BerXerker ability had come about out of the blue. So much so that Bubbles had crawled away, as if she was the victim.

The door opened after that.

"Tell me about what? Why are all of you on the ground?" Professor Utonium had appeared at the doorstep. Looking down at Bubbles and Buttercup, he could sort of put two and two together. Just his smile disappearing alone was enough to scare the Girls – they had all seen what he could become when he's really, truly mad. "What is so important that the three of you had to fight over it?"

"But we weren't fighting," Buttercup muttered, lied as she was wont to do so.

"We were just talking…" Bubbles, to the surprise of her sisters, came up with her own lie. Blossom stared at the both of them disapprovingly, a hand still rubbing a throat, which had developed a bruise from Buttercup's strangling.

Blossom had wanted to speak. Her mouth had moved, but words would not form. She wasn't even sure what to say to any of them, and when Selicia came out to put her arms around Professor Utonium from behind, leaning her head on him, it was completely silenced.

"Buttercup, you're bleeding!" Selicia gasped when she noticed the fingernail markings on Buttercup's cheek. She looked like she had been attacked by some feral animal that had been starved to near-death.

"It was from the farm, Mom," Buttercup lied when she exchanged looks with Bubbles, who still looked like she could tear her throat out from the way she was glaring at her. "The bad guys there had powers too." Buttercup had seen how Bubbles had torn out one of the cultists' throat with her teeth and drank some of the blood. She didn't want to be next.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

13 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1726.

"What did she do?" Professor Utonium asked as he was helping Blossom to remove her ruined tactical gear, letting them drop onto the floor in a messy heap. The Girls had been brought down to the lab for medical treatment, and once separated from Mom and her sisters, Blossom had taken the opportunity to open up about Buttercup's evil deed.
"She did a really terrible thing, Dad," Blossom said as she unbuttoned her red uniform and as she winced in pain, pulled the top off. It was sticky with blood, and the fabric had fused painfully to her wound. She did the same with the singlet underneath, gasping at the surprisingly stinging sensation.

"All I know is those cultists really did a number on you," the professor said as he began examining Blossom's wounds as she sat down on a stool. There were multiple lacerations on her torso area - she had been hacked in the chest by a Duranium axe, cut in the side with a Duranium sword and slashed behind her back with something similar. Thankfully, none of the cuts was anything more than flesh wounds. The hands behind the attacks weren't strong enough to do damage to Blossom's internal organs.

"Buttercup's worse than any of them," Blossom claimed, finding that her eyes were wet once more. She still couldn't believe that Buttercup, a sister she was supposed to love, could be so cruel. To be violently ruthless to adult bad guys with guns was bad enough, but a mother and baby girl was too much by a mile.

"Don't say that. How terrible could she be?" the professor added, though he didn't say it with any confidence. It was something he'd said to delude himself, perhaps give himself a thin sliver of hope that things weren't as bad as he thought it could be. Alice's warnings were circling around his head like vultures by now. She'd long suspected Buttercup of some nefarious deeds, and in the professor's head, no matter how much he tried to push it away and have faith in his own parenting, she seemed to be coming dangerously close to being right.

"Dad, Buttercup killed a woman today," Blossom finally dropped the bomb on her Dad. He had been palpitating her chest to examine her for signs of fractures in the ribs, but he'd stopped and straightened up as he thought about what Blossom had said, tried to look at it from every possible angle, searching for one that could clear Buttercup of any wrongdoings.

"She was defending herself, right? From a woman who could've hurt her?" Professor Utonium asked, hoping, even though it was all but certain now that there was no hope.

"No, Dad. The woman looked harmless. She didn't have a weapon and she wasn't even wearing any real clothes," Blossom went on. The professor leaned on his desk, sighing. "She was in the attic with a baby. Buttercup tried to kill the baby too but I stopped her."

"She had to be kidding, right?" the professor croaked. The last sentence felt like a gut punch to the professor. His legs had gone so wobbly, he needed to sit down. Unable to breathe, he'd said nothing at first. He closed his eyes, trying to keep from freaking out and letting his anger take control - after all, he'd taught Blossom to do the same not too long ago.

"She pointed her gun at the baby and threatened to shoot it when I asked her to give it to me," Blossom added. "The baby was hurt because of her."

Taking a deep breath, the professor stood up, pushing aside roughly the medical ward screen giving them a degree of privacy (Blossom jumped at his violent reaction) and marched over to the other part of the lab where Selicia had been taking care of Buttercup and Bubbles.

"Thanks, Mom, it feels so much better…" Buttercup was almost squealing with joy after getting treated with some painkillers and having antiseptics applied to her wounds, both fresh and old. Selicia was just about to start cleaning her wounds when they saw Professor Utonium coming up to them, swinging his arms as he walked as if he was about to punch someone.

Without a word, the professor grabbed Buttercup by the arm and started pulling her towards the
stairs leading up.

"Ow! You're hurting me!" Buttercup protested. While her Dad was manhandling her, she had fallen off her stool and landed poorly on a knee. He was pulling at her roughly and it was aggravating her wounds. "Dad! Stop! Owwww!"

Afraid that her Dad was going to do something to her once she was out of everyone's sight, Buttercup pulled back at the foot of the stairs. Try as he might, the professor could never match her strength, but the tug of war was hurting Buttercup's wounds.

"Dad, it hurts!" Buttercup shouted. Frustrated, the professor did finally stopped. Picking her up, he plopped her down on the stairs instead.

"You tried to kill a baby!?" the professor yelled at Buttercup, who was still nursing her wounds, cupping the cut on her arm with a hand. "What is wrong with you!?"

"But- But- It's not like- I didn't kill the baby!" Buttercup stammered as she rushed through her words to try to defend herself. "I didn't!"

"Blossom said you tried to! She had to stop you!" the professor yelled at her again, not holding back on his anger at all. "And you killed an unarmed, helpless woman. Is that true too!?"

"N-no, I didn't," Buttercup lied, shaking a little from being shouted at, actually afraid that her Dad was going to hit her because that was how he looked like. When he didn't respond to her first lie, she tried a second: "She wasn't helpless. She tried to kill me. She nearly did."

"Stop lying to me, Buttercup! Blossom said you did!" the professor scolded.

"But Blossom's lying!" Buttercup alleged stubbornly. "It wasn't me!"

"And what if I ask Bubbles about it!? Or ring up Mullens to check on the details!?" the professor pressed on. "Lying makes it worse, Buttercup!"

Buttercup did not reply immediately as she was watching her Dad, afraid that he would come flying at her with an open palm with her name on it. She did not reply as a way to buy time to think of a way out.

"Well!?" the professor boomed so suddenly that Buttercup shook from how loud it was.

"Dad- I couldn't control myself- I was hurt and I was scared and-" Buttercup said. At the same time, she'd turned on the tap, and it was easy considering her wounds and the mess she was in and how she was getting sidelined by her sisters, much to her frustration - which meant that she had to slink around and hide her wrongdoings all the time. "I couldn't help myself."

"Blossom and Bubbles are more sensitive than you and yet they could," the professor countered coldly.

"The woman raised a pistol at me and I was hurt and- I hated the pain-" Buttercup cried, holding the wound on her arm, appearing vulnerable. "I was just so angry too- These people were hurting me all the time- and I couldn't control myself-" She let herself go out of control, breaking into a full-on sob, and it was unexpected even to her. "You don't understand how it's like, Dad! I- I just wanted the pain to stop!"

Blossom, Bubbles, and Selicia had been watching all the while. Blossom was hiding behind her screen and so was Bubbles. They looked at each other as though they were both in trouble too, and
when Selicia looked at Blossom with an accusing frown on her face, Blossom returned into hiding behind her medical screen. She hadn't thought about Mom while she was tattling on Buttercup. It felt like it was the right thing to do, telling Dad about what Buttercup had done wrong. With or without Mom in the equation, she would have done it again.

"Buttercup, I didn't know you were this… affected," the professor said. Although he knew that Buttercup wasn't quite right in the head, to put it mildly, the way she looked while she was telling him about her bad experiences, the way she cried… got to him. It was impossible not to let it. It then clicked in him that psychopathy didn't remove emotions. It never did. Alice mentioned that it had reduced her emotional sensitivity, but not outright turn her into an unfeeling robot. While Buttercup couldn't empathize with others, she could be upset on her lonesome, which was kind of sad when the professor thought about it.

"I just want you to be proud of me, Dad," Buttercup claimed tearfully, though inside, she was absolutely jumping with joy. He'd fallen for it a hundred percent of the way. "You were always with Blossom and I- I thought that if I act tough and don't ever cry or talk about the pain…"

Buttercup switched her crocodile tears factory on overdrive, unable to complete her sentence.

The professor moved to sit down on the steps next to Buttercup, putting his arm around Buttercup's bare shoulders, taking extra care not to touch her wounds.

"Buttercup, you know that I love you as much as Blossom, right?" the professor said - and he believed in what he said with all his heart. "You don't have to go out of your way to gain my attention. I'm sorry if I've ever made you feel that way."

'Yes, you have, Dad,' Buttercup thought bitterly as he'd said this, though she was careful not to let her thoughts spill into words. She'd never understood what love meant, and to her, it just meant attention, gifts, and favors. 'You sure have, and I fucking hate you for it, Dad.'

Blossom, in the meantime, had made extra precautions not to be detected by Selicia. She'd resorted to using her x-ray vision instead to see what was going on, no matter how tiring it was.

"I'm sorry, Dad. I really am…" Buttercup cried. Blossom zoomed in her vision to her face and thought that the performance she was putting up was infuriatingly convincing. She could even feel her heart going out for Buttercup, her own eyes getting wet upon looking at her cry even though she knew that Buttercup was faking it. "I couldn't control myself…"

"Hey... I hear you, Buttercup," the professor comforted Buttercup. Lifting her up, he put her on his leg and let her sit there as he held her. "I'm sorry I shouted at you. But you just have to learn some restraint from now on, okay? You were doing really well before- I guess I should have told you that I'm really proud of you, little Butterfly."
Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup get a day off crime-fighting, and Selicia decided to spend some of it on a training session.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

14 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1421.

The next day had been uneventful. The professor had taken the opportunity to phone the Girls in sick, using the injuries they sustained the previous day as the reason for their need for a break, even though they were near full recovery and could perform regular duties well enough.

Selicia had continued training them. Buttercup had told her everything about Bubbles' new ability. She'd begged her to let her use it in training ever since, and Selicia couldn't refuse her favorite's request, not after what had happened yesterday. For all she knew, it could be her ticket to getting better results out of Bubbles just so that she could get General Blackwater off her back. She had to endure an hour of his bullshit during the last security review, and that had destroyed her mood that day – initially, she intended to be more forgiving towards Blossom, planning only to punish her with just a few shocks from her stun baton. But then the general had gone on from berating her about Bubbles to shouting at her about Blossom's regressive lack of tactics too. The thing that pissed her off the most was that it wasn't for a lack of trying. Selicia had given Blossom refresher courses on urban warfare in January and reminded her about it since, but Blossom continued to go the easy route - regressing into a child-like simplicity when it came to problem-solving instead of growing into the tactician she wanted her to become.

Allowing Bubbles to use her BerXerker ability could save her lots of future headaches. To this end, Selicia had decided to save Bubbles for dessert, since Buttercup had been jumping up and down about it constantly. Due to the Girls' tiredness and scars, she'd limited the number of matches to best out of five.

Blossom and Buttercup had sparred at first, after a quick refresher on both basic and advanced unarmed techniques. But while she was observing Bubbles throughout training, she saw nothing in her – just the same shy little girl bumbling about with moves, both strikes and grapples, that barely improved since more than a month ago. Even with her new ability, Selicia doubted then that Bubbles could even come close to defeating her favorite.

Blossom and Buttercup's matches wore on. As usual, Bubbles sat on the sidelines, perspiring as if she was sitting in a sauna or a furnace, terrified that she was going to disappoint Mom again. The last time she did, Mom had gone cold on her once more, refusing to even hold her or talk to her. Buttercup had made fun of her, and even Blossom was confused as to why she was so easily defeated in a friendly spar with her – and Bubbles could imagine that she would be wondering if she was going to ruin the next operation.

'What do I do?' Bubbles thought desperately as she stared at her sisters sparring, at how their
moves were superb and smooth – and only a fraction of it was required in actual combat for them to hold their own. She herself, on the other hand, had nothing to show for it both in and out of crime-fighting. 'What am I going to do?'

Bubbles could feel her stomach churning uncomfortably at the thought, her guts going into a knot at the idea of repeating her failures and living with it.

"Good job! Oh my! Buttercup, you've done it!" Selicia praised her favorite when she finally floored Blossom by using her own tricks against her: hooking her leg and tripping her over, at the same twisting her arm around her back and locking it that way. Furthermore, it was the third time in a row that Buttercup had beaten Blossom when no one expected her to – Blossom had won the first two rounds. On the third round, Buttercup barely won by avoiding Blossom's grapple, before letting off a series of kicks that knocked Blossom down and stunned her, allowing her to be restrained after that. On the fourth round, Buttercup won by beating Blossom in an exchange of punches and parries. This was topped off by Buttercup beating Blossom at her own game.

"That was really good, Buttercup," Blossom praised her. She'd been trying to mend her relationship with her ever since the previous day to no success. They hadn't spoken much since, beyond 'pass the pepper'.

Buttercup merely scoffed at her. Had she had the vocabulary, she would have warned her not to patronize her.

"Buttercup..." Blossom said. "You know I had to tell Dad. He's our Dad."

"Whatever, sis," Buttercup brushed her off, not that she could ever understand the way Blossom rationalized her actions. But at least it felt good to beat Blossom at her own game - the satisfaction inherent in the idea was good motivation for Buttercup to attempt it where previously, she was content to hurl punches and kicks of all types and combinations.

"Blossom, enough talking. Take the bench," Selicia ordered dismissively before turning to Bubbles, who looked like she could fill a bathtub with her sweat alone. "Bubbles, you're up! Show me what this 'BerXerker' business is all about!"

Nervously, Bubbles flew haphazardly towards the makeshift arena in the lab. She could feel butterflies in her stomach - just as much as she could already feel the 'Butterfly's punch in her stomach. She needed it! Needed it so much! There was no way she could stomach being the team let-down, the butt of all jokes any longer. Not when there was an answer to her problem, a desirable one at that.

"Mom, I need to go!" Bubbles lied, putting her hands on her groin (or her groin guard) to pretend as though her bladder was full. It was easier to lie this time - she was so nervous and afraid and paranoid that she had been visiting the washroom more often than usual for the past few days. "Please?"

"Of all the- Fine! Get it done quickly and come back down here ASAP!" Selicia growled impatiently - just thinking about how much of a failure Bubbles was in the arena of combat made her mad. No matter how much she sympathized with Bubbles as a vulnerable little girl, she saw her as anything but; she had what were literally superpowers at her disposal - how vulnerable could she be? In January it was all well and good because there was little need to fight beyond engaging a smattering of small-time crooks. She'd hoped that Bubbles would rise to the occasion to defend the peace she had enjoyed for over a month - only to be severely and utterly disappointed.

Bubbles literally flew out of the labs at breakneck speed the moment her Mom gave her permission
and shook her head in disapproval. After cycling the airlock, she flew straight up to the second floor and into her favorite washroom - the one near her room. True to her word, she'd pulled down her pants and underwear and sat down on the toilet the moment she was in.

But it was all just a cover for something she knew she had to do. Quivering with excitement as she relieved herself, she reached into one of her magazine pouches to find - nothing!

'Where is it!?' she thought frantically. Her second dose of His Secret 2.0 was supposed to be in her magazine pouch! 'No no no no no! I couldn't have lost it! I couldn't have!' The mere idea that she had lost her only syringe left was unbearable - it was like having a hive of bees in her head. A headache was coming on as pressure mounted.

With sweat pouring down her face, Bubbles finished relieving herself as quickly as she could before pulling up her pants again, forgetting to use a napkin to clean herself as she redid her zips and belt and flew out of the washroom and into the Girls' room.

She would search everywhere for it - under the bed, in the drawers of her personal wardrobe, in her mountain of soft toys. She couldn't seem to find it anywhere! Standing on the pink kiddy table, her eyes darted all over the room as she feverishly tried to backtrack and remember where she had put her second dose of magic.

She needed it. Needed it so badly. So much that it was painful. To live without it was terrifying. What would she say to Mom and Buttercup?

With a terrified sob, Bubbles began searching whatever nook and cranny she had missed earlier - her nightlight, whatever openings there were in her dolls, under Octi, behind Octi, around Octi - it felt as if she could die from the nail-biting experience - until she felt it in the back of her baby blue pillow.

'Yes! Yes! Thank goodness! Thank God!' Bubbles thought gleefully as she pulled it out of the pillow. Pushing her Kevlar arm guard lower so she could get a good view of a vein, Bubbles jabbed herself with the syringe greedily and depressed the plunger - it was the third time she had done this, and she was becoming very adept at doping herself with drugs where previously, she struggled to self-medicate.

The sensation was legendary. It was like taking a cool bath after walking in a desert for days or spending a month in Xanadu after a year in hell. Where previously, it felt as if her guts were like snakes writhing about in her body, it was as if liquid serenity and bliss had filled her belly.

Bubbles lay down as pure pleasure began to spread throughout her body, through her veins - by now, she was used to the stinging pain of the fluid circulating in her bloodstreams, masked by the height of the chemical happiness she had pumped herself with. She began laughing as she curled up into a fetal position, biting her pillow as she gasped with each twinge of excitement and pleasure running through her from head to toe, gripping the blanket as she shut her eyes tightly, enjoying every second of it until…

Opening her eyes, Bubbles remembered, barely, why she had taken the fairy godmother's magic, to begin with. Going back to the vanity, she stared at herself in the mirror and saw that her pupils were glowing hellish red as opposed to baby blue and she liked it. A wicked grin spread across her face as she thought about the things she would do to Buttercup for being a bad sister and making her life difficult.

With murder on her mind, Bubbles flew to the door, opened it roughly with a loud slam and flew back down to the lab. Where previously, she'd admired Buttercup and even feared her for her battle
prowess and accomplishments, all she saw in her mind now might as well just be a moving target, to be shot to pieces, blown to bits, run through, torn apart, rend to shreds, beaten to a pulp and slashed thoroughly.

"Bubbles! What took you! We have to…" Selicia bellowed the moment she saw Bubbles. She didn't see her red eyes immediately, but when she did, it'd taken the words out of her mouth.

Buttercup simply smiled at her reborn sister, who she thought would be more of a challenge. She hadn't faced Bubbles for quite some time, mainly because she was a walkover, and when she did, she found her far too easy - boring with a capital B to fight with as she couldn't even put up much of a fight that it was surprising she could beat regular people in combat. During the Battle in the Cult Of His Arm Compound, she had hardly seen Bubbles in action because she was too busy fighting – she was hoping to see more of it now.

Bubbles landed right before Buttercup, her malicious smile still strong on her face, her glowing, doom eyes drilling into Buttercup's cold green eyes. The look of it actually unnerved Buttercup, and the toughest fighter of The Three had stopped smiling. Uncrossing her arms, she got into a defensive posture.

"Are we fighting now, Mom!?!" Bubbles barked madly at Selicia as she giggled uncontrollably. "Are we!? I wanna fight badly!"

"Go right ahead, Bubbles, Buttercup," Selicia gave them the go-ahead, even though her confidence at refereeing the sparring match had waned with the way Bubbles looked and behaved. Buttercup's description did not do Bubbles' BerXerker look any justice. Bubbles was the poster child of the sweet, innocent perfect little girl look. Now, she looked like something from a horror movie. Even the most bloodthirsty security officer she knew would be appalled by Bubbles, whose eyes screamed bloody, gory murder, her face contorted in fury with saliva and foam dribbling down her mouth. The madness and hatred in her face were unnatural on a face so young.

Bubbles had jumped on Buttercup the moment her Mom flagged off the fight - in fact, she'd been losing patience within seconds that she would have done so with or without her permission.

Sprinting towards Buttercup, Bubbles started with a series of punches, which Buttercup dodged. Buttercup retaliated as she ducked by punching Bubbles in the stomach twice before getting the knee, which she was able to block with both her hands, but the force of the blow had sent her flying back. She landed on a knee and had to balance herself by planting a hand on the ground.

Her punches had done nothing. Bubbles was merely laughing it off brokenly as she watched her fly backward from her force. Buttercup's hands shook from the force of the blow. Even blocking Bubbles' attacks was painful.

"What's the matter, Buttercup!?!" Bubbles sneered at Buttercup, spittle coming out of her mouth. "Aren't you better at fighting than me!? Aren't you hard-core!?"

"Oh, I sure am! More than you!" Buttercup replied and responded by running up to her and doing a spinning kick. Bubbles punched Buttercup in the leg, deflecting her. Buttercup landed roughly, nearly losing balance. She'd felt the punch right down to the bone. Her leg felt broken, though it wasn't really.

Bubbles didn't give her time to recover, but it wasn't out of a sense of tactics. All she smelled was blood, and in the absence of any other targets, Buttercup was the one to provide it.

Blossom had been watching from the sidelines, and she had gone rock-hard tense, gripping her
towel tightly almost to the point of tearing it. To witness her sweetest sister acting this way was troubling. Professor Utonium, her father, had joined her on the bench, having been distracted from his work by this chance to observe Bubbles' new power.

And he didn't like it one bit. He thought it'd turned Bubbles into… something else. Putting an arm around Blossom as she leaned on him, he watched, almost with morbid curiosity, but he was just as tense and ready to intervene the moment anything went wrong. In a way, he knew that something was bound to go wrong.

Bubbles had begun pushing back aggressively, aiming punches and kicks at Buttercup, which Buttercup equaled with blocks using her arms and legs. But Bubbles, with all her restraint removed, was blindingly fast. Once in a while, her attacks - mostly punches – had slipped past Buttercup's textbook-perfect blocks and parries, jabbing at Buttercup, weakening her with every successful strike. Her eyes grew more and more terrifying to Buttercup with each blow, even though it never changed in appearance beyond blue to red, meek and weak to mad and mad. She was like a shark tearing at its prey, or a swarm of piranhas in the shape of a little girl, slowly devouring her.

Buttercup was slower, and her advantage in raw strength and brutality was all but negated by Bubbles' drug-enhanced endurance and lack of pain. She'd aimed two punches to her face, but Bubbles swepted them off as if they were paper balls. She gave her a side-kick in the stomach when there was an opening, but it looked as if Bubbles didn't even notice. The toughest of The Three remembered Naga, how she'd done the same thing, and panic arose in her when she realized she was going to end up like her.

The match was furious and ultimately one-sided. Buttercup was steadily getting tired and weaker while Bubbles showed no sign of stopping or tiring. When Buttercup went all in and aimed a double fist at Bubbles, Bubbles parried her arms aside and delivered a series of machine-gun punches in Buttercup's chest - putting a dozen or more blows in her within a few seconds, if even that. Winding up a harder punch, Bubbles sent Buttercup flying across the makeshift lab arena, and the latter little girl landed head-first, defeated.

Selicia gasped, and so did Blossom and Professor Utonium. Buttercup was bleeding from the mouth - Bubbles wasn't holding back at all. She was writhing on the ground, holding her mouth as blood dribbled past her hand, down her chin and in between fingers.

"Bubbles, what the hell!" Selicia screamed angrily at Bubbles. "You weren't supposed to hit that hard!"

"You didn't stop Blossom when she was hurting me!" Bubbles screeched as she stomped menacingly towards Buttercup, who crawled on her back, her eyes misting as she was in shock.

"Don't you mouth off at me! Take a seat!" Selicia shouted. Bubbles didn't listen. Instead, she'd kicked Buttercup in the head. "Bubbles, stop!"

But Bubbles didn't obey this time. Selicia's voice had gone unheard. It didn't even register as Bubbles knelt over Buttercup and took her by the collar.

"Bubbles, I'm serious, stop!" Selicia ordered again. She could feel her hair standing on ends as she realized, with horror, that Bubbles wasn't going to stop, and certainly wasn't just aiming to just intimidate Buttercup. "Stop! STOP! BUBBLES!"

She began punching Buttercup repeatedly in the face. Professor Utonium jumped out of his seat. Blossom hovered.
"Bubbles! What are you doing!" the professor shouted in horror at the unnatural behavior of his sweetest adopted daughter.

Selicia pulled her pistol out – she'd always carried it whenever she was in uniform. Blossom, however, flew up to her and got between her and Bubbles.

"Mom, no! She'll hurt you if you shoot her!" Blossom said before turning around in mid-air and flying into Bubbles, knocking her off of Buttercup. They both skidded on the shiny tiled lab floor, with Bubbles a greater distance away.

Blossom was rolling on the ground as she skidded but she righted herself quite easily with a bit of Chemical X-aided gymnastics. Bubbles was less graceful in her senseless fury, and only got up when she came to a stop.

In the meantime, Selicia took the opportunity to drag Buttercup, who was crying in pain, as far away from Bubbles as possible. The professor had sprinted in Buttercup's aid, and as Selicia was holding her, began examining her facial injuries.

"It's okay, Buttercup, you're safe now – she's not going to hurt you again…" Selicia comforted Buttercup as, for once, she was acting her age and bawling her eyes out.

"Buttercup, get your hands off-" the professor was struggling with her as he was trying to check her wounds. Buttercup had always had this habit of hiding her wounds whenever she was injured, starting from the first time she was shot because she was playing with his pistol, which she picked up from the lab.

There was blood everywhere.

"Buttercup, please!" the professor pleaded with Buttercup to let him see her face. Any effort he made to pry her hands off her mouth and nose was futile. But the reality of what Bubbles had done was apparent even with Buttercup's hands stuck to her face. There were bruises and open skin all over her face. She had a black eye, and just by observation alone, probably one or two stress fractures around the Orbit region of her skull.

Bubbles rushed Blossom as soon as she could, which was immediate. Blossom was forced to fire an infrared beam at Bubbles, causing her vest to burst into flames. It didn't stop Bubbles from throwing punches at her, but Blossom ducked and dodged and even flew out of the way. Smoke was rising from Bubbles all the while as her uniform continued to burn until she was coughing and retching from it – until she tore vest away, along with the singlet underneath.

"Get out of the way, Blossom!" Bubbles screeched crazily at her sister. She looked the part too, with half her face covered in Buttercup's blood. "Or I'll hurt you just like Buttercup!"

"What is wrong with you, Bubbles!" Blossom cried. "Why are you being like this!?"

"Why are you protecting Buttercup, Blossom!?!" Bubbles screamed. "She's always hurting us!"

"Because she's our sister! Because I love her!" Blossom answered. "Please… You're my sister too! And so is Buttercup! You need to stop this!"

Bubbles clutched her head as though there was a great struggle going on inside. She whimpered as she shook her head.

"It's… so hard, Blossom," Bubbles cried, her expression changing to one of being upset, before it swung back around to being one of anger and hatred once more, broken by occasional mad giggles.
"Buttercup should be hurt for WHAT SHE DID!"

"Bubbles," Professor Utonium came up beside Blossom. "I don't know what's going on with you, but listen to me – calm down."

"Get out of the way, DAD! I don't want to hurt you!" Bubbles screamed madly at her Dad. She looked so unhinged that Blossom had flown in front of the professor at chest level, just in case Bubbles lose control again.

"So don't, Bubbles," the professor said. He inched his way forward and around Blossom, shrugging off Blossom's hand and wordlessly telling the smartest of The Three that he would be fine. "You're in control, Bubbles. You love us – you won't hurt us."

Bubbles glared at the professor, then to Buttercup, who was still lying in a kneeling Selicia's lap, blood making rivulets down her cheeks and chin. She returned her eyes to the professor, who had gotten a bit closer, the look on her face swinging frequently between a glare and a tearful, needy gaze.

"I've hurt Buttercup..." Bubbles cried, at first regretful, before becoming hateful again. "I've hurt her – and I want to hurt her more!"

"No, you don't," the professor said. He was even closer now, just a few arm's lengths away. "She's your sister. She's rough but the two of you've shared some good moments. Remember how she comforted you around Christmas?"

"I've hurt her – I want to hurt her. She'd hurt me!" Bubbles continued to repeat herself as she panted and hyperventilated. The professor made his way closer, making no sudden moves. Blossom and Selicia looked on, dead worried and actually expecting the head of the household to get his head chopped. "Blood! I want blood!"

"Bubbles, look at me," the professor said as he got way closer, almost within arm's reach of Bubbles. Bubbles' hellish red eyes flitted to him as her face twitched with uncontrollable rage and pleasure. "This is not you."

"Stay away from me, Dad, I'll kill you!" Bubbles yelled at the professor, who actually shrank away from her, startled, but he didn't stay away from long.

"No, you won't," the professor asserted as he came within arm's reach of Bubbles and bent down. "Come here."

"No, Dad! I'll kill you!" Bubbles snarled. But the professor did the opposite and scooped her up into a hug, carrying her as he straightened up, and as he did, Bubbles broke into a sob. She grabbed at his lab coat as she cried into it. "I'm so sorry Dad... I'm so sorry... I lost control!"

"Shh... Shh... It's fine," the professor said. "I knew you wouldn't do it. You're my Bubbles, you've always been my little girl. You'll always be my little girl."

The professor looked into her eyes, and Bubbles looked back. Her eyes were red, but right before the professor, it'd returned to baby blue.
Chapter 32: Mommy Fearest

Chapter Summary

Buttercup enjoyed her free day with Mom, while Blossom had to suffer the consequences. Bubbles got her joy and laughter after another meeting with the fairy godmother.

Chapter 32: Mommy Fearest

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

13 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1848.

Bubbles had been watching Buttercup closely in the Girls' room. After getting their stitches and after the altercation in the labs that happened after Blossom tattled on Buttercup and told Dad about the latter Girl's sideshow, Bubbles was suspecting her of anything and everything.

And so when Buttercup spent far too much time in the walk-in closet and left it looking the same as before, Bubbles couldn't help but start guessing what Buttercup could be doing inside the walk-in closet.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

14 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1712.

After Bubbles' horrible accident with her BerXerker power, the professor had been examining her ever since, taking blood samples and doing brain scans. He couldn't find anything out of the ordinary, other than a slight change in brain activity and increase in certain hormones such as dopamine, testosterone, and adrenaline, which he ruled out as side effects of the new ability and the result of it. His working theory was that the BerXerker power was the use of Chemical X to rewire the brain to decrease pain reception, lower inhibition and increase aggression. While not as flashy as Blossom's infrared beam and Buttercup's laser vision, it was no less devastating.

He believed that Bubbles was just trying to get used to her new power. Blossom and Buttercup had both lost control of their powers when they were first discovered. Blossom had hurt Buttercup when she first discovered flight. She had also accidentally burned him when she first discovered her infrared beam. Buttercup had injured Naga when she first discovered her laser vision. Professor Utonium believed that it was no different with Bubbles, and her ability could be controlled with time and practice. The Girls were a hazard not by choice - it wasn't their fault - the unpredictable emergence of their powers was the root cause of all these unfortunate accidents.

He couldn't blame the Girls for the accidents they caused. Especially Bubbles - who would never hurt a fly in any other circumstances.

Later that day, Selicia had gathered the Girls in the living room. This included Buttercup, whose injuries had turned out to be relatively superficial, even if severely so and resulted in a lot of bleeding. The worse of it was the stress fracture around the orbit region of her left eye, which
would heal on its own within a day. The woman had a dustpan and broom in one hand, and rags in another. Buttercup looked up at her with a face covered in plasters and gauze and medical tape.

"The three of you will clean the garage," she announced their punishment coldly.

"But why?" Blossom asked.

"Do I have to spell everything out for the three of you?" Selicia snarled at them. The Girls' eyes were turned ground-wards the moment she said it. Selicia didn't need to explain it – each of the Girls knew they were guilty of something, both real and imagined. With Blossom, it was very much imagined, but she believed that it was punishment for getting her sisters injured and telling on Buttercup, effectively betraying her in Selicia's eyes. Bubbles thought she was being punished for going out of control. Buttercup believed that she was being punished for threatening the life of a baby, and actually ending the life of a woman – though she didn't think that she had done anything wrong.

"Yes, Mom…" they said in unison. Blossom took the broom and dustpan while Bubbles and Buttercup each got a rag. With that, they made towards the garage to clean it up.

"Blossom, wait. Stay a moment," Selicia ordered her but both Bubbles and Buttercup stopped and turned as well. "Get going, the two of you." Bubbles and Buttercup disappeared into the garage, Bubbles hesitantly, believing that Blossom was going to get into more trouble than them.

Blossom reluctantly walked up to her Mom, the broom and dustpan, which were taller than her, in her hands.

"Can you hover so I can take a good look at your face?" Selicia ordered again. Blossom put her cleaning instruments down on the floor and did as she was told. She could feel her heart thumping like it was going to rip itself out of her chest. Mom didn't look pleased, and when she reached out for Blossom's face, she flinched, afraid that she was going to hit her again. But it didn't happen. Instead, she was inspecting the stitches on her forehead. Next thing she knew, she was caressing her face lovingly.

"I just wanted to thank you for helping me out with Bubbles," Mom said. "For saving Buttercup."

"She's my sister. They both are," Blossom said, unable to look her Mom in the eyes for fear of offending her somehow. All she could do was to steal glances of her eyes, which Mom noticed anyway.

"And you better remember that, and keep Bubbles under control," Selicia said, perhaps redundantly so - but she knew the truth behind the Girls as their assigned handler. They weren't biologically sisters, and neither was she her biological mother. Selicia thought that perhaps instinctively, Blossom knew that and so it was prudent to remind her. "Now get going and clean up my garage."

Blossom took her leave, but before she disappeared into the garage, she turned around again. "Mom?"

"What is it now?" Selicia said impatiently. To her, Blossom was like a dog - give her a little encouragement, and she'd latch on forever. And then it would be a slippery slope from there. She'd start getting sloppy, take advantage of her love, and shit all over her. It'd all happened before, and Buttercup had suffered for it. There was no way in hell Selicia would let that happen again.

"Will things go back to how it was?" Blossom asked, and dared herself to look Mom in the eye - and at that moment, she found that she still loved her Mom, for everything she had done for her -
teaching her everything she knew about fighting hand-to-hand and with firearms and tactics, and things were pretty good between them in January. "I want to hear your stories again, and read books with you in the library."

Selicia stared at her coldly, so much so that Blossom couldn't bear to make eye contact with her anymore.

"We'll see," the Mom said. No, this would not do at all.

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

14 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1731.

While they were in the middle of the cleaning, however, Selicia had pulled Buttercup aside for milk and cookies. Blossom and Bubbles were left behind, and even when they were done with the garage, Selicia had punished them further by getting them to clean the corridor on the second floor. Buttercup, of course, was excused from this. It wouldn't have been so bad, had this trend not continued into the attic, and when they were done and back on the second floor, Selicia did not like the look on their faces and proceeded to knock down a vase and painting and blaming them for it. She then ordered them to clean up the broken glass.

"Dad, Mom is being mean to us!" Blossom complained to her Dad when she decided that things weren't fair. Buttercup had killed and threatened to kill the innocent, and yet she was being punished far less than her and Bubbles. And she'd let the professor know exactly what she thought.

"Oh, Thomas!" Selicia had faked being dainty when she found herself accused of being unfair and abusive. "Look at them – it's such hard work, raising daughters with principles when they're disobeying me at every turn!" She'd made herself look more vulnerable by leaning against the banister of the second-floor corridor as if she had lost most of her strength.

"But you're being selfish! You're a big, fat liar!" Bubbles shouted out of the blue. Even she did not know where it'd come from. Selicia's response to this was to run to the professor for a hug.

"Bubbles!" the professor chided as Selicia was crying in his arms.

"I just want them to be strong and independent and…" Selicia continued to lie. "I know I'm not supposed to expect anything out of the Girls, not even gratefulness…"

"Girls, your mother is just looking out for you!" the professor continued to reprimand the Girls. "And you're treating her like she's the enemy!"

"They just started throwing a tantrum and- look at the mess they made-" Selicia lied, further angering the professor.

"But-" Blossom tried to explain things, only to be interrupted.

"Go to your room, Blossom," the professor ordered, stabbing his finger in the direction of their room. "You too, Bubbles!" With that, the professor brought his 'wife' into his room. She seemed so upset that she could barely walk. Without the professor knowing, she had turned to look at the Girls with a victorious smile. The Girls were taken aback by this. Blossom was wiping away errant tears from being misunderstood. Blossom wasn't far behind.

Upset, Blossom and Bubbles hovered into their rooms with their backs hunched.
"Why did you have to shout at Mom, Bubbles?" Blossom asked as she stood before Bubbles, who was sitting on the edge of their bed, herself mad at her. "You made us look bad!"

"I couldn't help myself…" Bubbles said. "I'm sorry…"

"What's happening to you, Bubbles?" Blossom asked, more concerned than mad. Bubbles kept quiet, though unsure if she should remain quiet. She didn't want her secret to be found out, and yet at the same time, she knew that something was wrong. She could feel herself changing; it was so much harder to keep her anger inside now.

"I'm sorry," Bubbles simply said. Blossom gave her a quizzical look, unsure of what to make of her sister's response.

"Does it have something to do with your new power?" Blossom asked. Bubbles considered her question carefully, where before, she would have answered it thoughtlessly.

Bubbles nodded, deciding that it wouldn't reveal her dirty little secret.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

14 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 2045.

Ever since the incident with Selicia, the professor had enforced Blossom and Bubbles' grounding throughout the entire day. By the evening, however, he was beginning to feel bad about what he'd done. Sure, the Girls had been rude to Selicia, with Blossom talking back when she didn't need to and Bubbles shouting at her, but they were little girls, after all, who needed adult guidance.

In fact, he thought that he had been too harsh, grounding them for an entire day right after Selicia's house chores. He was self-aware enough to know that his love for Selicia had blinded him to the severity of his punishment. Ever since falling in love with Selicia – genuinely – she had that effect on him. He knew that he himself had to make amends for it, and to this end, he'd made them hot chocolate with marshmallows and cookies. He'd brought supper up to the Girls himself.

When he entered the Girls' room, Blossom was reading a kid's encyclopedia while sitting in a beanbag, not out of curiosity or the need to know, but as a diversion from her unjust grounding and Bubbles' problem. Bubbles, on the other hand, was lying in bed in a fetal position, holding Octi closely, mumbling to herself. Buttercup was missing in the room. Selicia had made sure that she stayed away. They had been watching the television in the living room ever since, their laughter sometimes loud enough for Blossom and Bubbles to hear as if to spite them further.

"Girls, I've brought supper," the professor announced to his adopted daughters. He set it down on the Girls' kiddy table. Blossom put down her encyclopedia and came over to sit down, unable to look at her own father. The professor found that he could never get used to it. Where had last month gone? There was never a need to lecture his Girls nor punish them before crime started spiking again. "Bubbles?"

"I don't feel like eating…" Bubbles muttered, before going back to whispering to herself again. Ever since calming down from her third dose of His Secret 2.0, she had been feeling terrible. While she was under its influence, she had no fear, no worries, and no pain. Without it, she couldn't help but be frightened of everything - even her sisters, her Dad, and Mom - and she couldn't help but feel insecure, as if her secret was just a word or action away from being exposed. She hadn't felt hungry at all since lunch - she had eaten little during dinner and she wasn't lying about her appetite during supper. It felt as if her insides were rearranging itself, and it was as uncomfortable and
"Bubbles? I know you feel bad about what you did, but you don't have to starve yourself," the professor assumed. Coming up to her, he lifted her up into a sitting position. Sweat was pouring down her face. She looked pale. "Goodness... Are you ill?"

"No... You're right, Dad. I just feel really bad about what I did. I didn't mean to hurt Buttercup and shout at Mom," Bubbles said, not entirely lying. "I'm sorry..."

"Maybe some chocolate and marshmallows might help?" the professor suggested. Bubbles smiled. Through the hardship she was suffering through, she knew that her Dad was always someone she could trust in every way - to do the right thing and make her feel better. She hovered towards the kiddy table and sat herself down beside Blossom. The professor followed.

"Dad, why does Buttercup get to do whatever she wants even though she's wrong?" Blossom asked while taking a nibble out of her cookie.

"That's not it, Blossom. She doesn't get to do whatever she wants," the professor said. "I know how it looks like, but that's not what it is."

"What she did was terrible, and Mom did nothing about it," Blossom added further. "She punishes us for everything."

The professor considered her words. He knew exactly why there was a disparity in Selicia's response to the different Girls, or at least he thought so. He certainly knew that he was treating the Girls differently - according to what they needed. But he loved them equally, or did he? Buttercup was a special case - he would certainly let her know what she had done wrong - in fact, he would certainly really let her know what she had done wrong. But her condition had ensured that the tomboy would never fully understand the consequences of her actions such that she had to decide what to do based on cold logic alone, and when that cold logic involved pleasure from behavior with moral implications lost on her...

'Should I tell them?' the professor thought. He had been keeping too many secrets from the Girls for too long. There wasn't a single day that went by without him thinking about his secrets. 'Should I?'

"Blossom, Bubbles, I need the two of you to listen to me," the professor said, and found that he couldn't breathe. He had to sit down on a kiddy stool and work up the courage to continue. "You see, Girls, Buttercup... She's not like the two of you."

"What do you mean?" Bubbles asked.

"She's, well, not right in the head. Remember what I told you two about sickness?" the professor struggled to find an analogy that a young child could understand. "Remember when the three of you got sick after chasing those crooks on the highway?"

"Yes..." the Girls said in unison.

"Well, that's Buttercup inside. She's just... messed up," the professor said - there was no other way of saying it at that given moment. Undignified and ugly as it sounded, it was the truth. "She doesn't know what's right and what's wrong because she's sick inside. She couldn't feel as much as the two of you because of it."

"But when was she sick?" Bubbles asked.
"Since the beginning, when she was born," the professor said, careful not to let slip the other secrets. He'd nearly mentioned 'created' instead. With the Girls' photographic memory, a mere mention of that word would have become a time bomb waiting to explode.

"Does that mean she doesn't love us?" Blossom asked, looking incredibly upset. She'd stopped eating. The professor was caught off-guard by that question. Blossom was incredibly smart - perhaps even smarter than he was - just that she was really young. He thought that it was just as much a curse as it was a blessing. He knew that from personal experience. "She never did, did she?"

"Oh, honey, I..." the professor struggled to find the appropriate response, deciding between the whole truth, the half or the lie. But he'd been keeping so many secrets, and it was killing him little by little each day. Each day she looked at his Girls, smiling innocently and naively believing him to be perfect, he felt that he had lost a bit of himself. It was like getting cut up into a million pieces.

"No, she never really did," the professor said. No more new secrets - he had decided. "But it's not her fault and... It's not entirely hopeless. You see, there's a connection between the three of you. Blossom, Bubbles... Buttercup does not - could not - feel the same way as the two of you, which is why the two of you need to love her more. She'll come around and understand."

It was a simplistic way of explaining things, and the only way the Girls would understand. Throwing psychiatric and scientific terms at them would be useless, that much he knew.

What the professor did not know, however, was that Buttercup had been listening all along, ever since she saw him walking towards the Girls' room from the living room. With her acute sense of hearing, she could listen in on them even from the washroom down the corridor from the Girls' room, where she had been 'using the toilet' since a few minutes ago, according to the lie she told her Mom.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

14 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 2243.

Bubbles had shut herself in the washroom so the others wouldn't see. She was in her pajamas. There were spots of perspiration on it even though the washroom was colder than other rooms – the heater couldn't reach it as well as the other rooms.

Hovering in front of the mirror, she saw that she was sweating profusely, and it wasn't because she was terrified of being found out. Instinctively, she knew that it was the drug's fault. Without it, she was a mess, and the more she used it, the more she grew to become dependent on it. It'd made her desire the magic more – the symptoms were pushing her, and the addictive attraction of the magic was pulling her deeper into it.

Her Dad's words had stuck with her ever since. Although it was a revelation of Buttercup's severe psychopathy, she couldn't help but think that it had something to do with her as well. Buttercup was sick inside, and she couldn't help but feel that she was sick inside too. And she couldn't stop it. She didn't want to.

Turning on the faucet, she splashed some water on her face, washing it before drying herself. After that, she picked up the syringe she'd left on the washing basin. She found it surprising that she was any good at it – smuggling the syringe from her gear into the washroom while her sisters were in bed. But she'd put it down to the dim lighting as only a table lamp was switched on and Blossom and Buttercup weren't looking at her.
Bubbles stared at the syringe. 'His Secret' was written on the metal tube. There was no '2.0' for some reason. Unsheathing the needle and after she palpitated her arm for a vein, she jabbed herself with it, only for the needle to bend then snap in two. It wasn't made for her. It wasn't Duranium.

The little addict started breathing heavily. She needed it and badly. Desperate, she inserted the broken syringe into her mouth and depressed the plunger, swallowing the chemical mixture thirstily like a girl in a desert who'd encountered water for the first time in days.

The taste was terrible. Bitter, acidic and foul. Wrong. Then Bubbles just stood there, waiting for the effects to kick in… but it wouldn't. She continued waiting expectantly, but as minutes passed, all she could feel was a tingle in her fingertips. There was barely anything at all – her stomach had stopped hurting – mostly, and she was sweating less, but that was about it.

As it turned out, the drug she had stolen from the cult's compound was different. Weaker. And it certainly wasn't enough.

Bubbles felt panic rising in her as a result. What she stole from the cult was supposed to be her next fix. She needed more. More!

And yet she knew there was no more. Bubbles clutched her head, pulling at her hair. It felt as if the fairy godmother had abandoned her, in this dire time of need.

"Bubbles?" a muffled voice came from the other side of the door. It was Blossom. Shock surged through Bubbles when she realized that she was holding incriminating evidence of her drug addiction in her hands. Looking all over the washroom, she searched the place for a good spot to hide her shame and wrongdoing. "What's taking you so long? You need to sleep or it'd be hard to study in school tomorrow."

Every time Bubbles thought she had found the perfect place to hide her syringe, she could think of how Blossom could find it – in what scenario and circumstance.

"Bubbles? Are you okay?" Blossom was knocking on the door harder, sounding more urgent and afraid. But at least she didn't sound angry or upset. "Bubbles!"

After hiding her syringe in a drawer, Bubbles rushed to open the door. Blossom sounded like she was going to knock the door down. She didn't need her entire family in the washroom. The chance of them finding her secret would be too great.

"I'm sorry, Blossom," Bubbles apologized after opening the door. "I was just tired…"
to the stairs. Passing by Dad's room, however, she couldn't help but wonder if she should stay with Daddy after all. She'd do that all the time whenever she was feeling terrible.

But this time, she knew that the terrible feeling in her wouldn't go away until she injected herself with more of the fairy godmother's magic. It was the only way. Besides, Buttercup had occupied Dad's room. She had utterly refused to sleep in the same room as her because of what she did.

With nothing left for her, she flew down to ground level. There, she saw the white light outside, same place as before: in the backyard.

And so she followed.

"Hello again, Bubbles," the fairy godmother greeted her the moment she came close, and this time, she'd come really close really fast as she was in desperate need of more substance.

"Miss Fairy Godmother!" Bubbles whispered urgently, still afraid of talking too loudly and being discovered with the fairy godmother. "I need more of it, please! I need it!"

"More of what?" the fairy godmother asked, acting naïve. Bubbles found her behavior strange. It didn't seem… mature enough for her age.

"Your magic! I need it badly!" Bubbles said.

"Oh, that. My magic. Of course," the fairy godmother continued to behave strangely. It was disconcerting to Bubbles, finding her lifeline being erratic like this.

"Give it to me, now! Please!" Bubbles was flat out demanding for it.

"Well, there's just one problem…" the fairy godmother said slyly.

"What is it!?" Bubbles howled in agony.

"I forgot to bring it with me, and it'd be a few days before I can return," the fairy godmother said with a mischievous smile.

"What!?" Bubbles screamed in disbelief - it was agony that she was doing this quietly if there was such a thing as screaming quietly. Whoever had heard of a fairy godmother who forgets things? "I can't live without your magic! Why are you doing this to me!??"

For some reason, the fairy godmother laughed when she heard this. It'd made Bubbles upset. And mad. But mostly upset. Unknown to her, her eyes had flashed red for a brief moment when hatred surged in her heart.

"Calm down, Bubbles," the fairy godmother said, infuriating Bubbles further. But then she'd reached into her dark blue shoulder bag. Bubbles then noticed that the bulge in it was more noticeable. "I was just kidding, god-daughter… yes… yes… where's your sense of humor?"

"I… I'm sorry," Bubbles apologized, remembering quickly that she was talking to her only source of His Secret 2.0. "I was feeling terrible."

"Don't worry, dear. All is forgiven," the fairy godmother said. For some reason, the tone of her voice had taken a sinister turn, though it was still wizen and motherly. The winged angel-like being pulled her hand out. Barely contained in her clutch were six more pouches containing the drug. Six! Bubbles was overjoyed!
So overjoyed was Bubbles, in fact, that she'd dropped the whole lot immediately upon receiving them to inject herself with one of them.

The fairy godmother did not stop her. Instead, all she did was to smile at the pathetic little addict, looking down at her like a dog as the little girl was feverishly doping herself with another dose of her 'magic'.

And when Bubbles finally got her fix, she could feel it melting away in her veins, like finely-cooked mutton in her mouth. Her discomfort and pain fell away like old memories. She blinked, and her eyes felt heavy. Yet something was wrong. The feeling wasn't as strong as before. The pleasure she felt from it wasn't as strong as before. The feeling of invulnerability and the rage - they were weaker. It wouldn't do - had she taken the magic during crime-fighting, it wouldn't have given her what she needed to get the job done, and maintain the love and respect between her and her sisters.

Yet, how much love and respect was there now? She had beaten Buttercup black-and-blue and red, and Blossom had seen it. Buttercup would never respect that and she had a feeling Blossom wouldn't love her for it.

"Miss Fairy Godmother, it's not enough- one's not enough," Bubbles said as she was still on the ground, on her knees. There was little pleasure to be had, and so she was savoring what little she could gather.

"Oh, that's normal. Yes… yes… The more you use it, the less powerful it becomes," the fairy godmother said as she ran her hand through her hair, stroking it as if she was stroking a pet.

"What do I do? I can't go on like this…" Bubbles said, even as she let herself feel every tiny bit of caressing from the drug, gasping with every little tingle and smooth sensation. It wouldn't last, and so she tried to make every little feeling last.

"But you can go on like this. You just have to take more than one… yes… yes…" the fairy godmother suggested.

"I have to take more than one…" Bubbles repeated her benefactor's words, and she liked the sound of it. "I have to take more than one." She reached for another pouch containing a syringe, only for the fairy godmother to bend down and grab her wrist.

"Just not now. One should be enough… to put you to sleep… yes… yes…" she said with an evil smile, knowing that Bubbles' senses were too badly affected for her to judge her character at all. "By the way, remember rule #4?"

"I have to do everything you ask of me," Bubbles recalled the rule as she stared into the distance.

"Yes, and I have something for you to do…" the fairy godmother said menacingly. "A little something to repay my selfless generosity."
Chapter 33: How Things Change

Chapter Summary

Bubbles continues to live with her secret, making every attempt to hide it - though cracks are beginning to show in the facade she is putting up.

Chapter 33: How Things Change

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

15 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 0016.

Bubbles had sneaked back into the Girls' room undetected without waking up Blossom. Clutching her armful of drugs, she scanned the room for a good place to make her stash – her pillow would no longer do because of the number of precious syringes she had just been handed.

When her eyes met the door of the walk-in closet, she knew that it was the only place she could hide her stuff. Hovering up to it, she opened the door silently to enter it, noting that it was no longer creaky because her Dad had oiled it, then closing the door so she could switch the lights inside on without awakening Blossom.

After pulling a cord that lit up the closet, she began looking for a good spot to hide her sinful indulgences. She thought about putting them in a corner behind her dresses, but it wouldn't do; she would be exposed whenever her dresses ran low. She thought about putting them at the bottom of the weapons chest, under guns they didn't like and rarely used, but with crime on the rise, they might be forced to use everything they had.

Then there were the boxes labeled as 'old stuff', even though nothing in The House were really old. They'd contained toys that were broken in the early days when they were careless with their strength, or just toys that were no longer fit for them. Some of the things inside were more fit for babies. Bubbles had no idea why Dad would still want to keep them around, but it was the best place she could leave the fairy godmother's magic behind without being discovered. Her sisters and she had never gone through them before.

The boxes were small, but there were many of them. It was all perfect. No one would ever guess which belonged to her if they were guessing in the first place.

She began unstacking the boxes, aiming for one near the bottom of the pile. Opening up the boxes, she checked the contents to make sure there was enough room for her drugs, and that there was enough junk inside to hide them.

One particular box caught her eye. It contained a vaguely-shaped train coach which was completely white and plastic in texture. By now, she knew that it didn't resemble the real thing in the slightest since it lacked the right color, proportion, and details. But she remembered how she cherished it nonetheless after being given the toy by Dad mere days into their 'birth' when she could barely even walk and talk. Buttercup had tried to take it away only for her to be reprimanded for it. How she had forgotten about it, Bubbles did not know - she just did, in the face of Octi and other toys that fit her better. Hugging the white train coach, Bubbles couldn't help but shed a tear (or two, or
three) at how things had changed so drastically. How there was a distance between her and her sisters now, and that she had secrets that had put her at odds even with her dearest Dad.

But she knew that there was no time for nostalgia: she had her stash of precious drugs to hide.

That was when she stumbled on one particular box. It was fairly large, far too big for five syringes. 'Buttercup' was written hastily on the side of the lid, in a small, messy script, misspelled as 'Butercub', probably for lack of time.

It didn't take a genius to figure out who it belonged to. On opening it, Bubbles saw even more syringes, all of which had 'His Secret' written on them. There were about thirty or more of them. There were other things as well, which looked like what a cat or a crow would drag up. There were some bullet casings. It sent a shiver down Bubbles' spine when she saw a small bottle containing dozens of teeth, some of which had dried blood on it. There were buttons, feathers, and bits of animal bones. Buttercup had been busy.

And now she was twice as afraid of being discovered. But it gave her an idea. Taking the weak His Secret drugs she had gathered in the crime scene, she stuffed Buttercup's box with them. Closing it up and sliding it back on the stack as though it was never touched, she went lower on the stack and found herself one with lots of tiny ghost dolls and white pillowcases in them that would serve nicely as cushions and cover.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

15 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 0521.

While the sun was still getting ready to put on its show, Professor Utonium woke up with a start. He had been assailed once again by a nightmare. Bubbles and Buttercup going out of control, killing Blossom, Selicia, and as Buttercup broke his back, he was forced to watch them kill each other, and as it just so happened, they were able to do so. Somehow, they each had a Duranium scalpel, and they'd stabbed each other in the throat. And then he was awake, and all that time before he realized it, he didn't think it was a dream, no matter how lucid it was.

Getting out of bed, he reached for his usual uniform; he'd been sleeping in pajamas, and on the way to the washroom, he took a look at Selicia, and the little bundle of joy in her arms with her head poking out. Buttercup. Her head injuries had healed by then, but it didn't stop him from remembering what Bubbles did. It didn't stop him from remembering what Buttercup had done in the cult compound. Yet, seeing her like this, with an unconscious, innocent smile on her face, perfectly child-like while she was asleep in Mom's arms, gave him hope for the future.

Going into the washroom, he got changed and left his room. Going through the airlock leading down into the labs and to his desk in the labs proper, he started removing slabs of documents from the drawers and began skimming through the back pages.

His latest version of Anti-X wasn't just promising. It was successful, though he had only tested it on plants and small mammals. The experiment with the guinea pigs was hazardous, considering that the animals had discovered that they could chew through steel faster than he expected. But after eating some corn laced with Anti-X, their powers were neutralized and they were returned to normal.

He had combined all three of his ideas for the Anti-X into one. By introducing compounds and catalysts into an organism boosted by Chemical X, both of which themselves were enhanced with Chemical W, the professor was able to create a mixture capable of interacting with Chemical X,
dismembering it by removing the bridging molecules and plugging it up with dead-end compounds, ensuring that the Chemical X infused into the organism was incapable of forming any kind of reactions.

But it wasn't the only thing he'd been working on. He couldn't approach the USDO council without proposing to them an alternative to the Girls - a better alternative - and it was just the thing he'd been working on too.

After re-establishing communications with his original staff, he was able to resume work on Chemical X, and recently, born out of the necessity to find a replacement for his Girls to fight crime, he'd decided that he would pursue his previous volition as a lead.

The version of Chemical X Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup were created with was an 'incomplete' version, with 'Sugar', 'Spice' and 'Everything-Nice' serving simultaneously as bridging and stabilizing molecules. There were still three other substances in the original plan for the real Chemical X. He'd often wondered what would have happened had he introduced them all into Chemical X, though his previous expectations had been optimistic. He'd concocted the formula and created the experimental set-up and steps necessary to create it because it seemed like the best possible combination, yielding the best possible results in terms of stability, acceptable mutability, as well as the potential for reactions and the resultant enhancements to an individual infused with it.

A Chemical X with just 'Sugar', 'Spice' and 'Everything-Nice' fused with it, on the other hand, was just the bare minimum, an unintended discovery at that. The professor hated himself and Mojo Jojo that the Girls were robbed of much of their potential and that they were an accident rather than a choice - he could only be happy that they hadn't melted before him just yet. Just yet. In retrospect, his probes into the Girls' version of Chemical X had revealed that it was like a girl on a tightrope, balanced by 'Sugar', which reduced some of the less desirable reactions, 'Spice', which allowed the more desirable reactions and 'Everything-Nice', which provided the most stability of all. The three other compounds that weren't added hadn't been necessary because they were catalytic agents and similar to the 'Spice', allowing other reactions projected to be useful.

The professor had already begun preparing to produce the new 'complete' Chemical X. He'd ordered in the compounds for it - which required that he cut through lines upon lines of bureaucratic red tape considering the top-secret nature of the compounds, but they were due to arrive anytime now.

Soon, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup would be free, and they would get their fairy tale ending - to live happily ever after, as one family.

---

**The City of Townsville. Pokey Oaks North. Pokey Oaks Kindergarten.**

15 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 1107.

To Bubbles, class today wasn't about the joy of discovery and learning, not like how it had always been. She loved class with Miss Keane, especially the art and craft she got to do almost every day. It wasn't that she no longer liked it. She had other priorities, such as hiding her dark secret from everyone else. She knew they were all looking at her. They were all whispering about her. Miss Keane couldn't be trusted either. She was a teacher - and teachers knew everything. But the biggest priority was the fairy godmother's magic, and how she could keep getting and using it. And the fairy godmother's request yesterday was key to a continuous supply of syringes, as long as she followed along with it.
In order to disguise her needs and distract herself, Bubbles tried enjoying art and craft as much as she could. The day's activity for that was sculpturing, but her sculptures would always end up malformed that she had to keep trying, again and again, to make it right. Her only success story when it came to her clay pieces was barely even staying together after a few minutes in the oven. It was a recreation of her Dad, but its head was halfway from falling off, and the arms weren't much better. It wasn't even anywhere close to a perfect cartoon version of him, at least by her standards, which she no longer cared to uphold. It'd served to distract her classmates and Miss Keane though, who patronized her by calling it good, and beautiful and other things she knew weren't truthful.

She was sweating, as usual, thinking about it; thinking about using another syringe of sweet, sweet His Secret 2.0. Her face had gone pale, as she continued in vain to try not to think about it. She took a glance at the USDO hotline in class once more, hoping that it'd ring, and hoping that the next operation would be a big one, so she'd have an excuse to use it, and not just as usual - she'd be able to use two of them at once! For now, however, if the pain and discomfort of not doping herself became too great, she had to ration it by using just one pathetic dose. It felt good, no doubt about it, but just one dose wasn't as good as it used to be, not by a long shot.

"Bubbles, honey, are you alright?" Miss Keane asked as she bent low beside her. Bubbles could feel her large hand on her back, and she didn't like it. It'd put her on edge, made her wonder if Miss Keane knew. "You're sweating all over."

When Miss Keane reached for Bubbles' forehead, she backed away. Didn't allow her to touch her even for a second. Unfortunately, the little girl had accidentally squashed her clay sculpture in her delirious scramble.

"I'm fine, Miss Keane," Bubbles said, trying her best to sound normal. Her voice came out a little raspy and made her sound a little like Buttercup. Miss Keane did not go away, and it was getting on Bubbles' nerves.

"Are you sure, Bubbles? You don't look fine to me," Miss Keane continued to dog her, and Bubbles hated it. "I didn't know you could get sick - but I could take you to the sickroom and make it better."

Bubbles didn't want to go to the sickroom. She wanted to wait for the hotline to buzz so she could use another pair of syringes and make good on her deal with the fairy godmother - all in the name of getting even more syringes of the good stuff. She'd noticed that the fairy godmother had been generous - more so by the day. She started by giving her just one needle to tide her through the Battle of Silver Age Cineplex, then it was two. It was six the third time. Bubbles imagined that it could be twice or even three times that the next time. In her altered mind, she imagined a whole sea of the dull red liquid. Her ideal world had turned from a cartoonish, idealized version of the real world to just a vast ocean of addictive chemical.

"Bubbles?" Miss Keane continued to annoy her.

"I don't want to go," Bubbles asserted. She was crushing her clay sculpture, not to redo it, but as a way to cope with what was inside her. Deep down, she knew she liked Miss Keane - a lot - but the way she was persistently forcing her to do something was making her mad, really mad. The way she was going to make her miss the chance to get more His Secret 2.0 was inexcusable.

"The sickroom isn't as bad as what your classmates say," Miss Keane said with a laugh, believing that Bubbles was afraid of it. "I'm sure you'll get past the smell, and even come to-"

"I SAID NO!" Bubbles slammed her table, making it creak and flattening her clay. Her eyes flashed red for the briefest moment. The entire class turned to her.
Miss Keane's hands went up to her hip as she glared at her. Blossom ran to Bubbles' side, holding her closely.

"I'm sorry, Miss Keane," Blossom apologized for Bubbles. "It's her new power. It's making her angry all the time and she's still learning to control it. That's what my Dad said."

The moment Bubbles felt her sister's touch, she felt more lucid, in control. It reminded her of family and love.

"I won't do it again, Miss Keane. I'm sorry," she apologized to the teacher as she looked up at her. Just days ago, the look the orange-vested woman was giving her would have reduced her to tears. She looked gigantic from her sitting position, like a skyscraper that was about to fall. Now, she was just another obstacle.

"No powers in the classroom," Miss Keane reminded Bubbles, wagging a finger at her. She then lowered it, and her facial expression wasn't as severe. "You still sure you don't need to go to the sickroom?"

"She's fine," Blossom said to Miss Keane. Bubbles, in the meantime, had to pick up her only completed sculpture. Her cartoon Dad's head had fallen off and nearly rolled off the table had she not intercepted it. Her head was a little clearer, and the sight of her broken sculpture was upsetting. Deep down inside, even while she was fighting off the fits that her drug was giving her, she'd made the clay representation of her Dad as a way to cope.

"What are you doing, Bubbles?" Blossom whispered to Bubbles harshly when Miss Keane went away to another table full of children. "Is it really that hard to not use your BerXerker power?"

"No, I just… It was an accident" Bubbles lied. "I lost control. I'm sorry."

That was when it finally happened. And Bubbles smiled, smiled widely when it did.

*Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz! The hotline rang, its clown face smiling alongside Bubbles as if taking her side. Blossom turned and glared at the clown phone, unhappy that it was interrupting her talk with Bubbles. She flew to it without allowing it to finish a second buzz:

*Bzzz! Bz-

"Hello? It's Blossom," she said. "Are you Mister Blake?"

"Gosh no, this is Chief McQuinn, Precinct 34. We have a huge shooting in the Financial District, Bank of China at Smith Avenue. 8 armed men holding a few execs hostages. You know the place?" the caller said on the line.

"Yes, Mister McQuinn, we're on way," Blossom said obediently - she'd been taught that anyone who called on the hotline should be listened to. When she turned around, Bubbles was already next to her, excited that there was action. Buttercup was uncharacteristically apathetic. They were practically racing into the storage room where their stuff was after Blossom received the call - Blossom to rein Bubbles in as she couldn't wait to get to the scene of the crime. Buttercup, however, lagged behind, as if she was asked to eat her broccoli.

Within under half a minute, they were already flying out, with Blossom apologizing to frightened teachers and kindergartners both, leaving after opening a window. They ascended, and when they did, they extended the glider wings on their flight packs, and Blossom led them towards the Financial District.
"This is Flight Control Five to Bravo-Four-Seven, be advised that the armed perps are on the twenty-first floor. They are heavily armed and dangerous. They have released all but one hostage. Proceed with caution," the Girls' radio crackled and Blossom acknowledged the message.

"What do we do, Blossom?" Bubbles asked the leader, but she had only one thing on her mind - the fairy godmother's magic.

"Just follow me and everything will be fine," Blossom said as they continued to streak across the sky.

Upon reaching the Bank of China, they flew straight through the windows of the twenty-first floor. Blossom had to actually stop and count the windows so they'd go through the right ones before they went full speed ahead. Crashing through the windows, they landed in one of the innumerable offices of the Bank of China, each on a knee, before standing up. Some of the bad guys who'd been keeping watch had to hide behind the office cubicles to avoid the deadly shards of glass flying across the office. Doors leading into the office were simultaneously opened as a few others barged into the office to join the coming firefight, rifles up, clearly too intimidated to even go in guns blazing as if they were weighing their options.

"Give up or we'll make you," Blossom warned the bad guys, putting on a growling voice. She didn't like being taken away from school, just as much as she didn't like innocent people getting hurt.

"It's them, just like the boss promised! Shoot them down!" one of the criminals shouted. They were all wearing masks, which Blossom didn't like. It reminded her too much of the Princess' masquerade ball.

"Buttercup, Bubbles, together, now!" Blossom shouted, speeding through her words quickly. As soon as bullets had started flying, the Girls plowed right into the men, pushing aside cubicle walls and desks, which did nothing to protect the armed criminals.

Bubbles could feel her 'BerXerker' coming up even though she hadn't taken the fairy godmother's magic. After tackling her first enemy, she could feel her eyes heating up; she knew then that it had turned hellish red. But it was preceded by none of the pleasures of the flesh. Within the space of a second though, it didn't matter.

"Rip and tear your guts!" Bubbles screamed as she flew to the next criminal, who was putting half his magazine of rifle rounds into her and punched him over a cubicle wall, the very sound of his skull cracking very audible. Even Buttercup was more forgiving as she wasn't punching to kill, having been pacified by her recent close shave with Dad. "You are big! That means you have big guts!"

Blossom turned her attention to Bubbles as soon as she heard it. Before she attended to her sister, however, she had to fire a couple of beams at a couple of shooters.

"Bubbles, no!" Blossom screamed as she saw Bubbles slashing another bad guy up with her fingernails. She looked like she was about to tear open the poor criminal shooter up. She flew to her to seize her by the arms, getting her off the bad guy, and slam her against a desk.

"Let go of me!" Bubbles struggled against her like a wild animal, trashing on the desk, barely
restrained by Blossom, as she swept off trays of documents and a computer in her attempt to escape her and cause more havoc. With a burst of strength, Bubbles broke the desk in two and threw Blossom back, before turning around and staring her down with her red eyes, panting heavily.

"Take deep breaths, Bubbles," Blossom said, following suggestions from her Dad. Buttercup, in the meantime, had knocked down the last gunman and flew over to her side when she was done making sure the bad guys stayed down.

"I can fight the two of you!" Bubbles growled aggressively as she continued panting. She could still remember the fairy godmother's request - she had to. All this - how she was facing off against her own sisters, felt like a prelude to it all.

"You don't want to. We're sisters, Bubbles. Dad said that as long as we have each other, we have a family outside The House," Blossom reasoned. Buttercup had nothing to say - she knew she was beaten the last time with Bubbles' new power activated. Neither did she care for Blossom's little speech. To her, there was no family in or out of the House. Neither was there any fun nor fulfillment left for her - she had tried to enjoy just delivering KOs to the bad guys, but it'd left her empty. It was no different from playing house at home.

There was silence after that, which was only disturbed by Bubbles' panting. Blossom took a sideways glance at Bubbles' latest victim. He was out cold all the same. There were long gashes across his cheek and chest. It was no wonder his lights were out - if the sight of an agitated Bubbles (to put it mildly) couldn't shock him into unconsciousness, then the amount of blood he was losing and the pain from Bubbles' new favorite clawing strikes would.

"B-B-Blossom?" Bubbles uttered as her eyes returned to being normal and baby blue. Her lips trembled as she struggled to hold back her secret, but she bit them in response and shut her eyes so they wouldn't see it in her eyes. "You're right, I don't want to."

"I'm glad you said that," Blossom simply said, none the wiser. She turned around. "Come on, we still need to find the poor man they are holding!"

As SWAT teams were still climbing up the skyscraper and USDO soldiers were rappelling from helicopters on the roof, the Girls were already zipping through corridors and rooms, looking for hostages or any bad guys they missed.

They didn't see any of the former. The latter was only one man, a Chinese executive in a suit who was unguarded and not even bound and gagged.

"That was easy," Blossom said as she carried the man, who was weak from being mistreated and beaten to his feet.

"Yeah," Buttercup muttered - to her, it wouldn't even matter if it was hard. Dad knew about her, and Blossom wouldn't allow her to even look at a bad guy the wrong way.

"Too bad…" Bubbles said, upset. She was hoping for an excuse to use more syringes, which she had hidden in her magazine pouch.

Neither did it sit right with Blossom. Obsessed with puzzles and patterns, she thought it odd that things had become simple after so many operations. But as she waited for the police and USDO to show up, she'd decided to let her guard down a little and start thinking that perhaps - just perhaps - things would go back to the way it used to be in January.
Chapter 34: In the Shadows (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

With crime on the rise, Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup had to go on overtime.

Chapter 34: In the Shadows (Part 1)


15 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 1223.

Blossom thought that the easy nature of their operation of the day – which involved taking down just eight normal human beings with normal guns – meant that things were going to go back to how it used to be: peaceful, and fun, and filled with learning.

Little did she know that it was the beginning of something different. And worse. Almost as soon as the Girls had touched down back in school and returned to their classroom, with Blossom hoping that she could salvage perhaps half an hour of learning out of the school day, the USDO hotline had rung again. It was right after they had gotten changed too, and so they had to jump back into their gear and fly out.

It wouldn't be the last operation either. The second call had been about a badly-planned bank robbery gone wrong, perpetrated by Lombardi outcasts, alienated and sent on their suicide mission probably for their ineptitude. The third call came in during a late lunch, and they had to go in with their riot gear because it was about dozens of men literally committing random acts of violence – beating random pedestrians on the streets with steel rods and flipping cars and setting fire to some dumpsters and then some – before holing up in an old apartment. They weren't fighters, and so after the Girls took down seven of them with tear gas, flashbangs, and sticks, they surrendered, much to Bubbles' frustration as Blossom had pulled her back the moment she did. It was hard keeping it all in.

When the Girls thought that the third call had to be the last one of the day, a fourth one came in while they were in the middle of dinner. And it was a good dinner too, one that Dad and Mom whipped up in an attempt to make them feel better. While Bubbles was smiling at a fourth chance for something big so she could use her magic and do what the fairy godmother wanted her to do, Buttercup was apathetic while Blossom was plainly upset. Things at the dinner table were going well too, as she was able to strike up a conversation with Dad and Mom about what they would all do when they were free of law enforcement duties.

That she had to toss herself back into the fire after dreaming through half her plate of mutton and broccoli was upsetting her. All too soon, the Girls flew out of the circular windows of their room and into the dark sky. Night had fallen.

The City of Townsville. Outskirts. En route to Gladys' Stables (Defunct)

15 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 1944.
'Hi, it's Blossom. You're not Mister Blake, are you?' Blossom remembered the latest conversation on the USDO hotline as she flew towards the heart signal. With the dark taking over Townsville, it was plain to see in the sky.

'Sorry to disappoint, girlie,' it was Detective Mullens on the phone. 'It's just little ol' me, Garrett Mullens. Listen, I heard from the boss that you gals were called in a gazillion times today, but I really need your help on this one.'

'What is it, Mister Mullens?' Blossom had tried to sound confident and alert and strong, but her voice was raspy and shaky - something that shouldn't have happened until just before bedtime.

'Remember Detective Jack Wednesday?' Detective Mullens had said on the line. Blossom remembered that her heart had sunk when she heard the younger detective's name. The first day she met him, disaster struck. And since she was responsible for part of it, she felt shame upon hearing Jack's name.

'We're not going to The Strip again, are we?' Blossom mumbled, afraid that that would be the case. She actually believed that that was the case. There was never a time when she was tempted to reject the chance to fight crime until then.

'Oh no, don't you worry about that - he's been on the hunt, see, and he managed to trace some of the children we couldn't save before,' Mullens had said. He was trying to sound hopeful, and positive. But it had only brought back bad memories, still fresh, in Blossom. Hundreds of children were lost that day. She had lost herself that day too, and Bubbles had lost something of herself because of her. She remembered Dad's lesson. She had driven the proverbial nails into Bubbles and pulling them out wasn't going to fix the holes. Not entirely.

'He saw them getting hauled into an old stable near the edge of the city. Six or seven of them,' Mister Mullens had said.

'Who are we fighting?' Blossom asked, her insides turning to ice even though her room was well heated.

'Cultists,' Mullens had said. Blossom couldn't breathe after that. Bubbles had lost control the last time they'd fought them. They were powerful enough to encourage her all the way, unlike the thugs they had been putting down throughout the city. A police officer they were speaking to after the 'riot' they put down had said that they had no idea who was behind the huge spike in crime in Townsville, but they were easy to defeat nonetheless - they were just bothersome and tiring to deal with. By the end of the third call, it was as if they had just been through another round with the Purple Man. 'You now know why we need you now? After what they pulled the last time, I guess we needed the insurance. There will be kids in the line of fire too, so I thought they'll respond to the three of you best.'

Blossom took it to mean that the children in the stables would easily befriend and listen to her sisters and her. She had her doubts – normal children were different from her, and Bubbles and Buttercup were far worse with what they were up to lately. Those thoughts had occupied her mind all the way to Mister Mullens, out in the cold, dark border of Townsville. That, along with the ever-present gnawing fear that something was going to go wrong.

When the Girls had reached the SWAT van shining the heart signal into the dark sky above, the Girls couldn't help but get a sense of déjà vu. Although they were many miles away from the farm where the Cult of His Arm was headquartered, the feeling was the same, if not worse.

They weren't just surrounded by dead trees that looked like the twisted bodies or faces of the dead,
and the emptiness of snow. They were engulfed by darkness and the terrifying possibilities of what could happen in the deep, dark void.

"Beautiful night, isn't it?" Detective Mullens greeted them the moment they touched down. It was dark, and shadows had covered most of his features. Even though he was a family friend for months, he still looked intimidating that way. Beside him was his daughter, Olivia, and Stanley Talker. Detective Jack Wednesday stood apart from them, flanked by a pair of uniformed officers.

"I just wish it didn't have to be about fighting tonight," Blossom said in response. "There was too much of that today. Why can't people just be nice to each other?" In retrospect, she realized she sounded like Bubbles before the BerXerker power had grown to define her. It'd made her feel alone, even though she was surrounded by people she liked and loved.

Her sisters, in the meantime, were silent. Buttercup was staring at the snowy ground, completely demoralized by the lack of meaning and motivation in life. Bubbles' eyes, for once, didn't look like it could kill even without Blossom's heat beam. Instead, it was darting around, sticking to everything but anyone else's eyes. She was sweating even though they were out in the cold. Blossom had put it down to nervousness.

"If we get this out of the way, you can bet that people will be nicer to each other," Detective Jack Wednesday said from the side. "We should get moving. They've probably seen our little bat signal." He started walking, and so Mullens and his daughter followed. The talking dog too. The Girls were pulled along.

"I doubt they'll be running away anytime soon," Olivia added. "I've been doing my homework. These weirdos care nothing about themselves. Ritual suicides and past police arrests told the same stories over and over."

"Will they give up this time?" Blossom asked, hoping for a positive answer - she really could go for some early bedtime.

"No," Detective Mullens answered dryly. All around them were car headlights coming from police cruisers, SWAT vans, and USDO unmarked vehicles. Barely illuminated SWAT cops and USDO soldiers were running forward all around them, like ghosts in the dark. No humvees or APCs this time though - it was meant to be a smaller-scaled operation, to be done quietly. Blossom could see that there were fewer good guys this time - perhaps half as many.

"We'll be raiding some old stables today," Detective Wednesday began briefing the Girls. "I tailed one of those child trafficking low-lives to it. They've been working with the cultists, selling them children for some reason I don't want to know but I'll have to find out. Forest rangers in the nearby woods reported screams coming from inside recently, children crying, and armed guards. I've sent my own men on a stakeout, and they reported about twenty of them."

"Do we go in on our own?" Bubbles asked, showing some initiative surprisingly, though it was only for her own selfish reasons. She wanted it to be dangerous, so she would have an excuse to use the fairy godmother's magic.

Then there was the mission her benefactor had tasked her to do. This was it - she knew it - because cultists were involved this time.

"God, no," Detective Wednesday said without pause. "We can't have that again. I don't want a repeat of The Strip. I need you Girls to go in from the front. My men will back you up from all sides. Me, Detective Mullens, Olivia and our talking dog here will sneak around the back."
"Well, someone's getting wise," Detective Mullens jabbed. The younger detective stopped, and so did everyone else. Even though the shadows were covering parts of Wednesday's face, she could tell that he wasn't exactly pleased with what Mullens said.

"That's easy for you to say!" Detective Jack Wednesday spat, jabbing a finger at the older detective. He continued doing so. "At least I didn't spend an entire lifetime lying down and eating shit while the city rotted from the inside-out!"

"Jack, stop-" Olivia shouted from the side. Stanley Talker growled, unsettled by the unexpected hostility between members of his pack.

"Don't think I don't know about your past, Garrett!" Detective Wednesday pressed on, so mad he couldn't just stop. "The mess you made when you went undercover? The people you got killed throughout your 'illustrious' career? Cheated on your late wife too with a bimbo on the other side too, did you?"

"Sir, please! There are kids with us!" Olivia pleaded with Jack, but she was ignored. The Girls merely stared, afraid to intervene in the adults' affair.

"You need to watch your mouth, son," Detective Mullens said, his gravelly tone gaining a furious edge, though it wasn't in an instant. "Don't force me to teach you a lesson in front of the Girls."

"Yeah, took you long enough to reach the rank required to do that, huh?" Detective Wednesday continued to taunt his older colleague over the perceived slight. "How does it feel like to hold the same rank as someone half your age? There's a fucking good reason for that and you can blame the corrupted system all you want! We all know why."

"Sir! The kids!" Olivia reminded the detective urgently. She glanced over at the Girls, who looked appropriately shocked at the language being hurled around. Detective Mullens, in the meantime, had fallen silent, lethally so.

"Yeah, you keep chasing your tiny-ass breadcrumbs and the idiotic pipe dream of putting the Amoeba Boys behind bars," Detective Wednesday kept on going. "It's people like me who're serving the public and protecting the innocents. Tell me, Mullens, how many have you saved in the past, I don't know, three months?"

Detective Mullens was still silent from this. His hands were in his pockets. He stared into the distance. Blossom could feel her eyes going wet. She hated it when friends argue. Looking away, she could only hope that they sort out their differences quickly.

"He was nice to me…" Bubbles mumbled in an attempt to speak up for him. Detective Wednesday looked in her direction, his expression changing from that of anger to some kind of sadness. It was hard to tell from the shadows. "He kinda saved me…"

She remembered how Mister Mullens had found her alone in The Strip when Blossom had abandoned her, how he covered her up with his own trench coat even though it was winter. How he defended her and brought her home personally, even though it took more time - his time - to do so than if she would fly home herself. She hadn't said it yet, but he was grateful for his company even though he was driving and she was in the backseat - how grateful she was that he'd done it.

"I, urm…" Detective Wednesday was at a loss for words. He knew that he had been responsible for Bubbles' ordeal. That very same night he left The Strip, he had been drinking heavily over it - well, it had something to do with the fact, too, that he had failed to rescue three hundred children from child prostitution and slavery, and managed to miss arresting key members of Townsville's most
prolific child trafficking ring even though he had vast resources at his command to make it happen. Unable to spare a word for Bubbles or anyone else, he continued walking, caring little if anyone was following. "Let's just go. We're wasting time."

Asked the group walked on, Bubbles was concerned for Mister Mullens. The things Mister Wednesday had said was upsetting, even Bubbles knew that. At the very least, it had distracted Bubbles from her addiction; coming up next to Mullens, she took his hand as they continued on their way to deployment.

"Thanks, kid, but you didn't have to," Mister Mullens said. Bubbles didn't know how or why she thought so, but he sounded a little like a wounded beast. Like a bear who'd stepped on a trap.

"But I want to," Bubbles said. She understood Mullens very well - she had been accused, and rightly so too, of failing in many ways so many times. In fact, she knew, right then, that she was failing in another way, and she didn't have the willpower to correct it.

"You're an angel, you know that? That's something that will never change," Mister Mullens said.

An angel. Bubbles knew better, for things had already changed without him knowing it.

---

**The City of Townsville. Outskirts. Gladys' Stables (Defunct)**

**15 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 2009.**

"Buttercup, Bubbles," Blossom said to her sisters as they floated their way up to the main entrance of the stables' manor, into the porch. "We'll go in close together this time."

Although she had seen nothing beyond the door and walls of the manor using her X-ray vision, it was too dark for her to see anything beyond a few feet past the door. One could never be too careful.

"Why?" Bubbles asked, even though she knew very well why.

"It's safer that way," Blossom said, though she wasn't really lying.

"This is Detective Wednesday to Blossom," the younger detective whispered through the radio. "We're ready to breach the building."

"Buttercup, Bubbles, you two knock down the doors when I tell you to," Blossom ordered, referring to the grand entrance of the manor. "I'll shoot."

Blossom shouldered her MP5 and charged up her eyes, getting ready to blast any cultists on the other side of the doors either way. Bubbles' hands were shaking - she really needed her fix and she felt that the time for it was close, so close she was shaking with anticipation.

"Now!" Blossom shouted, and her sisters kicked down the doors cleanly off their hinges. Looking in, they saw that the hall of the manor was as dark as the windows let on. Contrary to expectations, they weren't buffeted by a hailstorm of bullets the moment they came in.

The Girls' eyes went immediately to lantern mode to make up for the darkness. Floating in, guns live, the illusion of peace was quickly broken when a woman who had been hiding behind an old, non-working grandfather clock jumped out and charged them with a machete, screeching like some vampire creature with glowing red eyes. Blossom fired a couple of her heat beams at her, flooring her. Dust fell from the roof. Buttercup looked up, bringing her eye-light to bear on the second floor
to find a couple of cultists spying on them from above, wielding bolt-action rifles. She quickly swept her laser eye beam across the banister they were leaning on, causing them and their cover to fall from above to the ground floor.

Bubbles then caught sight of a man in red robes descending the stairs, and promptly put a poorly-aimed shot in his leg, which caused him to tumble down. It was only by virtue of the fact that he wasn't far that she'd even hit anything – her hands were shaking from the lack of a certain drug to make her feel better.

It was silent again after that. Blossom had been sweeping the perimeter with her x-ray vision in the meantime. There was no ambush waiting in the adjacent rooms, as far as she could tell in the darkness. SWAT officers filed in through the entrance they opened, cuffing the cultists, all of whom were still alive if wounded in a multitude of ways.

Things were going well so far. But there were too few of them when there should be at least twenty.

"Blossom," one of the SWAT officers called out to the leader of The Three as he was handcuffing the cultic lady she had knocked out. "Work your way to the stables. Sweep as you go. Your job here is done."

A few gunshots ringing out in the house punctuated the SWAT cop's orders. Blossom started looking through walls, searching for the source of the sound as she guided her sisters towards an exit that would take them close to the stables on the manor's grounds.

The shots had originated from the detectives' group. There was a series of barks after that, followed by the loud sound of scuffling and dog-on-man violence. Blossom could see it all through the walls; Rays from torchlight illuminating fallen bodies. Buttercup could hear it clearly as if it was all happening in the same room as her, but she didn't care. Blossom could only wish that she could see her friends again, but she knew she had to follow the plan.

"Come on, Girls, let's go save our friends," Blossom said, and by friends, she meant children - because by her innocent worldview, all children were friends of each other. The opposite was but a few exceptions. Flying up to the second floor with her sisters catching up quickly, Blossom opened a door and flew through a bedroom and its window. Buttercup was so clumsy that she partially broke the window even though it was open. Bubbles completed the destruction by flying slightly higher, completely taking the window off its frame.

Flying across a field that was probably for horses to canter around, Blossom flew towards one of the stables, and together with Bubbles and Buttercup, knocked down a massive door leading into the stables meant for horses to gallop through with their riders. There were dim lights in stable number one, which meant someone was there.

And they were right. Several cultists were walking up and down the rows of horse stalls. Blossom shot infrared beams on one the moment she noticed them. However, the moment she did, many more burst out of the stalls, firing their weapons at them. Two cultists who were closer had thrown their handheld weapons at them, one of which was some kind of a sickle, at Blossom while another a knife at Bubbles.

They didn't have time to see what sort of weapons they were. Blossom and Bubbles had found out too late, however, that they were Duranium.

The sickle had missed Blossom almost entirely - except it had nicked her in the arm. Bubbles wasn't so lucky, as the throwing knife aimed at her had struck home, burying itself in her shoulder.
Both Girls had each flown into their own stalls for cover, and they had each discovered that the stables weren't used to hold horses. In fact, Blossom had expected horses, only to be disappointed in the split second she had before the bad guys appeared - Dad had yet to take them to a stable to see the horses and ponies.

The stalls contained children instead. A boy, black and eight years old - very afraid with a leg chained to the wall - was staring at Blossom when she crashed through the doors and into his stall. Bubbles was met by a six-year-old Caucasian girl who was also chained by a leg to the wall. She didn't even care that she was there because she knew that it was time…

Time to do as the fairy godmother had asked, but most importantly, to use her magic. She didn't even care that a Duranium knife was sticking out of her shoulder. Wincing in pain and ignoring the pleas of the child for help, Bubbles pulled out a syringe and quickly injected herself with drugs, before repeating the action and going for a double dose. As Buttercup dove into action, ignoring bullets and pain and punching out bad guys, Bubbles finally got what she wanted as she moaned and clutched herself in pure pleasure while the little girl chained to the wall watched in horror.

"Stay here - we'll beat the bad guys first then come get you," Blossom instructed the boy in her stall as she crouched low in it. Pain shot up in her arm. Clutching it and yelping, she realized that it was bleeding there - the wound wasn't just skin-deep. However, it could have been worse. Hovering up, she surveyed the stables to find that Buttercup was alone in her fight against the cultists, but doing admirably well - she'd just thrown a cultist through a wall. He wouldn't be waking up anytime soon. Looking to her right, she saw that Bubbles had yet to leave her stall, but she didn't have time to check on her. Buttercup needed help.

"Betrayers!" a feral-looking cultic axeman with a pair of hatchets screamed as he rushed Buttercup while she was pushing away a few others who had rushed her with other deadly-looking implements en masse. Blossom flew over at high speeds to slug him, throwing him off his feet.

"Betrayers!" the group Buttercup had pushed back echoed. "He will be displeased!"

Buttercup glanced dismissively at Blossom.

"Why do you even care?" she said.

"Because I do," Blossom replied. The cultists, with more coming to reinforce them, started rushing them again. The axeman was getting up. Their eyes were all red. To the Girls, it meant things were going to get difficult.

"Join us before it's too late!" another cultist warned the Girls even as he charged them, pistol blazing.

Bubbles stood behind them, tilting her head as she observed what was going on, her mouth slightly ajar as she was still experiencing a tide of pleasure ebbing and flowing inside her. She reached for the throwing knife in her shoulder and pulled it out unflinchingly, casually. She held onto it because she thought it would be interesting to use.

Staring Blossom in her back, she gasped as the very thought of putting the knife in her back alone had resulted in a spurt of pleasure in her. Revenge was a form of pleasure, and the very thought of carrying it out, the temptation, was overwhelming. Besides, she knew that Blossom would try to stop her from doing what would please the fairy godmother and gain her even more of her magic.

Bubbles clutched the Duranium throwing knife, which was wet with her own blood, tightly. She could still remember Blossom's poorly chosen words and physical abuses clearly, even if her
memories weren't as sharp as either of her sisters'. Detective Wednesday's mere presence had served as a reminder.

Yes, she would help the fairy godmother just as she had helped her.
Chapter 35: In the Shadows (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Bubbles did as she was told, and everyone was none the wiser.

Chapter 35: In the Shadows (Part 2)

The City of Townsville. Outskirts. Gladys' Stables (Defunct)


As Blossom was fending off cultists by firing stunning heat beams into their ranks, not doing much for long, or punching and kicking at any that were coming close, the cultic axeman had gotten up without her noticing. Shouting a warcry, he held his right hatchet as he charged at Buttercup, attracting the enhanced little girl's attention, who fired a laser beam at his weapon, only to do no damage against the axehead. She fired a second beam to slice it by the handle instead, but then felt sharp when the cultic axeman hacked her in the thigh with his left hatchet – the right hatchet had been a distraction.

Buttercup's cry of pain had attracted Blossom's attention. She sailed across the room and delivered a flying kick to the back of the axeman's head, who collapsed.

"Are you alright?" Blossom asked.

"Just leave me alone!" Buttercup replied as she was clutching her belly. Blossom couldn't see how bad it was, just that she was bleeding.

Just then, a firebomb exploded right on top of Blossom. Her bow, gear, and uniform were on fire. The nauseating smell of burning petrol was choking. Blossom fired a few infrared beams in retaliation, at point-blank range, dropping a few and pushing back the growing number of cultists.

That was when she felt a sharp pain down her back, and saw Bubbles bowling through her and a few cultists, pushing past them and through the barn at high speeds, crashing through the set of doors on the other end of the stables.

"Bubbles, what are you doing!?!" Blossom cried too late as she was long gone. Little did she know that she was extremely lucky. Bubbles had been contemplating stabbing her in the back to remove any chance of her interference in the fairy godmother's affairs. An inkling of kinship and love that Bubbles could still feel in her drug-fueled enraged state had dissuaded her from doing so.

It didn't dissuade her from doing the fairy godmother's bidding to gain further access to her magic though.

In the meantime, Buttercup had begun escalating her attacks, graduating to emitting cutting beams at the cultists. Blossom could see curious children poking their head out of the stalls. There was the smell of smoke and burnt hay. Looking around her, she saw that the firebomb hadn't just set fire to her. It was spreading very quickly over the hay and wooden structure of the stables. Even the cultists could see what could go wrong with this. Some of them, especially those around the back
of the cultist group, was already running away.

Another cultist surged forward, taking swipes with his Duranium machete but Blossom was able to dodge them all and retaliate with an uppercut. Her attacker was thrown backward, but he did not hit the floor as he was buoyed up by his friends behind him.

Time was running out. The fire was spreading and children were screaming.

"Buttercup, we need to save the kids!" Blossom appealed to her sister. But from what her Dad had revealed about Buttercup, she knew that she would be too 'messd up' to care – one could only hope that she would. "They'll burn in the fire!"

"I'll fight the cultists. You do that," Buttercup offered, not because she cared about the children – they could burn to death in this fire for all she cared – but because in this mess, she sensed an opportunity.

"Thanks! We'll have to find Bubbles later – she's gone!" Blossom said before zooming off to save the kids in the stables.

"She could die and I won't care," Buttercup muttered to herself, not so much afraid that Blossom would hear, but she was more cautious than ever about losing favor with her Dad – even if it looked like she had squandered most of it by being discovered. She still couldn't believe they were angry at her for killing the woman. After all, wasn't she a cultist? By extension, it'd made her baby a cultist and therefore an enemy – she was willing to bet that people like General Blackwater and Captain Butch would agree with her, though in reality, even Captain Butch, a man who would put the entire population of an Afghan village before a firing squad, would think twice about committing infanticide.

Going into a stall, Blossom found a boy who was just lying on the floor, dazed. His eyes were red and he was foaming in the mouth. She could draw parallels with Bubbles. But how could a normal boy be like Bubbles? Without the time to think about it, she decided that he was a cultist because of his eyes, but one who was young and deserved saving. 'Kids make mistakes,' she knew her Dad would say if he was in the stables.

Picking up the boy's chain, she snapped it in two before carrying him fireman-style. As she flew towards the exit, she looked back at Buttercup to check on her.

She had been sweeping her laser across the cultic horde, enduring bullets and further melee attacks from the braver or crazier of the cultists.

Outside, she laid the boy down. In the distance, she saw that the detectives were coming with the talking dog. But she had no time to wait and greet them. Flying back in, she started freeing more children, some who could run on their own and others who, being drugged like the first child, needed lifting.

After rescuing a few more children, Blossom had stopped to check on Buttercup.

She was streaked with blood – and most of them weren't hers. The cultists, barring a few, were in full retreat. Blossom shouldered her MP5 and fired a few rounds to help her unstable sister out, putting them in shoulders and arms as she didn't want the cultists to die in the fire too – they needed their legs to run. Buttercup turned around in her hovering position.

"I didn't need your help!" she shouted ungratefully.

"But I need yours! There are still children inside and we need to get them out!" Blossom said. The
fire was absolutely raging, and there was still crying and screaming inside.

Wordlessly, Buttercup flew into one of the stalls after giving Blossom the stink eye. She then freed a girl by cutting her chain using her laser beam. She carried the girl, about twice her physical age, roughly by an arm and flew her out of the stables. When they were out, she nonchalantly tossed her down next to the others.

With Buttercup's unwilling help, Blossom was able to evacuate the children quickly. But where Buttercup was unwilling to help with the children, she was hostile with her next request.

"We need to get the cultists out too," Blossom said to Buttercup. At this, Buttercup folded her arms and just gave her the most spiteful glance she could work up. It didn't take any effort at all.

"They'll die in there!" Blossom pleaded with her stubborn tomboy sister.

"Fine. You're the leader, 'sis',' Buttercup said sarcastically before flying back into the stables with her, picking up cultists, two at a time. She hated it - she hated that she had to swallow her hate and ego and needs to clean up a mess that would have been swallowed up by the fire anyway, that she was back to being totally subjugated by Blossom where previously, she didn't even have much space to do whatever she wanted to begin with.

Outside, they began depositing the cultists as far away from the children as possible, where the detectives, talking dog and their gathering colleagues could hold them.

Blossom, in particular, was trying to do this as fast as she could - Bubbles was still missing, and she was dreadfully terrified of what she might be up to without her supervision. Being incredibly unpredictable these days, that she could be killing bad guys wasn't the only concern she had.

---

The City of Townsville. Outskirts. Gladys' Stables (Defunct)

15 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 2035.

Bubbles had flown over to a second stable after ditching her sisters in the first. She had traced the cultists, who ran in the other direction, some of who fired wild shots at her on sight, into the second stable. She knew that the object of her fairy godmother-given mission was there. Her magical benefactor had given her some very specific details and instructions.

Swooping through the entrance of the second stable, she crashed into a cultist who happened to be in the way. He was dashed so hard against the concrete floor that ripples of cracks erupted throughout his body. He was a bloody smear on the floor after that, instantly dead, while Bubbles continued flying through the stables when she saw that it was empty of cultists. There was another door leading deeper into the building. She went through there and turned to look, the second stables being L-shaped.

A group of red-robed cultists was huddled around something. They turned around as soon as they heard the whooshing of wind and the banging of doors preceding her landing. One of them came forward, a man who appeared familiar and yet impossible to place by Bubbles - not that she was of sound mind to place anyone.

"Bubbles!" the man greeted her - how did he know her name? He didn't look like a cultist, especially after he'd thrown off his red robes, revealing a trench coat underneath. He pulled out a familiar badge with an eagle motif to it. "Jackard - USDO intelligence. I need you to stand down - what's wrong with your eyes?"
Jackard. Bubbles thought she'd seen him once or twice before, among policemen and USDO soldiers.

"Anyway, we got him - the leader of the Cult of His Promise. The guy who attacked Blossom back in that cinema?" the man claimed. Bubbles looked past him to see the cult leader. The man had long hair, scraggly beard, a permanent, malicious smile on his face that persisted despite his capture. He was surrounded by turncoat cultists, men, and women who Jackard had recruited based on their regret in joining the cult.

Bubbles recognized the cult leader. A USDO security officer had visited them soon after the Battle of Silver Age Cinema to brief them on him. But it wasn't the USDO briefing that informed her the most about the cult leader.

She had to do it. The look on the friendly cultists' eyes said it all. They knew about Bubbles' secret. Bubbles started forward, unslinging her MP5 and shouldering it.

"Bubbles, what are you doing?" Chief Intelligence Officer Jackard asked, confused. Bubbles aimed her weapon at him. "Bubbles! Stand down! Stand-" And she unloaded something like eight or ten rounds at him. She saw blood spurting front and back of his head. The rest of her rounds had penetrated his torso. He fell, and Bubbles turned her submachine gun on the friendly cultists, firing on them at full auto, and when her SMG was out, she leaped at them, stabbing him in the stomach with the Duranium knife she'd pulled from her shoulder before slitting it partially and leaving the knife there, letting the cultist try in vain to keep his entrails in as he collapsed to his knees.

She threw another cultic defector through a wooden pillar so hard that the pillar broke in two, and the red-robed man looked even worse. Grabbing another by the neck, she flew up higher and threw him down on the stump of the broken pillar, impaling him on the stake-like wood. Had Bubbles been sober, she would have thought that his scream was horrifying, if the sight of it wasn't enough.

The cultists tried to fight back, but it was like confronting a force of nature; like trying to blow up an earthquake with mines or sniping out a tornado with a hunting rifle. Bubbles yanked the rifle of a female cultist away and shoved the barrel through her throat. She sliced another cultist with her nails, cutting deep into his face, bursting eyeball and lacerating flesh. This one had only stumbled, being slightly more resilient, so she leaped onto him and bit his throat off, bathing herself in his blood. But there wasn't time to enjoy the fruits of her labor - picking up the downed cultist's bolt-action rifle, she swung its stock at another, smashing both his skull and the stock into splinters.

One more cultist remained, and he chose to run. Bubbles didn't let him. Flying up to him, she landed on his back, clutched her thighs tightly around his neck as he was screaming and flew backward, yanking him back and slamming him down on the concrete floor. Putting her arms around his head and face, she jerked at it so hard that he was beheaded instantly - so quickly that the cultist did not know even after his head was cleanly separated from his body.

Bubbles stood up and held the head up before her, fascinated by what she had done. She giggled when the man's eyes were still open and staring at her, still alive, but that had only lasted a few seconds more. She thought it was funny - like something out of a Saturday cartoon show. When the last cultist's eyes shut themselves for the last time, she dropped the head and returned to the cult leader tied to a chair.

"Are you here to kill me?" he asked calmly, his smile still plastered on his face even if he was facing apparent death. Without saying a word, Bubbles flew up to him, grabbed the rope coiled around his body and pulled them apart, snapping them as if they were made of paper. The cult leader shrugged them off. Bubbles continued to free him by digging into the rope around his ankles with her fingernails and cutting them off that way.
The cult leader stood up when his legs were free. Bubbles continued to work on him, floating around him and biting off the ropes binding his wrists together. When it was off, the cult leader turned to face her. Bubbles, startled for some reason, backed away whilst hovering.

"Why are you helping me?" the cult leader asked, still maintaining his royal, high and mighty holy savior-type demeanor.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House

15 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 0006.

"You will find a friend of mine in Gladys' stables. Leopold is his name. He has long, black hair and is heavily bearded. His eyes will be glowing red like yours. He is in the Cult of His Promise, and so he wears a red robe. He will be betrayed by his friends. You will rescue him by killing the betrayers – they are evil for double-crossing a man they regard as their friend and leader, after all," the fairy godmother instructed as Bubbles was still on her knees, enjoying the effects of her latest dose of His Secret 2.0. "You will tell him that-

---

The City of Townsville. Outskirts. Gladys' Stables (Defunct)

15 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 2035.

"The Master protects. You will continue to serve him as you did," Bubbles relayed the fairy godmother's message to the cult leader. "I am now on His side, and so I am at your disposal."

The cult leader's smile grew wider if it was even possible.

"I understand my vision now," the messianic-looking cultic figure said vaguely. From within his disheveled robes, he pulled his pendant out. On the pendant is an icon resembling some kind of a demon.

"Bubbles, do not shy away from this – you will be kept safe this way. Thank the Master for me," the cult leader, Leopold, said.

"What do you mean?" Bubbles asked, but she got her answer in an unexpected way – an immediate way. Putting up his hand, a kind of hellish red lightning shot out from it, streaking to Bubbles and striking her in the head. She screamed in pain, clutching the sides of her head, the electrical-like red energy so excessive that it was lighting up her eyes and mouth. When it was over, she dropped to the ground, lying on her side.

"Make no mistake, Bubbles. He is pleased that you are on His side," she could hear Leopold's voice echoing in her ear. "Now rest. Rest, my dear. You've done well."

For a few seconds, she blinked, remembering a random day at the playground with Dad and Blossom and Buttercup for some reason, before everything went dark.

---

The City of Townsville. Outskirts. Gladys' Stables (Defunct)

15 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 2042.

"Bubbles? Bubbles?" A voice was calling out to her. Bubbles could hear it was she was just coming to. She opened her eyes, but her vision consisted of a hotchpotch of colors. She thought she
could make out splotches of red, orange, pink and beige. "Bubbles, are you alright?"

But when everything came into focus, she saw that it was Blossom kneeling over her, shaking her awake. Where she was previously on her side, her sister had shifted her to her back. Bubbles sat up when she remembered the pain that came with the red lightning that had knocked her out before. She then remembered Leopold, the cult leader.

"Bubbles, you're alright!" Blossom exclaimed, glad that she had come to. Bubbles, however, wasn't too thrilled - instead, she was looking around the stables, somehow expecting the cult leader to stick around despite the fact that he was supposed to be gone. After all, she couldn't afford to have her secret exposed.

"I… guess I am," Bubbles said. But thankfully, there was no sign of him. Instead, there were dead bodies all around her, the result of her drug-fueled outburst.

"What happened to you?" Blossom asked. That was when Bubbles understood why Leopold had knocked her out. It was the perfect alibi, though she didn't know the word for it.

"I was fighting the cultists, but I guess they were too strong for me…" Bubbles lied, looking around her. Blossom studied her surroundings as well. "I had to kill some of them. I had no choice."

"I guess you had to…" Blossom shrugged her shoulders. Although she found the loss of life distasteful, the fact that Bubbles was lying on the floor, unconscious, seemed to justify the need for killing. She thought that Bubbles was nigh-unstoppable in her BerXerker fury - that the cultists managed to subdue her even in that state might have meant that she was in real danger of dying herself. Still, something did not add up, though Blossom wasn't sure what it was. Trusting her sister to tell the truth, however, Blossom did not think about it any further.

"Why did you come here without us anyway?" Buttercup questioned Bubbles, not out of a need to find out the truth, but out of spite towards her sister for beating her up a couple of days ago. Today, it didn't help that Bubbles had left her alone in the first stable when her help could have made things easier - she was injured again as a result. She hated getting stitches. "We needed your help and you just left us!"

"I lost control… I'm sorry…" Bubbles lied.

"You're always saying the same thing!" Buttercup asserted.

"Forget it, Buttercup," Blossom said. "Things are fine now. It could have been worse. It's not as if she ran away. She was fighting."

"What's the difference? She left us!" Buttercup continued to press on.

Detective Mullens, Wednesday and Olivia were coming up to them as Blossom and Buttercup argued and Bubbles was just sitting on the floor, looking miserable in one of her more lucid moments - which were becoming less and less common the more she used the fairy godmother's magic.

"Where's Mister Talker?" Bubbles asked. She hadn't spoken to the talking dog for a day or two, and already, she was missing him. The dog's companionship had been unconditional, and it was a pal, completely non-judgemental.

"He's entertaining the kids you three saved," Olivia said. "Good job."
"It's just the two of us," Buttercup retorted, still mad at Bubbles for her abandonment and previous perceived errors. "Bubbles didn't do any saving."

"Stop being mean to me!" Bubbles shouted angrily all of a sudden, her eyes turning red again, shocking everyone concerned.

"Or what!?" Buttercup retaliated. Blossom had to get between the two of them.

"Okay, break it up, the both of you," Detective Mullens said, pulling Bubbles back. She shrugged off his hands violently, and the detective, for the first time, had to wonder if he was going to get a bloody nose out of it. But thankfully, Bubbles' eyes had gone back to baby blue once more, which he used as an indicator of her mood.

"You know, Buttercup, Bubbles didn't exactly do nothing," Detective Wednesday said unexpectedly to Buttercup. Pointing behind him, he continued: "She made sure there were no cultists here in this second stable, so the kids here are safe. Safer, in fact, than the kids in the first stable. That's not to say that you and Blossom didn't do anything either, of course. We've all done something here." Even more unexpectedly, Jack Wednesday cracked a smile, and for good reason. All in all, there were thirty-eight children of all ages and both gender who'd been spared a life in a crazy cult, whatever that entailed.

And he bloody well knew what it entailed. He'd done the research, seen the sights in the manor and the stables. He hadn't told the Girls yet, and he didn't want to as they were children themselves too. He'd gone below the basement of the manor. They'd dug deep, built some kind of a chamber down there, made an altar. And there was blood on that altar. And shackles. Where the bodies were, however, he did not know. He would rather focus on finding the living.

Then there were the children who were still breathing. Some of them displayed signs of drug abuse. Judging by the setting and the fact that the children were literally chained where they were, based on none other than their accounts, the drugs were pumped into them by force. The cult had been using them as human guinea pigs for testing the drug.

"That's nice to know," Blossom smiled at Bubbles, but Bubbles wasn't smiling - deep inside, she wasn't proud of what she had done. Saving the children wasn't her intention - getting more drugs was, and in her selfish pursuit of artificial, liquid joy, she'd inadvertently helped the cult. She wasn't blind nor completely out of it in her drug-induced state.

"I guess…" Bubbles simply said.

"Say, did the three of you see a man here? White guy with long black hair and beard? Same guy seen in the cineplex?" Detective Mullens asked, pulling out a polaroid with a slightly outdated visage of the cult leader himself. He didn't look much different years ago. The beard was shorter.

"We had a tip-off that he'd be here, from some very reliable sources."

Blossom shrugged her shoulders, followed by Buttercup.

"What about you, Bubbles?" Detective Mullens asked, pushing the photo closer to her face. "Did you see him around here?"

Bubbles didn't want to lie, but she knew she had to. Afraid that the detective would see that, she closed her eyes and shook her head.

"You sure?" the detective asked. His source was very reliable; he had never failed him before.

"I've never seen him, okay!?!" Bubbles shouted, feeling harried. The worst part was that the
detective was right to have done that. Mullens stared at her, looking like he had unearthed something.

"Alright, alright, don't get your pantyhose tied up," Mullens said, before surveying the destruction Bubbles had wrought. "What did I tell ya? You really need to dial it back a little."

"They were hurting her really badly, Mister Mullens," Blossom defended her sister. "She was lying on the floor when I found her."

"Unconscious, you mean?" Mister Mullens inquired. Blossom nodded with a cute 'uh-huh'.

Something just wasn't adding up for the detective. It was a feeling he was used to in his career, but not one he would care to stomach for long – and his answer to that was usually some good ol' fashioned detective work.
Chapter 36: In the Shadows (Part 3)

Chapter Summary

Crime does not sleep, and neither does law enforcement.

Chapter 36: In the Shadows (Part 3)

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

16 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 0752.

Sleep came easily the previous day, despite the Girls' injuries. It had been a long Wednesday after all. For Blossom, the hope that the sudden rash of crime was just a quirk of the day had kept her from staying awake. For Buttercup, depression kept her down. To sleep was to get away from the emptiness that was her life now. Bubbles, on the other hand, couldn't wait for the next day, which would bring more opportunities for using the fairy godmother's magic.

But even in their dreams, there wasn't a void for them to rest in. Blossom had emerged into a beautiful forest under a beautiful starry night sky once more, and the man of her dreams had visited her again. Oh, how she'd missed him! She couldn't help but to cry in his arms, and tell him about all the things her sisters had been up to. But she couldn't take what he'd said in the end.

'Perhaps it's time that you distance yourself from your sisters. The three of you may be born together, but that does not make them good - if you stay with them any longer, they will corrupt or destroy you,' he'd said. 'Or even better - your father had said that doing the right thing is hard. And the right thing to do is to end your sisters, or they will hurt even more people… Yes… Yes…'

That was when she pushed the dream-man with a goatee away from her and ran away.

Buttercup, on the other hand, had met the dead cat again in her dreams. It was awfully distant as usual, but it did say that its many friends had taken an interest in her. Friends who would know a way out for her in her current predicament - when a family who claimed to know what's best for her had decided that she was 'a freak', as the dead cat had put it.

'The cults you've been fighting… there are some in them who can help you,' the dead cat had claimed. 'They know who you are, and they'll come for you at the right time and the right place. And then you'll be happy… Yes… Yes… You just need to wait PATIENTLY! I know you enough to know that you are not patient, but you must be.'

The next day, just when Blossom thought that the streak of criminal activity from yesterday was broken (naively by faith alone), there was a call just before they were ready to go to school. Her sisters and she were already donning their backpacks and on the way to Dad's family saloon when the USDO hotline rang. Before they knew it, they were flying to some obscure bank to beat down some of the most clueless bank robbers in Townsville - apparently, they didn't even have an escape plan. There were only six robbers, and Bubbles couldn't use her syringes.

They were scarcely settling down in class when there was another call. A neighborhood shootout in the tenements area had escalated out of control and required the Girls' intervention. It'd turned out
to be another one of those operations that was neither too hard nor too easy, much to Bubbles’ chagrin, forcing her to secretly inject herself with the fairy godmother's magic after lying to Blossom about needing the loo. She had to do it in a dirty, broken toilet too, which was typical of the rundown tenements.

By the time they gave their report to the police lieutenant in charge of the operation, school was nearly over. But that wasn't even the worst part. The worst part was when they had to attend to another call even before Dad and Mom could make lunch. They had to go on an empty stomach, clutching microwave-heated instant meals in paper bags while they were on the way to another operation. They had to eat while flying at the same time, and it'd made for a messy ordeal. Bubbles didn't even try, though she suffered much less for it as the drug had made her lose her appetite.

The next flash operation had turned out to be a manhunt, and the Girls were tasked with looking for a group of jewelry thieves wherever the police would point their fingers in the direction of. It was grueling, as they had to speed off here and there and search through ten or more locales before hitting the jackpot. What was even odder was the fact that the jewelry thieves were described to be moving in a nonsensical pattern that wouldn't have helped them to escape. If anything, their 'escape' pattern seemed designed to waste time. When they were captured, it didn't help Bubbles' mood that the jewel thieves had given up after Blossom had KO'ed the crew's leader. By the time they were back home, the lunch Dad and Mom had whipped up had become dinner.

Blossom, in the meantime, had been growing more and more concerned when it came to her sisters. Buttercup was barely even cooperating with her, but Bubbles took the cake. Her temper problem hadn't improved one bit despite Dad's optimistic projection that it would disappear as quickly as her accidents with her heat beam. If anything, it was getting worse. She had begun acting out more often. When the jewelry thieves did not turn up in the location they searched, Bubbles had trashed the place and generally messed it up and even destroy a pillar or wall or two - and Blossom had to stop her. That was aside from the fact that she tried to kill the jewelry thieves in plain sight even when they gave up without a fight. Blossom had to restrain her - and had Buttercup not helped, she wouldn't have been able to. And Buttercup had come dangerously close to disobeying her.

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

16 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1735.

When Blossom had told Professor Utonium about Bubbles' continued difficulties with controlling her BerXerker power, he could do nothing except run some more tests on her, tests that ultimately did nothing but affirm that Bubbles' body chemistry hadn't changed - if anything, the hormonal contents of her blood had further increased in concentration. All he could do was prescribe medication to Bubbles in the hopes that it would help her calm down while she worked out how to control her BerXerker power - though he found it troubling that he was prescribing antipsychotics and antiandrogens to Bubbles, the medication that was the last things he would expect her to take.

And it was prescribed none too soon – for, during Bubbles' checkup, the clown phone in the lab started ringing. Blossom had to apologize and plead for time for Bubbles' medical examination to be over.

It turned out to be Agent Blake, whom Blossom sorely missed. Her sisters, however, weren't as enthusiastic as she had hoped. Buttercup had gone cold on everyone and as for Bubbles – Blossom could not tell what was motivating her sweetest sister any longer. She seemed to have lost interest in Mister Blake.
'Hey, Blossom, don't ask. It's me, Blake,' the agent had said on the phone. The smart little girl could recall every detail of it. She couldn't help but drink in his every word, his accent, and tone and every little nuance of what he said as he had been gone for too long. 'I'm sorry we haven't visited for a while now. I've been really busy lately. It's funny how our duties have been putting a distance between us, and now it's bringing us all back together.'

'But what are we doing, Mister Blake?' Blossom had asked.

'Just like old times, buddy. We're going down to the sewers. I swear, they multiply like rats down there,' Mister Blake had rambled on. 'But we're going to have to try to shut them down completely.'

Thus marked the Girls' return to the sewers, made worse because they had already found out what it was for and what the water contained the first time.

---

The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Logger Street.

16 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1753.

Feeling cold, filthy and miserable, Blossom started forwards in the sewer tunnels. Surprisingly, Bubbles did not appear to feel the same way at all. 'I can't wait to help our friends,' she'd said, and Blossom had put less stock in her words than before. The leader of The Three knew better than to judge her sister by a power she couldn't control, but she could not help but feel differently about her. Where previously, Bubbles was afraid of getting down and dirty to fight crime, it was as if she had missed the fact that they were down in the sewers with the entire city's human waste. Buttercup, in the meantime, didn't seem to care, though unlike Bubbles, Blossom could tell that she hated it based on the grimace on her face.

When they had floated far enough ahead, the Girls' friends, Agent Blake and his band of USDO operatives, started climbing down from the manhole. While they were directed on where to go by Agent Blake, Blossom was using her x-ray vision to scan ahead. So far, the crooks weren't anywhere close. Lieutenant Blake had chosen an insertion point a fair distance away from the alleged drug node in a sewer junction.

"How did you know where the bad guys will be, Mister Blake?" Blossom asked her friend over the radio to fill in the void as they continued floating forward, making sure to whisper her inquest to avoid any chance of being discovered.

"Your friends in the police tipped us off. Detective Mullens and his task force. He's busy elsewhere, so he left this one to us," Blake replied. "He found out about the drugs here from a cultist he arrested."

---

The City of Townsville. Downtown. Townsville Police Department Headquarters.

16 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1755.

Beep… Beep… Beep… Detective Mullens' desk phone rang as if he had been hung up when he was put on hold pending a transfer to the USDO's research department. After weeks and months of no results from the TPD's own forensic department, Garrett Mullens had turned to the USDO for their superior scientific facilities and personnel to uncover what 'His Secret' was all about. He'd sent them a sample of the drug to them a few days ago, and although he expected them to take longer to analyze the dope, he decided to call them anyway. As brutal and out-of-the-water as the USDO were, they had built themselves a reputation for being efficient and way ahead of the tech
"Hello? Doctor Vanum, USDO Research Department. How can I help?" the man on the other end of the line said.

"This is lieutenant Mullens of the TPD. Did you receive my samples?" he asked immediately - no bullshit, no beating around the bush. He wasn't going to wait any longer after wasting months on a wild goose chase with the TPD's forensics experts.

"Yes, and it's quite remarkable. I'm quite frankly surprised that anyone outside the USDO could have concocted such a chemical," the doctor on the other end said.

"What are you talking about? What do you mean?" Mullens asked. 'Now that's interesting,' he thought. In a way, he'd expected this. It couldn't be that the entire TPD's staff of forensics experts were inept. It had something to do with the drug itself, how it was the next level in the escalating drug war in Townsville - if the escalation in the use of bioweapons (perhaps in response to the USDO's Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup) and the crime waves weren't bad enough.

"While I haven't truly identified the drugs you sent me, I've seen its structure and chemical properties before. It bears some resemblance to the same thing that gave Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup their enhanced abilities," Doctor Vanum explained.

"And can you tell me exactly what gave those kids their abilities?" Detective Mullens asked.

"It's classified information. But if the drugs you sent me is anything like the stuff used in the Girls, then they'd likely enhance an individual and their performance in all areas. There's one key difference though. The stuff used to create The Three aren't drugs – as in recreational or performance drugs? But what you sent me - 'His Secret', was it? It contains additives that would make it even more potent than any known street drugs. I'm afraid that's all I can tell you. I'm not exactly the go-to expert when it comes to the chemical," Doctor Vanum explained.

"Then is there a go-to expert I can speak to?" Detective Mullens asked.

"There is one person. My former boss. He's the Girls' 'father'," Doctor Vanum said, and he'd kept the sarcasm minimal to avoid blowing the professor's cover story.

"You talking about Professor Utonium?" Mullens asked. He didn't expect to run into him so soon, nor did he want to. They didn't exactly part on the best of terms and he thought that he'd better stay away for a while – at least until he was sure the professor had cooled off.

"Yes. I've consulted him about the drug not too long ago actually. Hours ago, in fact. I'll transfer you over to him now," Doctor Vanum said.

"Wait-" the detective tried to stop him but it was too late. The doctor's voice was soon replaced by a steady ringtone. "Damn it."

"Hello?" it was Professor Utonium, the father of The Three himself. Detective Mullens would be lying if he wasn't intimidated himself – his children were hurt multiple times on his watch, and he knew how fathers could be when their children were hurt. The worst part was that he was helpless to stop it. It was either the Girls or his men. The Girls could take hundreds of bullets to the head and still come out fine, while a single bullet at the wrong place and the wrong time could end any of his men. Sure, he felt guilty whenever the Girls were wounded, but it was better than destroying families by allowing good men and women to die when there was an alternative.

He couldn't help but wonder, however, how the Girls and their family had gotten to such a state –
being put in the forefront of Townsville's war against crime in such a way that law enforcement had become so integral in their family affairs. He knew from personal experience that it wasn't something any sane, normal family would want.

"This is Detective Mullens," he said.

"What is it now?" the professor said, sounding as if he was offended. "Did something happen to the Girls again?"

"No, I've been transferred to you, actually, by Doctor Vanum," the detective said. "It's about the drug known as His Secret. He said you'd know more about it."

"Oh, that. I've seen the mail sent to me through the USDO internetwork," the professor said, though his tone hadn't changed. "I'm sure my colleague has probably mentioned this, but the drug you sent me is very similar to the chemical that enhanced my Girls. But that's not all. His Secret is actually considerably more advanced than what I've been able to create. It's impossible for anyone, even the Foundation or Institute, to create the chemical. I've seen the chemicals it has been bonded with, and it's as if it has been made specifically to enhance a regular individual without introducing the usual psychological and medical side effects – something I've failed to achieve even with my brilliant staff and cutting edge lab equipment. I can't even venture to guess who this person or what his affiliation is."

"And we've been waging war against this person for over a month," the detective deduced.

"My Girls have been waging war against this person without knowing it," the professor said with a vaguely accusative tone. "They've been fighting under your charge from time to time."

"Professor Utonium, I realize that it hasn't been easy for the Girls and I'm truly sorry but-" Mullens tried to explain himself, but the professor had cut in before he could.

"No, I… ur… I know I can be harsh with… everyone, practically, but…" the professor had rambled unexpectedly. The sudden change of tone was jarring enough to leave Mullens confused.

"I understand. I'm a father too," Mullens said. "And my daughter's in the force. Just turned detective last month."

"It's killing me. I see them coming home with blood everywhere, their bodies were torn up – I had to sew them up on a daily basis like- like mishandled dolls and the fact that it's becoming routine… it's not right," the professor rambled on. Mullens could sense that the man was reduced nearly to tears.

"Jesus, prof. I don't know what to say-" in all his time as the bearer of bad news, being the survivor of countless police operations in a city as vile as Townsville, he had never had to deal with something as heartbreaking as the Girls' situation. When good men and women die in the line of duty, they had died having lived a life, a childhood, knowing what they'd signed up for, and knowing that they were doing good. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, on the other hand, were just little kids - if what the USDO spokesmen said were true, merely 5 years of age when they were thrust into the seedy underworld of crime. They didn't even know the first thing when it came to what they were getting into, and by dint of their enhanced abilities, had made a huge difference anyway, albeit at a very high cost. If they had any childhood to speak of, it was coming to an end, too many years sooner than it should.

"Just get them out of your operations alive - I know it's all I can ask, for now, what with all the… SHIT that's been going on in this crazy town," the professor had continued on the phone, his voice
shuddering. "I just need them alive because I've figured something out for them to live their lives as they should."

"You have my word," Detective Mullens promised. "The Girls - I haven't said this to you, but they've changed me. They may be spending everyday knee-deep in the town's miring, hateful muck, but it's as if they're made of sugar, spice, and everything nice like that song my old lady used to sing to Olivia. I know for a fact that they've done the same thing for others too."

"Thank you. I'm sorry that we've gotten off-track. I can't help being sentimental," the professor apologized.

"You have every right to be," Mullens said.

"Okay… Alright…" the professor sounded like he was having difficulty keeping a straight face or a straight voice, in the case of a telephone conversation, but he was eventually able to swallow his emotions down after taking a few deep breaths. "The- the drugs. They aren't just capable of enhancing an individual. They are capable of stimulating the central nervous system of a person, including the pleasure center of the brain. Risk-reward gets rewired. The compounds bound to the drug's central chemical are reminiscent of Methamphetamine and offers similar 'benefits' such as heightened energy levels and awareness. But there are other lesser-known compounds bonded to the chemical too. If I'm reading Vanum's report right, they increase aggression and suppresses certain parts of the brain, inducing acute psychopathy. And that's just the beginning - I haven't gone into the worst side effects it could possibly have, and the central chemical - I'll just call it Chemical Y - ensures that the effects linger far longer than the regular street drugs and since it's a chemical of the same type as the kind used in… my children's… urm… ascendance, it will physically linger in the consumer's body indefinitely, like radioactive substances with incredibly long half-lives, except chemicals like these have half-lives stretching into the eons."

Then there was a pause as if the professor was thinking, or unsure of himself. It'd stretched on for seconds, then half a minute, until the detective was sure that the professor suspected something.

"Professor?" Detective Mullens prompted the man. "Are you having one of those genius epiphanies or something?"

"No- Nothing. Just a wild thought. Something stupidly improbable. I'm sure it's just my paternal instincts going haywire," the professor replied.

"If there's one thing I learn from a lifetime of parenting, it's to trust your paternal instincts," the detective said.

"No, it's nothing," the professor insisted. "I'm going to further analyze the drugs you sent to Doctor Vanum, perhaps order them into my lab for testing. I'll let you know if I have anything more."
Chapter 37: In the Shadows (Part 4)

Chapter Summary

Despite Blossom’s attempt to keep her family out in the city together, they splintered apart...

Chapter 37: In the Shadows (Part 4)

The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Logger Street.

16 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1802.

When Blossom had finally seen the bad guys through the walls of the sewers using her x-ray vision, she didn't expect to encounter more cultists. She hated dealing with them - they were so much harder to take down than the regular crooks. There were about twenty of them, and they were accompanied by some poorly dressed people. Hobos and the destitute in the cultists' employ, from the looks of it.

"Mister Blake, what do we do?" Blossom whispered her question to the USDO agent over the radio. They were just a bend and a short stretch of sewage tunnels away from the baddies.

"Hold up. Wait until I give you the go," Mister Blake said over the radio. The Girls had forged far ahead of Blake and his detail. Being small and capable of hovering, they were easily able to maneuver in the tight underground silently while the USDO soldiers couldn't even walk briskly without making a lot of sloshing noise and audible, echoing footsteps.

Despite the relatively easy difficulty of the operation, Blossom was intimidated because of exhaustion; she had fought more crime in the past two days than the entire month of January, and it was draining. Her Dad had cautioned her about exhaustion, that there was a limit to her superpowers and she'd need to rest and recharge to keep it working, or it'd be post-Highway-13 all over again. It didn't feel like it would happen again until now when it was as if the entire city's criminals had conspired to wear her out…

"We're right behind you – stay safe, Girls. Now go!" Mister Blake gave them the green light. Buttercup could hear their footsteps and water displacement using her enhanced hearing, though she didn't care to inform Blossom about it for fear of revealing her secret power – she'd been hiding her acute hearing ever since discovering it, and it'd been very useful so far for finding out things, such as the fact that Daddy thought that she was 'messed up inside', which she took to mean that Daddy no longer loved her. By extension, she thought that Blossom and Bubbles probably felt the same, since it was Dad who told them everything.

"Bubbles, Buttercup, together now!" Blossom ordered and flew around the corner. Buttercup was slow to follow. Unbeknownst to Blossom, Bubbles wasn't budging at all. Looking back the way they came, she saw no USDO soldiers, no Mister Blake. As the bad guys started shouting and screaming, Bubbles scurried into a corner, behind a huge concrete tube pouring some brownish gunk and dirty-green fluid out, and pulled a pair of syringes out. Pulling aside the Velcro strap securing her Kevlar arm guard, she stabbed herself with the syringe and injected herself with the drug. She could immediately feel the effects coming on. Returning the expended syringe into her
pouch, she applied the second syringe – and that had given her what she needed – no pain, no fear, only pleasure, and false courage.

There was unbound rage, what used to come in tiny spurts on demand, but had become the rule rather than the exception. She moaned and laughed as the poison coursed through her veins.

As soon as she returned the syringe into her pouch, white beams from torchlights had appeared around the corner from where they passed. Mister Blake and friends! Bubbles kicked herself up into a high flying position and darted away before they could see her.

Blossom had to commence the fight on her own. She opened it by firing several heat beams at the closest cultists, before dropping into cover behind a crate full of drugs as the cultists returned fire. Looking behind her, she saw nothing. Nothing! Bubbles and Buttercup should have been bringing up the rear! And when Buttercup streaked into the arena of battle belatedly, she wasn't relieved at all. It felt as if the team – her team, was falling apart.

Blossom had executed her own opening if it wasn't clear enough that there was a distance between them now. Firing her MP5 on full auto, she'd aimed it at the legs of her enemies, dropping a good number of them. Blossom didn't like it one bit – she had seen how Buttercup had done it. Most of her victims were hit with more than a bullet which was far more than necessary. She knew first hand how painful getting shot was – and knew from how normal people would bleed that it was much worse for them. When Buttercup got into cover behind a box near hers, she'd avoided looking at her. It was as if she was deliberately driving a wedge between them.

And Bubbles was still missing.

Everything was falling apart. Why? Blossom couldn't understand why her sisters couldn't be more like her.

Peeking above her box of illegal drugs, Blossom saw the group she was fighting splintering. The workers serving the cultists were running away down a tunnel, and some of the cultists took another path. The others had opted to stay and fight - and they happened to be the glowing-eyed ones. Shooting some of them in the legs didn't deter them from fighting back at all - those who could, stood up again. The others raised their guns where they were, either sitting or lying on the ground.

"Mister Blake, some of them are running away!" Blossom reported over the radio. "Will there be someone around to catch them?"

"No, Blossom, we're it," Agent Blake said over the radio. "I'm coming up now. I need the three of you to chase the runners down, over."

That meant splitting up. The reason why Blossom had been ordering that they fly in together was that she had to watch her sisters - they were both just as likely to kill now, which saddened her. How did it come to such a state? If she split the gang up, it would mean that they could kill again. But they had to - the criminals had scattered. The only upside was that she could supervise one of them.

As Blossom was panicking while considering her options, Bubbles had flown in, her eyes redder than ever.

"Bubbles!" Blossom shouted to gain her attention, but her BerXerker-ed sister hadn't even noticed her. She'd flown right into a cultist with an automatic rifle nearly instantly, fist-first, sending him flying across the sewer junction. She turned to her other sister instead: "Buttercup. Hey,
"Buttercup!"

"What!?!" Buttercup shot back, glaring at her, clearly still mad at her for the many wrongs dealt to her.

"I need you to go down that tunnel," Blossom pointed at the one where all the workers had gone. "And stop the bad guys from running away. No killing! Okay?"

Buttercup answered her with a continued, sustained glare into her eyes. Without another word, she jumped high up and flew off in the direction of the drug workers, leaving behind only a streak of green light as defiant as the little girl they came from.

When Buttercup was gone, Blossom jumped into action, running into a cult champion with a Duranium falx who tried to swing her weapon at her, but Blossom had seized it mid-swing with a wince, the blade cutting into her palm, and punched out the cultist several times in the face, enough to gain control of the falx. The enhanced little girl tossed it into the murky water where it was unlikely to be found in the heat of battle before flying up to Bubbles, who was savaging a downed cultist and pulling her aside by an arm.

Bubbles was able to free herself from Blossom easily – before swiping at her impulsively, putting several gashes in Blossom's face.

"What is it now, Bloss!?" Bubbles snapped at Blossom, annoyed that she had been stopped in the middle of her raging. "Can't you see I'm busy!"

"We need to chase the running men!" Blossom reasoned.

"Do it yourself, sis! You're the smart one!" Bubbles retorted unthinkingly before pushing Blossom away, and a fair distance away too, such that she'd hit a wall, cracking it, and slid down into the sewer waters. In the meantime, Bubbles had jumped right back into the thick of it, ignoring bullets pelting her as if they were rubber bands, and delivering a punch into the shooter so powerful it'd sent him flipping a semi-circle before landing on his back, cracking his skull on the concrete floor.

All while Blossom watched. All while her back was hurting from being hurled into curved concrete masonry. Her lips trembled as she choked back tears from how Bubbles had callously thrown her aside and hurt her. How she no longer listened to her where previously, she was able to get a hold of herself eventually.

'You deserve this, Blossom,' she couldn't help but think to herself. 'You've hurt her and she's hurting you now.'

Never had she been so unsure of what to do. She couldn't help but let the panic and anxiety in her take control, as she knew that for every second she waited, she was letting the bad guys get away. At the same time, Bubbles had sonic-screamed at whatever cultists remained, blowing them away as they bled from their ears and eyes.

The bad guys were getting away. She couldn't stop Bubbles now, she decided, and so she darted away into the tunnel beside Buttercup's, unable to help but weep as she knew that she had lost control of her sisters (and it was all her own fault) and lots of people were going to get hurt because of it.

Just in time, Agent Blake and his team came charging into the sewer junction. Cultists who were struck down by the Girls were stubbornly getting up again, but the USDO operatives made short work of them by knocking them down with gunstocks and batons and restraining them for cuffing,
after shooting down those who were stubbornly still shooting before Bubbles could get to them.

Agent Blake had inadvertently given them a better chance at living - by this point, Bubbles was more lethal than getting shot with high-powered military-grade weapons.

With no one left to fight, Bubbles let herself drop to her feet, panting from the excess adrenaline in her blood. She was spattered all over with blood, Blake could tell even without her turning. But when she did, she looked even worse.

Her eyes were still glowing bright, hellish red, and blood had been flowing from her eyes like tears after she had used her sonic scream.

"Bubbles? Are you alright?" Agent Blake asked, worried and a little afraid of what had become of Bubbles. From his perspective, things had changed drastically because of his absence. Bubbles had changed in a blink of an eye.

"Mister Blake!" Bubbles had greeted him, but she sounded nothing like the Bubbles he knew. Her voice was rough, rougher than even Buttercup's tomboyish raspy voice, and the look on her face was far from innocent, reminding him somehow of Captain Butch. "Are you here to fight me too!?"

And she sounded as if she was confused about which side she was on.

"Bubbles, we're friends," Blake reminded her and thought it odd that she needed reminding. Bubbles said nothing to that and had continued panting, her fists balled up, still. She glared at him as though she was still deciding if he was friend or foe. The newer guys in his team were on edge. Blake signaled for his team to keep their guns down, for fear of agitating the now-changed Bubbles. "Are you alright?"

"F-friends…” Bubbles muttered as if the word was new to her. She alternated between gritting her teeth and relaxing her jaws.

"Yes, Bubbles. Remember me?" Sergeant Rutherford came forward and said. He was a PTF soldier who had developed a friendship quickly with the sweetest of The Three even though they couldn't spend much time together. This was despite his reputation even among other Vietnam veterans as that 'scary black dude' who'd been through the deepest, darkest level of hell in Vietnam and returned to tell the tale – except he didn't do much of that. Rumor had it that he'd fought against the original first three recipients of Chemical A and came out traumatized as the sole survivor - without killing them. Turned out that all it took was Bubbles to get him to open up. "We used to play together."

"And what about me, you remember me?" Sergeant Holliday came forward next. A pale-looking man, he had the look of a stone-cold killer, as a Powerpuff Task Force soldier should have, but his expression was something else. "I used to cook for you. You reminded me of how much I loved cooking."

Bubbles stepped forward, looking like she needed a closer look as if she could barely even recognize them even though it hadn't been long since they last met - as if she would just kill them when she couldn't remember in time who they were.

---

The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Logger Street.

16 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1809.
The cultists – what remained of the sewer detail anyway – had tried to run and disappear, but there was no running from a bioweapon like Blossom, who, at top speed, was about as fast as a propeller plane.

She was able to catch up with them within seconds, and even fly ahead to land right in front of them before they even realize it, with her submachinegun drawn, splashing wastewater and assorted natural and artificial trash about in her rough landing.

"Give up or I'll make you!" Blossom warned the cultists with her MP5 out and her standard line. Looking at the eyes of the cultists she halted, she noticed that their eyes were natural-colored. They were the weaker ones, ones that would go down easily. One by one, they started dropping their weapons, mostly guns, and once they did, she breathed easy.

Her concern for her sisters returned after that. She thought she heard gunshots back in the sewage junction where the group was camped. Buttercup was down in a sewage tunnel right beside hers. While in most cases, sewage tunnels did not run alongside by side, Blossom thought that they would in her naivety. Hoping to find Buttercup, she looked through the wall of her sewage tunnels in an attempt to do so.

And found that her fears were realized.
Chapter 38: In the Shadows (Part 5)

Chapter Summary

There's more to the Girls than what meets the eye...

Chapter 38: In the Shadows (Part 5)

The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Logger Street.

16 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1811.

Buttercup had gone after the cult workers with the intention of disobeying Blossom. There was simply no reason to listen to her anymore. Her previous murder of the cultist woman and attempted infanticide of the cult baby was exposed, and from what she’d heard, her family had thought of her as being ‘messed up’ and ‘sick’ inside. They hated her, she knew. She had lost everything, including all of which she had worked for.

Mere minutes ago, when she came within range of the closest worker, she'd fired a laser beam at him, and it wasn't just a warning shot or a deterring fire. She'd bisected him by the waist, leaving him to crawl with just his arms, though he wouldn't get far and Buttercup knew it. When she got up to point-blank range, she beheaded another with her laser before punching another runner in the skull so hard that it shattered, and the grey matter underneath turned to mush as the man collapsed in a heap.

A couple of them had turned around to fight using crowbars - she thought their effort was laughable. When one of them took a swing at her, she grabbed the weapon mid-swing - it stung a little, but she knew it wouldn't even scratch her. Wrenching the weapon out of the man's grasp, she impaled him in the eye with the prying side of the crowbar, the metal tool exiting through the other side of his skull.

In the meantime, she felt a sting in her side - the other worker had struck her there. She reciprocated by giving him a left hook hard enough to break his neck. He fell, losing all control of his body. But he was alive - Buttercup knew from his mewling and begging. It wasn't something she would stand for, so she lifted him by the collar and pushed his face into the murky water, finding pleasure in drowning him in the filth of the city.

But much to her chagrin, she knew that she couldn't watch him drown slowly in the piss and crap from the city. There were others, and they were getting away, so she left the paralyzed man face-down in the refuse water to drown by his lonesome. In her reverie, she had forgotten all about Blossom and Dad and the rest of her family. With a wide grin on her face, she launched into a flying kick at another runner, breaking his spine in two and killing him instantly by severe trauma. Grabbing another man by the head, she slammed him against the wall so hard that his head was partly flattened. He fell a gurgling mess, his corpse twitching even after death.

Three more. She took one of them down by laser drill, blowing a hole in his chest larger than her fist. She then flew into the second with a fist in the small of his back, snapping bones, causing him to fall and slide in the muck. Jumping on the back of the last man, she pulled him up and hung him by her arms, giving the filthy hobo worker his final embrace as he twitched and gasped in vain for
lack of air. She gave him a final squeeze and heard his throat shatter and his neck break, but at least the twitching stopped.

Dropping the man she hung, Buttercup looked around her. She'd heard scuffling. One of them was still alive. The man who she'd broken the back of. He was trying to crawl away. She thought that he was like an animal - like the ones she'd killed in secret back in January. She remembered a bird she'd chased and struck down in the backyard while no one was looking. She'd broken its back but it'd tried to crawl away with just its head and beak dragging along the snowy floor. She thought it was fun, and she was reliving the moment now, except better.

And without her knowing it, Blossom was watching her. She hadn't seen the whole thing, but she had seen enough to know that Buttercup had killed on purpose, defying Dad and her, throwing the family away for… what? Blossom could never understand Buttercup's compulsion to kill, except through Dad's words, that she could not feel as much as her, and she was sick and messed up inside.

And Buttercup had continued to do so even when the runners she pursued were down to just one half-paralyzed man. Blossom wanted to help, to stop her insane sister from hurting the poor worker more, but before her stood a group of cultists she had to guard. She could just barely hear Agent Blake talking to Bubbles. She could hear their voice echoing through the tunnels. Bubbles, at this time, would still be trying to calm down from her BerXerker power, which Blossom realized was more curse than a blessing. Blake was this detained.

And that meant she had to watch Buttercup mutilate the hobo. She'd tried shouting and screaming at Buttercup even as she was breaking the man's fingers one at a time, starting from the pinkie, but she wasn't Bubbles – her voice would not carry nor defy the laws of physics. It couldn't have reached the parallel tunnel Buttercup was in.

"You seem disheartened, Blossom," one of the cultists said. It didn't sound like a taunt at all. It sounded far too sincere for her liking.

"You poor, misguided thing," another cultist said, just as frank, no tricks pulled.

"Join the Master and all will be clear," yet another cultist offered.

"I don't want to hear it!" Blossom yelled at them.

"Join Him and you need not be sad any longer," another cultist continued saying anyway.

"Shut up!" Blossom cried.

"Blossom?" Agent Blake shouted from a long way off, but his voice was loud and the underground sewers confined. Blossom could hear the steady beating of footsteps coming closer to her, barely audible at first before becoming louder.

"I'm here!" Blossom called out to her friend. "There are lots of them but they gave up!"

"Blossom," one of them actually tried to catch her attention, singing her name like it was music. A woman. Black hair and brown eyes. She didn't look local. "Blossom."

"What?" and she fell for it.

"Don't you remember who you really are? Can you not see what you really are?" the cultist said cryptically.
"What do you mean?" Blossom asked, genuinely curious. She always had a soft spot for mysteries. She always had the need to know.

"You are a shadowkin, Blossom," the cultist said with some kind of an Eastern European accent. "The human tongue does not do the name of your divine kind justice, but you are a goddess among men – you deserve more than to be their slave and… what's your supposed father's name? His pet and lapdog."

"Don't talk like that about my Dad and me again," Blossom warned the cultist, feeling her rage returning – she was practically shivering with it. Her MP5 was rattling.

"He doesn't deserve your love for what he's done to you," the lady cultist continued regardless, unafraid of the tough front Blossom was putting up. "Corrupting you, making you weak and unambitious. You are not your shell…"

"Yes, you are more. He should be serving you instead," another cultist, a man, added.

"Shut up!" Blossom screeched at the lady cultist, pointing her gun at the man before shifting it to the cult lady. Instead of cowering in fear, the cultist put out her arms instead.

"Yes… yes… please," the woman begged with a crazy smile on her face. "If this is how you will realize your true destiny! Please!"

"Blossom?" Agent Blake called after the enhanced little girl, much closer this time. His team had finally reached her, and when they did, they immediately slammed the cultists against the sewer walls to cuff them. Blossom, however, looked like she was stuck in place, shaking with fury. She hated it whenever anyone spoke poorly about her Dad. But what the cultists were saying - that she was something else entirely - did things to her imagination, and now she couldn't stop thinking about it. "Are you alright there, buddy?"

When she felt a hand on her shoulder, it was as if she'd woken up. Turning to Blake, she studied him, then her surroundings. Everything seemed well again - her friends, all familiar faces from a simpler time - were there to make it all better by taking away the demons… demons she never knew she had.

"What happened to Bubbles?" Blossom asked. She had to pull herself away from her own problems. She had to - Bubbles was more important. Buttercup too.

"She's back there, resting. She was going wild, but I think she's calmed down enough," Agent Blake said. "What happened to her? Why were her eyes all red and bloody?"

"It's her new power. Dad called it BerXerker. It makes her really angry and out of control," Blossom explained.

"When did it appear?" Blake asked.

"When we fought Naga in the movies," Blossom answered. Blake found it surprising - he was there in the Silver Age Cineplex, but he might have missed it, he thought. Come to think of it, it'd explained Naga's defeat and the gore in the movies. It sure explained the gore in the sewer junction. Bubbles had done a number, killed quite a few before he was able to stop her.

Blossom stared through the wall of the sewers at Buttercup. By now, it was too late to save her last victim. She was busy dismembering the body, hiding pieces of it here and there where she thought no one would find them.
Agent Blake noticed what she had been doing. He knew full well, too, that she could see past walls. He could just about see the faint vortexes appearing before her glowing pink eyes.

"What is it, sport?" Agent Blake asked.

"It's Buttercup," Blossom said, her voice cracking from being upset. "She's killing people again. Why can't she be normal and nice and sweet like you? And Bubbles? Before she…"

Agent Blake smiled, but it was faint and it didn't last. He wasn't much of a smiling man to begin with anyway, but the situation seemed bad that he just couldn't. From his perspective, it was as if things had taken a nosedive since his left.

"Come on, why don't you go ahead and get your tough cookie sister and I'll catch up with you?" Blake offered as he stroked her head affectionately. He missed the old days, too, when he got to substitute Professor Utonium as her caretaker for a few days. He had since fallen in love with the idea of having a family and kids. He'd since been busy trying to make a life for himself whenever he wasn't on duty, stuck with a girlfriend he'd found in the city where before, he had a series of girlfriends and was proud of it. He intended to pursue marriage and having kids before he became too old for it.

---

**The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Logger Street.**

16 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1816.

When Blossom was flying to Buttercup's tunnel, she'd encountered Bubbles back in the sewer junction along the way. She was sitting on the floor, a raised part of the sewers that wasn't slick with urine and dirtied by feces. For some reason, she'd avoided sitting on the crates the cultists had hauled into the sewers - they seemed like better seats than the floor.

Unsure of what to say to Bubbles, she flew past her without notifying her of her presence and right into Buttercup's tunnel. It was as if she could hear her heart thumping and echoing in the tunnels. The last time she had tattled on Buttercup, her very own sister, ever the wayward one, had tried to break her neck. She remembered how unpredictable Buttercup was - before this, she had threatened to break her arm if she didn't hand over leadership to her. Shortly after their first operation in Townsville Central Bank, she had tried to strangle her and even before that, she'd threatened Bubbles with bodily harm in the cinema when she wouldn't give up the seat next to Daddy.

What would Buttercup do next? Blossom didn't want to find out, so she took her time, knowing that Buttercup was trying to hide the bodies, in order to give her the time to do it. When enough time had passed, she flew up to her, ignoring the bodies that Buttercup hadn't been able to hide regardless of her speed.

When Blossom had found her, she was washing her hands of blood with the cleanest stream of water she could find, which wasn't saying much.

"Are you okay, Buttercup?" Blossom asked while Buttercup still had her back turned. Startled, the latter girl turned around.

"Why do you even care?" Buttercup said with her eyes turned away from her. She acted as if she was more interested in herself as she was brushing muck off of her uniform and gear, but Blossom knew that Buttercup was paying attention to her - she had to. Blossom did not reply to this. It was upsetting that Buttercup was speaking that way to her where they used to have conversations about… Buttercup's obsessions mainly. Although they weren't all that interesting to her nor did
they last long, at least there seemed to be a connection between them.

"Where are the runners, Buttercup?" Blossom questioned Buttercup, knowing full well where the runners were. Some of them had been torn to shreds and stuffed up pipes and down chutes leading to the lower parts of the sewers. Others were more poorly hidden, just laid down along the sides of the waste stream.

"They were too fast, okay?" Buttercup lied. Blossom tried not to look at her wrongly, but the absurdity of her lie was too great. Picking up on this, Buttercup continued to weave her story: "They must have gone into those holes in the walls before I could get them - those cowards…"

Blossom, of course, knew that she was lying. She had seen what her sister had done to those poor people (who were literally poor). Because of what she did the last time, she felt the need to avoid a confrontation with her from now on.

"I believe you," Blossom lied.

"You do?" Buttercup couldn't help but raise an eyebrow at her sister. She was rarely this trusting to her, and for good reason.

"Yes. Of course," Blossom said. She hated lying, even if it was for a good cause. Hated it so much that her eyes began swimming in tears.

"What's with you?" Buttercup said as she noticed her glorious leader sister becoming emotional. It seemed to her as if it was coming out of the blue.

"Nothing," the red-haired one evaded. But she couldn't help but feel sorry for Buttercup, now that she had done her wrong by lying to her - but there was always more. The fact that her sister was 'sick inside' came to mind. It was sad whenever she thought about it. Moving towards Buttercup, Blossom hugged her while Buttercup had put up her hands defensively. As a result, her arms were trapped between them.

"Hey, what gives!?" Buttercup yelped, surprised. "What are you doing?"

Blossom held on tightly. It was all too upsetting. As Buttercup struggled, she felt a shiver traveling down her spine, from that silver lining in her brain, that connection between her and her sisters. Sadness and pain. It was unbearable, even though she had rarely felt such a thing.

Buttercup stopped struggling. Pulling her arms out from between them, she returned the hug, confused as to what she was feeling, a single tear trickling down her cheek.

"I'm sorry," Blossom said.

"For what?" Buttercup replied, still unsure of what had set off Blossom.

"I'm just sorry," Blossom said, keeping the actual reason for her sadness from her wayward sister.

She was sorry, because she was going to have to tell her Dad about her again, and this time, she could sense that Daddy just wasn't going to go easy on Buttercup anymore. Those literally poor people didn't look like criminals. They didn't even have any real weapons. Blossom had seen it all through the wall. She had seen how scared they were before they ran. They looked more like children who had been caught doing something they shouldn't - and they had no choice in the matter. Like children made to do something by bullies. Blossom had seen it before in the schoolyard before Miss Keane put a stop to it.
By the time Blake reached them, Blossom and Buttercup were already flying back towards the sewer junction, hand-in-hand, which was a rare sight. The soldiers stopped. Blake smiled. The Girls looked lovely this way. If only Bubbles was in the picture too and not all pale and shivering and covered in blood while sitting alone on the filthy floor of the sewers. It would have been perfect that way.
Chapter Summary

Professor Utonium makes special plans for Buttercup while Blossom and Bubbles catches a break with the Princess.

Chapter 39: The Final Wrong


17 FEB (Friday) 1989. 0821.

The professor waved Blossom and Bubbles goodbye as they made their way on foot into Pokey Oaks Kindergarten. Buttercup, however, was not with them. Not this time. When two of his kids disappeared into the school building, he rested his head against the steering wheel. The past couple of weeks had been stressful, and yesterday was just plain distressful, but that was just naming one of those days. Deep down, he knew that today was going to be worse.

Blossom had delivered the bad news the previous day. Funnily enough, Bubbles losing control and killing a number of cultists wasn't it. It was Buttercup.

'She killed lots of people in the sewers,' Blossom had tattled on her. 'And they looked helpless too. They weren't like the others with guns and scary red eyes.'

'Are you sure, Blossom?' he had asked her to make sure. In a way, he couldn't believe that Buttercup would kill again, not after what they had talked about. Buttercup sounded really contrite the last time they spoke about taking lives. When Blossom mentioned Buttercup's deeds, he was already losing confidence quickly that Buttercup was keeping her word to stay pacifistic.

He should have known that one of his three little babies wouldn't stay a perfect little angel for long. Not when she couldn't even grasp the concept.

'I saw Buttercup through the wall with my x-ray vision,' Blossom had said, still sounding horrified then. 'She wouldn't stop hurting them.'

After Blossom had said it, the professor did not pursue the matter immediately. After stitching up Bubbles and after attending to their dinner, he'd gone back down to the lab and sat behind his desk, thinking and thinking. He'd thought about things for a long time. He'd opened a drawer and picked up the picture of Eileen, his late wife, and Bloome, his late daughter, and looked at it. His eyes still misted when he saw it, and remembered what had happened that took them away from him. He rubbed his finger down Eileen's cheek before putting the picture back into his drawer and hiding it again.

He then picked up a photo frame containing a polaroid of his current family. Himself, Selicia, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup. They were all squeezed in together in an arcade photo booth. He remembered where they'd taken it. The Mall, uptown, during a shopping trip when the family
could actually go out together without the city going at their throats or mobbing them.

He found it surprising that his current ragtag family was still together after everything, considering how much danger they were in, not just because of the Foundation, but also because of crime in the city and even the USDO itself. It was why he'd cherished every second with them.

But the time had come when one of them might not be with them any longer. He had to test the Anti-X he had concocted on a human being sooner or later - and there were only three human beings he could test the Anti-X on. There was only so much data human cheek cells, even if they'd come from Blossom, could provide. The human body was infinitely more complex, and an infinite number of unprecedented things could happen.

He didn't know how long he'd stared at the picture. He loved all three of the Girls. Deciding between Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup was an impossible task. At least, it felt that way when he was fooling himself. The moment he found out he could put the Girls in a hierarchy, he couldn't help but weep, his tears landing on his photo of the family. What kind of a father would love one kid more than the other? He found out that he would rather risk Bubbles and Buttercup than Blossom - it was a toss-up between Bubbles and Buttercup, but even that dilemma was conquered swiftly the same way. He would rather risk Buttercup than Bubbles.

'What kind of a father am I?' Professor Utonium remembered saying to himself, reprimanding himself. 'What kind of a father chooses one baby girl over another?'

A bad father, he knew. A bad father to Buttercup. He'd even rationalized it all, telling himself that he had made the right decision because Buttercup was suffering from an incurable mental disease right from the start, that she was dangerous in her current state. There was no chance that she would just stop killing and hurting people, not with the kind of situations she had been put in - and the only way out for her was to risk her life and take away her Chemical X enhancements using the Anti-X. Even Bubbles in her current state, with her BerXerker ability going out of control once in a while, stood a better chance of coming back from it without any drastic actions taken.

For an eternity after that, he'd tried to regain his bearings. Tried to tell himself that he was just a man placed in terrible circumstances, forced to make terrible choices. He told himself that he loved Buttercup as much as Bubbles, and both Buttercup and Bubbles as much as Blossom. He repeated to himself that fact dozens of times, hundreds of times, as he lay his head down on his desk. Somewhere along the way, he'd fallen asleep, and had it not been for Selicia, he would have been there until morning.

The guilt never went away. Like a badly-swallowed pill, like a wound that needed surgical intervention, it'd stayed with him all the way, and it was just the latest addition.

"Are we going yet, Dad?" Buttercup jolted the professor out of his thoughts, irritation, and impatience in her voice. She was loud too, as she was sitting in the seat beside him. Buttercup had become cold towards him recently - he did not know why.

This morning, Professor Utonium had decided that he would take her out for an entire day of father-daughter fun. He'd made all the arrangements, calling the school to excuse her from class, pulling strings and using up hard-won favors to get her out of her law enforcement duties for the day. He'd made it a surprise for Buttercup, announcing it while they were right at the door. He'd expected Buttercup to warm up to him, for there to be kisses and hugs, but she'd scoffed at the gesture instead. In the car, she was constantly averting her gaze and whether it was in the rear-view mirror or whenever he would turn around to look at her. Her arms would be folded in that usual Buttercup way, signifying that she was mad - at what, the professor did not know. He'd asked, twice or thrice in the car, but Buttercup had remained stubbornly silent.
"Can't you just tell me what's wrong, Buttercup?" the professor goaded her on. "I'm your Dad, we can talk about anything you want."

"You're lying," Buttercup said. Beneath that cold exterior, the professor could detect a degree of hurt. Being mentally unbalanced would not have prevented her from feeling hurt.

"Is that what this is about?" the professor guessed. "That we haven't been talking enough?"

Buttercup kept her arms folded and turned away, looking out the window. Wouldn't even deign to look at her Dad. Professor Utonium, however, could see the look on her face from the faint reflection in the window. It was still dark enough for him to do so. Her piercing eyes were easy to read. She was mad. Perhaps spiteful. Perhaps even hateful. Buttercup was a wildcard.

The professor sighed.

"Look, you don't have to tell me everything if you don't want to. Just… just let me make up for it, whatever it is, okay?" the professor offered.

"Whatever, Dad," Buttercup said dismissively. "Where are we going anyway?"

"There's a winter fair in Townsville," the professor revealed. "Captain Scott handed me the brochure from the mailman."

There wasn't a response, at least not immediately.

"Why isn't Mom coming with us?" Buttercup asked. At this point, Mom was the only person she could trust, though even Buttercup's concept of trust wasn't conventional. As far as she knew, she had never heard her talking behind her back even though she eavesdropped on her too.

"Someone has to watch out for Blossom and Bubbles," the Dad replied as he was reversing the car, looking behind him as he did. "She's sending them to Elodie Morbucks' place after dinner."

Elodie Morbucks. Given the choice, Buttercup would have considered seeing the Princess. As the sickly little girl was an outsider with no involvement in the Utonium family affairs, she considered her reliable. Buttercup could always trust Elodie to be generous with her gifts.

The only reason why she didn't kick up a fuss knowing that she wouldn't be able to go to the Princess' mansion was that she thought it might be worth it to let Dad be generous instead and give her whatever she wanted.

What Dad didn't tell her was that Mom had second thoughts about taking away her Chemical X enhancements. She'd refused to talk to him in the morning when he told her and made it damn well known that he wouldn't change his mind.

---


17 FEB (Friday) 1989. 1842.

Dinner at the Morbucks' was magnificent. Extravagant. It always was with them, and now that Blossom and Bubbles had both returned to Elodie's side, it was much more so, to the point of overcompensation. Even Bubbles' poor appetite could not make it any less tempting for her.

After a bath, with all three Girls attended to by servants, they retired to Elodie's bedroom where they would spend the night having a sleepover. It was slow-going but fun at first. They played a
game of snake and ladders - Blossom and Bubbles' very first attempt at enjoying a board game, though Bubbles was a little distracted as usual. They would groom the luscious hair of dolls custom-made for such an activity, play nurses and doctors with yet more dolls - Elodie was most experienced with such a thing considering her frequent visits to the hospital.

"I think I need to go," Blossom suddenly said while they were in the middle of a 'surgery' involving a baby represented by a life-like doll. "My tummy feels terrible…"

"Annie will take you to the nearest washroom," Elodie said gracefully to one of her best friends. Blossom practically flew to the door – she wasn't kidding when she needed to go. Bubbles and Elodie were left waiting.

And Bubbles had been sweating. It had been a day since she took a shot of the fairy godmother's magic, and she was getting jittery over it. She was shaken for the entire day. Miss Keane had tried to ignore it, but she knew the teacher was wise to it. The way Elodie's eyes would flit to her before averting her gaze had told her everything she needed to know about her attention. Elodie knew. Everyone knew.

"Bubbles, are you sick?" the Princess finally asked now that they were alone. She'd put a hand on Bubbles' upper arm, which was uncovered because she was wearing a sleeveless dress, and it was slick with sweat.

"I'm! Not! Sick!" Bubbles hollered, shrugging off the Princess' hand violently. Her eyes had gone all hellish red. "Stop calling me sick!"

"I… I wasn't…" Elodie stuttered, shocked at how Bubbles had changed. "I just thought you were… were ill…" tears prickled Elodie as she tried to explain herself. It was too much that her best-best friend had shouted at her for being concerned.

It was harder and harder for Bubbles to snap out of it each time she took a shot of 'His Secret 2.0', but it wasn't as difficult this time. Elodie was her closest little girl friend – no one in her kindergarten class could fill in for her. They had some history together, and Bubbles had felt responsible for her ever since.

"I'm sorry…" Bubbles apologized, only to proceed to lie: "It's my new power. It makes me angry all the time and I couldn't help it."

"O-oh," Elodie continued crying and couldn't stop. "$-it's alright."

"I'm sorry again," Bubbles added before giving her hand a squeeze.

"I'm okay," Elodie sniffled as she tried to contain herself. "I get angry too whenever I feel really sick and sad."

"Princess?" Bubbles asked with her hands folded on her lap, as she looked down at those hands – those hands that had killed so many, and she knew that a bit insubstantial number of her victims did not deserve death, even if they were criminals.

"Hmm?" Elodie mumbled as she continued to wipe tears away.

"It's about my anger," Bubbles went ahead, but she paused after that, unsure of how to continue.

"What about it?" the Princess asked. She held Bubbles hands when she realized that Bubbles was extremely troubled. She had never seen her this way before.
"I…" Bubbles paused again, unsure if she should even say a word about her anger problem.

"You can tell me. I'm your friend," the Princess said. Bubbles whimpered and wept as the past few days came back to her. "You helped me before, and I'll help you now."

"I've been taking drugs," Bubbles blurted out, fighting through tears.

"But drugs are good right?" the Princess said. "Whenever I feel really sick, I take drugs so I'd feel better."

"I'm not taking drugs because I'm sick, Elodie," Bubbles corrected her. "I'm taking them because they helped me to fight. I can't help my sisters without them, but it's making me angry and crazy and… It's making me do things I don't want to do."

The Princess was lost at first. How could medicine ever be bad? Weren't they supposed to help people? With her, it had helped with her remission from cancer. With Bubbles, it seemed as if it was giving her mood swings. Elodie had suffered the same effects before – or at least that was what her limited experience told her. But Bubbles' eyes had gone red, shining red. It didn't look like any kind of side effect any sort of medicine could produce. But the Princess' trail of thoughts had gone cold from there onwards. She had no idea what it all meant.

"Did you talk to your doctor about it?" the Princess asked, and for some reason, Bubbles had stiffened up, as if there were terrorists in the room.

"Doctor?" Bubbles asked. What did doctors have anything to do with drugs?

"Didn't a doctor give you those drugs?" Elodie questioned. "My doctors gave me my drugs to make me feel better."

"I… don't have a doctor…" Bubbles admitted, knowing that it was making her look suspicious.

"But where did you get your drugs?" Elodie asked, the concern in her voice growing.

"I don't know…" Bubbles lied, after realizing that the growing silence between them was making her look worse, but she couldn't think of a good one for the life of her. She had never really lied before until days ago. She never liked lying, nor liars. And it was at this time that she realized that she had become something she hated.

"Maybe you should talk to your dad about it?" Elodie suggested. "I'll always talk to my daddy whenever I need help…"

Without knowing it, the Princess had made an irrefutable point, suggested a course of action that shouldn't be avoided, and Bubbles knew it. Yet, the thought of owning up to the fact that she had been abusing drugs to her father was more daunting than even facing Mojo Jojo. She knew she was wrong right from the start. She'd talked to a stranger who was certainly strange and not in any civil service uniform, and she was taking drugs - something her Dad had taken great pains to make them understand as something dangerous, like fire and guns. She'd lied and hid things from everyone, and she'd hurt and killed people.

There was no way she would come clean with her Dad - and that was the final wrong she knew she had committed.
Chapter 40: Disempowerment

Chapter Summary

Professor Utonium betrays Buttercup for the greater good.

Chapter 40: Disempowerment

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

17 FEB (Friday) 1989. 2018.

The door to The House opened. The sound of laughter was evident even before it did. Professor Utonium stepped through the door, and Buttercup was sitting on his shoulder, laughing alongside him. It had been a wonderful day, and Buttercup had had so much fun that she had forgotten, at the moment, the grudge she harbored against her own Dad and her sisters.

The Townsville Winter Fair was slow-going at first. The professor had taken Buttercup to the games there, but Buttercup found them to be lame. An airsoft rifle just didn't have the same satisfying kick as the real thing, and the enhanced little girl would rather hurl people across a room than hurl balls at fake bank robbers.

But then there were the bumper cars and the teacup rides. The roller coasters managed to coax a smile out of Buttercup. There was a giant swing, and Buttercup had broken into a burst of hearty laughter after that. The melody of her innocent-sounding laughter was music to the professor's ears. It'd reminded him that Buttercup, deep inside, had always been a little girl. Beneath her law enforcement duties, beneath her hard-core exterior and the psychiatric disease that robbed her of her empathy and deepest emotions, the professor knew that his little girl was somewhere in there - and he would dig her out no matter even if he had to wear the tips of his fingers to the bone.

After the winter fair, the professor had taken Buttercup to the Townsville Zoo, to show her all the huge, majestic beasts there, animals that would appeal to her tomboyish tastes. Polar bears, lions, tigers, giant snakes like the Anaconda. There was even a bird show at the indoors aviary, and Buttercup actually complimented it by taking off after the eagles, and the audience applauded her and the eagles that were trying to keep their distance from her.

It was then that the professor learned that despite Buttercup's psychopathic outbursts, the public did not know the truth about her. From what he'd heard, only a very small minority was right on the money, while there were others who thought of her as a heroine and some who thought of her as just a general menace, but not a psycho. Some would ask to take a photo with her, and since Buttercup was in a good mood, she'd allowed it to feed her ego, though when she tire of it, she would begrudgingly make her poses and shake her fans' hands or put her arm around them with an impossible-to-miss frown on her face. She was still a hit despite her attitude. People saw her as cool that way.

As the early winter night came, they spent it on a drive-in movie, watching The Fly II, which was already on its way out of the silver screen. It wasn't a great movie and the professor was far too distracted to enjoy it, not just by how scientifically inaccurate and improbable it was, but by Buttercup's situation.
An entire day of fun had distracted her enough that she'd gone from cold as mint ice cream to sitting on his lap and reclining on him, warming up to him as though she had given him no reason for what he had to do next when they're back home.

The professor had been taking lots of pictures throughout the day. Multiple rolls of film's worth of them. And most of them were with her using her powers somehow – mostly hovering and carrying something heavy, like a seat full of bystanders, but there was this once he allowed her to discharge a laser beam so he could take a photo of that too. It was difficult to find a safe place to do that, but it was worth it, because if everything went well, Buttercup would never, ever be able to pose for those shots again.

After coming back home, the professor took his time – he knew what he had to do, and Buttercup was none the wiser. The entire day was planned to make her forget her grudges and drop her guard and it'd work perfectly. Shepherding her upstairs, he bathed her and allowed her to break whatever rules with her enhanced abilities as she wanted. Running fast in The House, flying fast into the washroom, whatever it was because she wouldn't be able to do it again for long if everything went as planned.

Then the final path began. After getting all cleaned up, Buttercup looked ready for bedtime, but the professor offered her something else.

"How about I carry you, Buttercup?" he said. "You look tired."

"That would be great, Dad," Buttercup agreed, and the professor picked her up, and held her closely. Instead of going into the Girls' room, he'd turned the other way: towards the stairs. "The last few days were tiring."

"Where are we going, Dad?" Buttercup asked, confused. Daddy had promised to spend even more time with her in her room, reading her some of the cooler bedtime stories, telling her some of the stories the security officers in the USDO had cooked up.

"I need to perform a little medical examination on you, Butterfly," the professor lied, and had kept his adopted daughter's chin on his shoulder to hide his expression from her. It was impossible to hide his emotions this time. He had no idea what could happen next. There was a possibility that he might not even see her again. "Just a small one. Can a tough fighter like you handle it?"

"It's just a little medical examination, Dad," Buttercup boasted, then yawned. "I can handle lots of criminals all at once. A little medical examination is nothing."

'Like how you handled those bums in the sewers?' the professor thought to himself but didn't let it out. The thought of Buttercup killing those beggars in the sewers was still grating at him, and that was next to her killing an unarmed woman and attempted infanticide. It was unacceptable, no matter what her reasons were.

He brought her down into the labs. There, he instructed her to get changed into her uniform and gear. He'd planned all of this. He'd brought a set of her uniform and gear down without any of the Girls realizing what he was going to do. They trusted him so utterly that he could be waving a Duranium gun in their faces and they'd still be smiling at him – even Buttercup. She might bear grudges against him, but she wouldn't expect him to really hurt her anytime soon.

When they were in the labs, Buttercup had gotten off the professor, so he led the hovering girl by hand into a corner of the lab she had rarely seen and never visited in recent memory. Last she saw, it was an old, boring place. It was all the better for what would come next.
It was different this time when she saw it. Where there was once an empty storage area, a metal table shaped like a cross, or an X, stood in the middle of it. There were machines surrounding it. An ECG, heart rate monitor. Tanks filled with some kind of gas with nozzles pointing towards the middle. A computer was hooked up to them, with wires leading in and out. There was also a tray full of medical instruments. It was intimidating even to Buttercup. She stood rooted to the ground, unwilling to go in.

The professor strolled in, his head held low, but when he turned around, he'd put on his biggest smile.

"Hop on, Buttercup," he said to her, patting the head cushion of the Duranium table. There were Duranium claws on either side of the head cushion. Cautiously, Buttercup lay herself down on the table, taking care not to bump her head against the Duranium claws. "Stretch out your arms and legs sideways, Buttercup. Like when you were playing with the snow."

Buttercup did as he asked, completely unaware of her Dad's intentions even when she had to put her wrists and ankles inside the open shackles on the arms and legs of the Duranium cross.

The professor proceeded, quickly, to secure her legs, before moving onto the arms. He then closed the claws surrounding Buttercup's head and neck and tightening them such that she could only stare straight up into the ceiling. The restraints clicked loudly and ominously. Buttercup tried moving, but her arms and legs were trapped. She was stuck in a spread-eagled position.

The professor stood before her, tears he had been holding back for a while spilling out.

"I'm sorry, Buttercup, but this is the only way," the professor cried.

"Dad? What are you doing?" Buttercup asked, panic rising in her as she struggled against her restraints. She had never been stuck in one place like this before, so she couldn't help but feel trapped. "What's happening!? Dad!"

"It's the only way, Buttercup. I'm so sorry," the professor cried again. "I'm going to have to try to remove your powers."

"Dad! No! Don't!" Buttercup screamed and cried. She tried to levitate her way out of the restraints, or even break the table away from the concrete floor, but it was secured to the foundations of The House such that she was anchored in place by the entire house. She sobbed and wailed when she realized that no amount of struggling could free her.

"It's going to be okay, Buttercup," the professor tried to comfort the little girl. He came up beside her, stroking her hair affectionately.

"Daddy… Please don't," Buttercup begged, tears flowing freely. Her Dad continued stroking her hair possessively, before pulling away. "I'm scared… Please let me go, please!"

"I can't. I'm sorry, honey," he apologized again. Unbeknownst to Buttercup, there were risks involved. Death was a possibility, one of many other unwanted possibilities. But it had to be done. It was either risk Buttercup's life for the Girls' freedom, or lose the Girls to corruption.

"Daddy's sorry," he apologized profusely, before pulling away with Buttercup still struggling against her restraints, grunting and grimacing against it. The professor stepped outside the chamber Buttercup was in, before closing the door and pressing a few buttons on a keypad outside.

"DAD! NO!" Buttercup screamed. The professor's index finger hovered over the 'execute' button. He couldn't help but hesitate. He knew the risks involved. He'd hesitated every step of the way.
More than once, he'd considered just letting things be. But now, it was too late. He'd burned the bridge after crossing it by betraying Buttercup's trust in him.

The professor jabbed at the 'execute' button hard.

"NOOOO!" Buttercup yelled, her voice still clear even with the glass all around her. Anti-X was sprayed all over her form half the gas tanks in the room, through the nozzles above her, like a white rain from above.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House

17 FEB (Friday) 1989. 2055.

The Duranium table room Buttercup was held in for her disempowerment was completely filled with fog when the professor discharged his Anti-X into the room. It took a while to clear, and all the while, the professor was scared. Afraid. Terrified. Buttercup had stopped screaming and crying. This was followed by a powerful discharge of a kind of green electricity shortly after. Energy had been released in the process. Through the haze and wave of sadness, the professor surmised that it could be a discharge of Chemical X energy, such that Buttercup would have little or none of it left.

But then again, whether that would matter or not would hinge on whether Buttercup survived the process. And the professor was afraid that she didn't.

When the white mist inside Buttercup's chamber had cleared itself out with the help of the ventilation system and air scrubbers, the form on the Duranium cross-table wasn't moving. He could see from the other side of the bulletproof glass that Buttercup's eyes were closed too.

"Oh God no! No no, no!" the professor cried as he went on a full-on panic mode, unlocking the door and rushing into the Duranium table room. Hurrying to Buttercup's side, he scrambled to pick up a stethoscope, accidentally knocking over some emergency surgical instruments, before roughly putting the earpieces on and searching for a heartbeat with the other end.

"Please be alive, Buttercup," the professor pleaded with his surrogate daughter – whether dead or simply unconscious, he didn't know. "Please don't leave me so soon."

With Buttercup's life on the line due to his doing no less, the professor was too panicked to even do even the basic grunt work all doctors should know by heart. He searched for a heartbeat, and couldn't find any. Sucking in his breath and hushing up, he scanned the appropriate area again, until…

Yes. There it was.

It was there, but faint. The professor measured her heart rate with a watch. It was slow too. Looking around for better instruments, he realized that, in his panic, he had forgotten that he had arranged a full suite of medical electronic equipment in the room. The ECG would have made for a better method to measure heart rate since it was divorced from the vagaries of human emotions.

Except he needed to check Buttercup's other vital signs. Skipping the ECG, he put a finger under her nostrils and confirmed that she was still breathing, if not as strongly. Taking a penlight out of his breast pocket, he opened one of her eyelids – but what he saw there didn't need a penlight to reveal. The green bioluminescence in her eye was gone. He checked her other eye. Same thing.

Both her eyes were dark brown underneath that glow, but they weren't entirely so, unlike
Buttercup’s genetic source, Kimiko Scarlett Ito. There were speckles of bright green scattered throughout her pupils, likely due to exposure to Chemical X.

Reaching out for the tray without taking his eyes off of his dear daughter, the professor searched for the thermometer there. He couldn’t find it. Looking around at the tray, he realized that it wasn’t there. Thinking back, he thought it might have fallen off the tray. Bending down, he searched for it on the floor, and he found it quickly. Scattered on the tiled floor was his emergency surgical instruments and in that mess was his thermometer.

"D-dad?" he heard Buttercup whimper just as he was about to get back up. It'd hit him like a truck, hearing his Butterfly speak again. It wasn't just a wave of relief overcoming him, but fear – what would Buttercup think of him now? No matter how justified he was to disempower her, there was no telling how much a kid would understand, much less a kid like Buttercup, who was suffering from certain mental imbalances.

"P-please let me go…" Buttercup begged. The professor got back up and saw what she had become. The way she was looking at him with her non-glowing, tearful eyes had told him everything. The way her mouth hung open… He couldn't imagine what it felt like to lose over 95% of one's body strength.

"Shh… Hey… It's okay…" the professor held the little girl and comforted her. Reaching out for her shackles, he began unlocking them, first freeing her hands before letting her go and freeing her legs. "Can you sit up?"

Buttercup didn't try it immediately. Then, anemically, she tried pushing herself up into a sitting position but failed at first. She succeeded – barely – on her second try, with shivering arms that were likely taxed a hundred percent.

"I… I feel heavy…" Buttercup said. No doubt, the professor thought, it had something to do with the gear he'd gotten her to put on. With her enhanced strength gone, even the lightest of weights had become a huge burden now. The Girls had never complained about weight unless they were lifting objects by the tonnes. The Girls could walk for many hours on end without feeling the same kind of fatigue that would have reduced a normal girl to tears. Buttercup would be the first of The Three to have to contend with her natural weakness as a little child.

"I'm going to carry you and put you down, okay?" the professor said, before cradling her in his arms and lifting her off the Duranium table with a grunt. "Try standing for a minute, then walking."

Taking her out of the room, the professor set her down in the middle of an open space in the labs. He'd kept his hands under her armpits to assist her. It was like teaching a baby how to walk.

"You ready?" the professor asked. Buttercup nodded to him half-heartedly, her mind still too much of a blur to continue hating him for what he had done. Professor Utonium let go after that.

And found out that Buttercup couldn't even keep herself straight for long. After shivering from the effort for just a few seconds, she began sagging. She'd nearly fallen down had her Dad not catch her.

"It… It's too heavy, Dad," Buttercup mewed, and started crying again. The professor knew what was wrong, and it'd confirmed the results. She had become too weak to carry even her own gear, although to be fair, the USDO had outfitted her with non-standard gear that wouldn't be fit for a normal kid. There were multiple Kevlar plates on each side of her vest where even trained adults tend to carry just two in total. Her shoulders and upper arms were protected by more Kevlar plates too, as were her legs. Her entire suit was almost twice as heavy as her… and certainly far heavier.
than what normal children could and should carry.

"Here, let me take it off," the professor said.

The rest of the tests he'd devised had become a mere formality. He'd arranged for her to attempt to shoot her guns (without her armor). She'd remarked that her pistol was heavy and when she fired it, she'd missed by a mile as her hands were trembling as if they were diseased and the gun flew out of her hands from the recoil. She could barely even hold up her MP5 submachinegun, and when she fired it, the kickback was so strong that it'd knocked her on her butt with a yelp. The shot she fired wouldn't have hit the broad side of a barn. Attempting to use her laser vision resulted in some kind of a green electrical discharge from her eyes, some kind of feedback which Buttercup described to be as painful as getting soap in her eyes.

The professor moved to help her when it'd happened. But when he took her by the arm, Buttercup yanked it away, crying as she glared at him.

"Why did you have to take away my powers!?!" she screamed at him. The professor reached for her again, only for her to dodge the effort.

"What do you think!?" the professor snapped at Buttercup. He couldn't help but be frustrated at how oblivious she was, no matter how well he knew about her psychopathy. "I've warned you many times not to kill, not to hurt people without a good reason! I've warned you and you just went and killed again in the sewers!"

Shit. He wasn't supposed to say that. The professor couldn't help but wear a shocked look on his face when he realized he had a slip of the tongue.

"Blossom told you?" Buttercup said in disbelief.

"Does it matter who told me? It's done," the professor said as he seized her by the arm and pulled her to her feet, and for the first time, Buttercup was helpless to resist - and she'd actually struggled hard but couldn't break her Dad's grip. She could only get herself free when her Dad let go.

Bending down and with a hand clasping her shoulder, the professor continued: "I've taken away your powers because I want you to live a normal life. No more law enforcement, no more adult responsibilities and killing except learning and growing up. As it should be."

Assuming the Anti-X had cured Buttercup of the anti-aging effects of Chemical X.

"But I...I can't be like this!" Buttercup asserted, still fighting against the professor's grip, but she was unable to break it. "I want to fight crime!"

"No, you don't!" the professor corrected her. "Buttercup, you need to give this a try, okay?"

After running a few more tests, the professor had to escort Buttercup up to her room - without the same physical strength, she had to get used to walking all over again, and without her power of flight, which all the Girls had taken for granted since discovering them, she had to climb stairs that had become daunting. Buttercup was actually tired out by the time she got to the airlock leading up to the surface. She had to be carried to her room for the rest of the way.

Not to mention, she had fallen asleep from exhaustion halfway to her room, and when she did, it had given the professor some time to think, as he watched his little angel snoring away in bed. The other tests he'd performed had yielded surprising results. For one thing, there was still Chemical X in Buttercup's blood, just a tiny amount - about 150 ppm, which was a fraction of what it used to be. This had explained the other results. Buttercup was still resistant to damage. Steel couldn't cut
her, though crude Duranium drew blood easily when it used to require multiple strokes to do the
same. In theory, it also meant that Buttercup would still be locked in growth stasis as the very same
Chemical X that was protecting her also had the effect of holding her present form together in its
original shape, in addition to rebalancing the hormones in her blood to prevent any chance at
growth. The best the professor could hope for was that instead of taking eons to grow to adulthood,
Buttercup could take millennia instead.

Selicia wouldn't approve. She hadn't approved of this right from the start. Her mouth had uttered
the right words to get on his good side, but deep down, she loved Buttercup the way she was.
When the professor insisted on doing this early in the day, she'd refused to come back home, and
instead stayed out after delivering the Girls to the Morbucks family estate.

And now, with the kind of results he had achieved, she was sort of vindicated - Buttercup would be
neither here nor there after the application of Anti-X. She would never be able to fight crime again,
but neither would she truly be a normal little child, considering that she could never grow up.

And the worst part was… What he'd done to Buttercup might well be permanent.
Chapter 41: Favors

Chapter Summary

Buttercup goes through her first day as a (somewhat) normal little girl. Bubbles meets her fairy godmother for the fourth time.

Chapter 41: Favors


17 FEB (Friday) 1989. 2359.

Bubbles could not sleep, not with the jitters she had been getting. It was worse than what Dad had called 'Chemical X fatigue', worse by a mile. And it hadn't stopped for hours, even though the feeling would pass once in a while throughout the day. She'd tried to get rid of it and the suspicions that Blossom and the Princess were no doubt harboring by taking a long bath just before bedtime, but it had only succeeded as a placebo for less than an hour.

She couldn't help but blame the fairy godmother - she was supposed to look out for her - she was supposed to give her more of her magic after she'd done what she asked, but she'd received none of it last night, not for the entire day!

Sitting up, Bubbles sighed and looked around the room. She was sleeping right beside Princess, who was still holding her hand even while she was fast asleep. Blossom was opposite her. Looking at Blossom, she couldn't help but blame her for the predicament she'd found herself in, being forced to do wrong by taking drugs in order to fulfill her demand for a sister who could fight crime alongside her. Her eyes glowed hellish red the moment she thought about it - about all the things Blossom had done to her when she couldn't live up to her expectations.

So much so that she had wrapped her hands around her neck, so much so that she was fantasizing about strangling her there and then while she slept.

But then there was light coming from the window. Bubbles' eyes returned to blue, as she was distracted by the light, which she had seen several times before. It was white, and it'd come out of nowhere. Like Pavlov's dog, her mouth had gone wet as she knew what it meant. The fairy godmother had come to visit.

Flying to the window, she looked down into the gardens below Elodie's room - her room being on the third floor - and saw the fairy godmother standing there. Bubbles would have whooped with joy had she been alone. Hunggrily - thirstily - she opened the window and flew down to the garden, touching down an arm's length from her benefactor.

"Hello, Bubbles," the fairy godmother greeted the twitching Bubbles, who looked as unstable as she was inside.

"I've done as you asked - please... please give it to me," Bubbles begged, coming closer to the fairy godmother.
"But why do you need it, Bubbles?" the fairy godmother asked, and Bubbles could not believe she would ask such a question. It was as if the fairy godmother was playing dumb, or jesting. One would think that a fairy godmother would know the answer to such a question.

"I don't feel good… Please…" Bubbles answered the question despite - it didn't matter what she had to do - she just had to get her next syringe of His Secret 2.0. "I need to feel good…"

The fairy godmother simply smiled when she heard Bubbles' answer.

"But isn't your reason for using my magic to help your sisters? To help people?" the fairy godmother asked.

"Yes… yes… that too… please," Bubbles played along for her next fix. She tugged at the fairy godmother's skirt, like a hungry little girl, or a kid who needed to answer nature's call. "I need it - please."

"Why of course, darling," the fairy godmother said and reached into her dark blue waist bag. Bubbles' heart leaped and her breathing seized up when she did. She couldn't wait to get another hit, couldn't wait to see the gigantic bounty that she had worked hard for - the gigantic bounty she had rightfully earned-

Only for it all to fall flat when the fairy godmother pulled out only a couple of syringes. Bubbles was devastated by the underwhelming number of the drugs that she had frozen up entirely, and she had only moved to cradle the leather pouches containing her drugs when the fairy godmother pushed them unto her. It'd felt so bad that Bubbles had fallen to her knees, knowing that she had been given only just enough to have to choose between suffering from hours of withdrawal effects in order to get high during combat or to avoid the pain but miss out on the pure pleasure and combat performance injecting both of them at once could provide.

"Oh, don't you worry about that, little girl," the fairy godmother reassured the addicted little girl when she noticed her expression. She reached into her bag again and pulled out a third syringe, this one naked and larger and without a needle. "I've brought you your supper too, so you may sleep easily tonight."

The fairy godmother stuck the needle-less syringe close to Bubbles' face. She could see the dull red liquid inside. The size of the syringe looked like it could give her more than a syringe's worth, but less than the two doses needed for her to reach a peak.

Bubbles was about to drink from it when the fairy godmother pulled it back again.

"There is… one favor I need you to do for me, however… yes… yes…” the fairy godmother said. Bubbles looked up at her expectantly, pleading with her teary eyes.

"I'll do anything for you," Bubbles said. "Please give it to me…"

"Good… good… I knew I could always count on you," the fairy godmother praised the little addict. "It's only nice that you help me with one little thing or another, after everything I've done for you."

"What do I have to do?" Bubbles asked.

"Simple really. You'll just have to kill Blossom," the fairy godmother said curtly and frankly.

Despite the gnawing, dull ache throughout her entire body, Bubbles could still be taken aback by the fairy godmother's request. Blossom was her sister - even if she had abused her before. They
were close, and they were still close. To kill her for more of the fairy godmother's magic wasn't preferable.

"But..." Bubbles shook her head as she cried because of the predicament she'd been put in. "She's my sister."

"Bubbles, I'm doing this for you," the fairy godmother claimed. "Have I ever given you any reason to doubt me?"

"She's my sister..." Bubbles wept. "Please don't make me..."

"Bubbles, hey..." the fairy godmother bent down to meet her gaze and stroke her chin. "I'm doing this for you. Blossom is not a good sister to you. She'd hurt you badly, I know. That is not what a sister should do. Remember what she did to you?"

"She... she tried to leave me behind. She would hit me and make me cry..." Bubbles recalled all the terrible memories - she was kind of forced to.

"Yes... yes... And she will do it again, I just know it. People don't change. Your sister is selfish - you know that, right? She's fighting crime just to feel good about herself... yes... yes... She cares nothing for you and Buttercup," the fairy godmother said. "Kill her, Bubbles, and I will continue to bless you."

Bubbles hesitated at first. To kill criminals and let some go because they were friends of the fairy godmother, she could accept... at a stretch. But to kill her own sister? But the fairy godmother's argument was compelling. In fighting crime, it wasn't inconceivable that some criminals might have to die for what they had done, and even then, many of them would be injured whenever she confronted them. Would killing Blossom be any different? What Blossom had done to her was criminal and the way she was using her and Buttercup to stroke her own ego was self-centered. But her past abuses stood out the most. Dad had mentioned things like that. 'Domestic violence', he'd called it. It wouldn't be nice and sweet, and it wouldn't be pretty, sure, but it had to be done.

It had to be done if she wanted more of the fairy godmother's magic. It had to be done.

"Yes. I'll do it. I'll kill Blossom for you," Bubbles finally agreed, and the fairy godmother pushed the large needle-less syringe closer to Bubbles' face. Bubbles opened her mouth, and the angel-like being stuck it into it before depressing the plunger and letting her drink the drug as she stroked the little girl's hair. Bubbles sucked on it, drinking the drug thirstily like a girl lost in a desert.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 0841.

When Buttercup woke up, alone in her room, it felt as if everything was different, and everything was new. It wasn't just her compromised senses - everything seemed duller now, and she couldn't hear as well, much less listen beyond the confines of her room. Even her sense of touch felt different. It was less rich.

Yesterday was like a bad dream. A nightmare. Losing her powers? Giving it up? Not in a million years! But when Buttercup tried to hover out of her bed, she realized that yesterday was no dream.

Sitting up, she felt sluggish too. She could feel her weight most severely, unlike the world around her, and it was making her feel lazy where previously, she would be ready to jump out of bed the moment she was awake. Even sitting up required effort now - had she not been hungry or thirsty, or
in need to pee, she wouldn't even have tried.

She jumped out of bed, only to do so awkwardly and landing badly, falling to her knees. Even with the carpet cushioning her fall, it'd hurt like hell and high heaven.

It didn't take long to figure out that being normal was horrible. How could Dad even stand a day of being normal? How could anyone? It was hard to imagine that there were millions of people around her who would wake up normal every day and feel fine and even cheerful.

Even her mind felt dull. Her thoughts came slower, and memories had become a little more distant - requiring effort to recall. Walking up to the door, her balance shaken as though it was her first day walking, she went to the door and reached up for the doorknob. It was difficult to turn it such that she needed to use both her hands, and she grunted with the effort.

Almost immediately after she opened the door, swinging it sluggishly, she could hear footsteps - faintly - and being unable to hear things as clear as she wanted to scare her.

Dad had appeared before her before she was ready - with her mind no longer allowed to go over the speed limit and her powers gone, she found that she couldn't be ready for anything anymore, even something as every day as seeing her Dad.

Not that she was glad to see him. She had never forgiven her Dad and at this point, she didn't think she ever would. He had, after all, taken away her powers.

"Rise and shine, Buttercup," he greeted cheerfully with a smile on his face. With his hand on her shoulder, he began guiding her to the washroom. "Today's a brand new day."

She didn't like the sound of it, but she knew she couldn't and therefore shouldn't resist. When they were in the washroom, the professor took a stool and set it up next to the sink.

"What is that?" Buttercup asked, disgusted because she knew it was probably something she would need to use from now on.

"Don't you remember?" the professor said, sickeningly cheerful, still. "You used to use it when you didn't know how to fly. You'll need it from now on whenever you use the sink or the toilet yourself. But I'll be there if you need me."

Buttercup couldn't help but grimace at the stool. She hated it already. It was like the wheelchair she was forced to use on two occasions whenever she was too badly wounded or exhausted. The stool was little more than a crutch and she was disabled by her own father. The idea of having to clamber on top of the plastic eyesore was particularly painful especially considering the fact that she used to be able to fly across the city without too much difficulty - and now navigating the washroom had become a tiring chore.

Despite hating this, Buttercup let herself be picked up and placed on the stool. She proceeded to brush her teeth, grinding the bristles of her toothbrush harder than she should. She hated it that she wouldn't be able to release her pent-up frustrations and rage by hurting and killing criminals anymore, and even more that she could only take it out on small objects as it was pathetic compared to what she used to be able to do.

At breakfast, even climbing on top of the dining chair took all her strength.

"You'll get used to it," Dad said when he saw her pushing herself up to her seat while he was cooking. "Your body is just adjusting to the lack of Chemical X. You'll grow stronger after some time. You just won't be carrying the car anymore." The professor laughed and Buttercup hated it. It
was like adding salt to her wound even if her Dad didn't intend to.

By the time the pancakes were ready, Buttercup was sulking. She didn't even look at the breakfast Dad had prepared, and neither did she acknowledge the smell of the well-made breakfast; the rich scrambled eggs, the sweet maple syrup…

And Dad sat down right next to her, setting down his own plate of pancakes. Lifting a carton of milk, he poured Buttercup a tall glass of milk. The raven-haired little girl turned the other way when he looked at her with that stupid smile on his face.

"You should start eating, Buttercup," the Dad said. "You wouldn't want it to get cold. I think we're getting enough of that from the outside."

Buttercup did not even move a muscle.

"Buttercup. Hey, Buttercup," Dad continued to pester her. She felt his massive hand on her shoulder when she continued to sulk. She couldn't help but shrink away from it. Size seemed to matter more now, especially to her subconscious. "Look at me when I'm talking to you."

Buttercup glared at him instead, finding satisfaction in going overboard with her Dad's request. But her glare used to scare people. She knew that it used to scare her Daddy too. She found it discouraging that even her eyes had been defanged, and it wasn't just because the scary green glow was gone.

"I know you're upset about losing your powers," the Dad continued to try to convince her, not that she was willing to listen, to begin with. "But what's been going on for the past few months wasn't the life a little girl is meant to live. Little girls aren't supposed to fight crime and decide who to hurt and save. Little girls aren't supposed to kill."

Buttercup did not reply, not with her mouth. She continued to glare at Dad, putting on the kind of look that would be more fitting on the face of an incarcerated prison convict.

"Don't you start giving me that look," the Dad warned Buttercup. "I'm doing what's best for you."

"But I don't want this!" Buttercup exclaimed, jumping on her seat, looking more like a kid throwing a fit than a bioweapon that could blow up and kill. "I wanna fight crime! Why does Bubbles get to fight crime even though she killed so many!? It's not fair!"

"You killed when you were in control - she killed by accident, Buttercup!" Dad lectured, though Buttercup was more right than he'd let on. To what extent was Buttercup truly in control of herself? Bubbles' BerXerker side effect had put her on par with Buttercup.

"I don't care!" Buttercup yelled and in her anger, had knocked her cup of milk off the table. Milk and glass shards flew everywhere while the milk made a puddle on the floor.

The professor sighed when it happened. Pushing his chair back and standing up, he went over to a corner of the kitchen and picked up a broom and dustpan.

"You'll get used to this," he repeated himself as he began sweeping. "Now eat or you'll go hungry."

Sensing the futility of her resistance, Buttercup grudgingly picked up her dining knife, which felt several times heavier than the M79 grenade launcher she wielded back in the day when she still had her powers and started cutting her pancake up roughly, accidentally dropping it several times because she was still getting used to manipulating objects with her weakened and clumsy hands. She imagined it to be her Daddy's face, or Blossom's face, or Bubbles' face, and she imagined that
she was mutilating them. She ended up making messy pieces of it, some of which wouldn't be easy to pick up using a fork.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 0916.

Selicia looked into the rear-view mirror of her borrowed USDO unmarked SUV. Blossom had been trying to talk to Bubbles sporadically for the past twenty minutes or so, but Bubbles had been distant lately. She wouldn't even speak when she was spoken to, not even when her Mom was doing the talking, and neither would she acknowledge anyone.

She wouldn't even so much as look at anyone. Selicia had only just managed to make eye contact with Bubbles, and there was something wrong with her eyes. They were still pink and bloodshot as if she had never slept the previous night. As if she was diseased or something else.

"Are you okay, Bubbles?" Selicia asked, her eyes constantly flitting between the road and the rear-view mirror.

"I'm fine, Mom," Bubbles replied quickly to avoid suspicion.

"What happened to your eyes?" Selicia asked. Bubbles was shocked when she did and had to try hard not to gasp at her realization that her cover could be blown any second now. She had seen what had happened to her eyes when she was going through the motions of changing and brushing her teeth. She had put two and two together that it had something to do with the fairy godmother's magic.

"I'm… just tired, Mom. I couldn't sleep last night," Bubbles lied. She knew to do so because it wasn't the first time her eyes had become bloodshot. Previously, it had done so whenever they had to fight crime late into the night. It was the perfect lie, and Bubbles resented herself for it - but it must be done. It must be done so that she could get it done - so that she could bring justice by killing Blossom - so that she could get more of 'His Secret 2.0'.

In fact, she'd been thinking about how she could do it. She couldn't do it in Princess' room - because it meant that Elodie would know and she'd have to silence her as well. She didn't want to kill her BFF – it hadn't come to that yet. She couldn't do it in the car - she still wanted Mom to love her after all this. Where would she even put Blossom's body even if they could be alone in their room?

"You could lean on me if you want," Blossom offered Bubbles but she was ignored.

Bubbles turned away from Blossom, hating that she was being nice and offering her something that actually felt tempting.

"There's still time for you to sleep," Blossom insisted.

"No," Bubbles rejected. She knew she had to distance herself from Blossom. It would make things easier down the line.

When they reached The House, it seemed empty and quiet. Dad and Buttercup were nowhere to be found. Or at least, they were nowhere to be found in the living room.

"Girls, go to your room, there's something I need to do," Selicia said and without clarifying what she meant, she rushed off towards the airlock leading to the labs, looking worried to Blossom and
Bubbles, looking like she was about to break into tears.

"Come on, Bubbles, let's go put our stuff," Blossom said as she floated towards the stairs leading up, lugging along a sling bag effortlessly. Bubbles merely grunted, her eyes drilling into Blossom's back. Had she had Blossom's heat beam or Buttercup's laser beam, she would have been tempted to make that literal.

Selicia had dropped her own duffel bag in the airlock as it was cycling. When the lab-side door opened, she bolted out of the chamber and down the stairs, a million dreadful scenarios crowding her mind.

She knew what the professor was going to do. She knew that there were risks, but she'd trusted her other half to mitigate it. Now, she was afraid that the cosmos had long been prepared to deal her another blow and make sure her happiness wouldn't last.

Sprinting down the steps, she emerged into the labs, and when she found nothing in the main hall, she ran to the corner with the Chemical X storeroom and Duranium table – only to find nothing again.

Turning around, she flew back up the stairs, shouting Buttercup and Thomas' name as if it was the last day she'd do it.

The airlock cycled once more. Even though her legs burned from the effort, Selicia forced herself to keep on going, as if chased by the psionic terror that was Blisstina herself, taking two, three steps at a time up the stairs to the second floor, then flying across the corridor until she found herself panting outside the Girls' room to find…

Her love, Thomas Upton, bending down next to Buttercup, the both of them fine and breathing, fit as a fiddle. Buttercup was sitting behind the Girls' pink round table. Blossom and Bubbles were holding her hands, though Bubbles didn't seem worried like the others. There was more of a blank look on her face.

Buttercup didn't look right the moment Selicia laid eyes on her. The amazing green glow in her eyes was gone, she looked a little pale and sickly to her and where the tomboy used to be brimming with evergreen energy, she now looked anemic, like a cancer patient who would be right at home next to the Princess in a hospital ward.

"You should be happy, Buttercup," Bubbles comforted her sister, in one of her increasingly non-existent moments of clarity. "At least you're normal now."

Bubbles had wished that she was a normal little girl for a long time. Even now, she wished that she was a normal little girl so she wouldn't have to kill Blossom.

"Don't… want… normal," Buttercup had forcibly uttered through her sobs. She looked utterly wretched, and it'd shaken Bubbles out of her own problems. She rested a hand on Buttercup's shoulder, but the latter girl slapped it away as she was bawling her eyes out.

"You won't have to fight crime anymore," Blossom added, and meant it, though one side of her was glad that she was out of the game. It meant that she could no longer kill. "And you get to play all day. We can always play together once we're like you. Dad said we're going to be like you soon - normal."

Buttercup looked up at Blossom, glaring at her, though the anger in her eyes was clouded by tears and sadness. She still hadn't forgotten what Dad had said last night, despite her poorer ability to
recall things. It was all Blossom's fault - she'd tattled on her and caused Dad to forcibly remove her powers.

"You see, Buttercup? It's not bad at all – as long as you have a family, you don't need your powers," the professor said after that, though Buttercup looked far from convinced.

Selicia had never seen Buttercup that way before. She was crying and the redness of her face informed her that she had been doing it for a while.

"But I wanna fight crime..." Buttercup managed to complete her sentence miraculously. She was going to say something more - how she hated this, how she hated them all now, but she bit her lips and erred on the side of caution. She couldn't help but be more cautious, and overly so. She was vulnerable now, and she could feel every bit of it, right down to the weakened sinews of her muscles and her bones, which was held together less strongly by the thinner Chemical X in her body.

"Buttercup?" Selicia called out to her favorite.

"Mom!" Buttercup screamed as she ran up to her favorite parental figure. In her sisters' eyes, she was unbelievably slow, taking seconds to reach her where they would have taken a fraction of that at their slowest Dad-approved indoor speeds.

She'd gone up to her all tearful and vulnerable, and Selicia bent down to scoop her up. Even the way Buttercup felt was wrong – she was all clammy and hot – even feverishly so – from crying where she used to come out cool even after running through a burning building. She was shivering and soft – whether from the cold or fear, it didn't matter. The Buttercup she knew was firm and all muscles, like the hunks she used to hug.

Selicia glared at the professor. She didn't like the results, and she didn't like how he had completely ignored her wish to LEAVE SHIT BE.
Due to Professor Utonium's recent actions, he has been summoned to the USDO Council for an emergency meeting.

**USDO Emergency Meeting 02181989 Transcript**

**DOC: 18 FEB (Saturday) 1989**

**-TRANSCRIPT START-**

Director Cliff: (Slams table) Where the hell is Professor Utonium?!

Liaisons Head Yorkshire: He's on his way, sir. It is an emergency meeting after all, and some of our security personnel aren't here yet either.

Director Cliff: Fine. Should we start with some of the minor matters first then? Yorkshire, give me something minor from the agenda of the day!

Chief Intelligence Officer Rook: How about if I make the announcement?

Director Cliff: Go right ahead.

Chief Intelligence Officer Rook: I regret that it is my first duty as Chief Intelligence Officer to inform the council that Chief Intelligence Officer Jackard was killed in the field three days ago. I will be assuming his position as of today.

Psychiatry and Social Services Department Head Alice: A regrettable loss. He had a brilliant mind, and he was more than just an intelligence agent. He should have stayed in HQ. (remorseful)

Chief Intelligence Officer Rook: The circumstances of his death-

General Blackwater: I know the circumstances of his death very well, Rook. Congratulations on your promotion. Why not tell the council the circumstances of Jackard's death for their benefit?

Chief Intelligence Officer Rook: Jackard had been operating in the field for over 5 weeks. I know, as I had to take over certain responsibilities here in HQ because of his absence. He's been gathering intelligence on the various cults operating in Townsville.

Director Cliff: Yes, the cults. I was skeptical of their importance in Townsville's criminal network at first, but Jackard convinced me otherwise… partially.

Chief Intelligence Officer Rook: He went out there to find more data to convince you fully, sir.

Director Cliff: That, he did.

Chief Intelligence Officer Rook: He died three days ago on a mission to apprehend the leader of The Cult of His Promise, sir. Leopold Sutton, if I'm not mistaken. He's also the overall leader of
every cadet branch of the cult, including The Cult of His Arm.

Director Cliff: How did he die?

CIO Rook: He was killed during a police raid on a compound owned by The Cult of His Arm. Our people were there, and they're still investigating the circumstances surrounding his death, but the man in charge of the investigation believe that he might have been mistaken for a cultist and shot down.

Director Cliff: Mistaken by who?

CIO Rook: He's still doing ballistics tests using the firearms of all personnel involved. He'll be done in a few days.

Director Cliff: Good. I want to know who the fuck killed him. He'd better not be a member of the USDO, or I swear to God, I'll make sure he suffers for it.

(Silence)

Director Cliff: Wake up, people! Do we have any minor things to settle!?

Media Ops Lead Glitchfell: I've got one.

Director Cliff: Let's hear it then.

Media Ops Lead Glitchfell: The Townsville media complex, and to an extent, the world, has been asking for a team name for B-47, B-48, and B-49.

Director Cliff: They've already given them all sorts of names. Should we even bother?

General Blackwater: Permission to speak freely, sir.

Director Cliff: Go on.

General Blackwater: The Girls are our personnel, our operatives. They're our responsibility. We should not let anyone else but us label them. We should give them an official unit designation. We'd be putting our foot down. If we don't, it's a sign of weakness, and our enemies would love to see a chink in our armor.

Director Cliff: Agreed. We are no longer the Organization. Suggestions from the floor?

Media Ops Lead Glitchfell: If I may, sir, the city had already produced a long list of suggestions. (crinkling of paper) Here you go, sir. I've circled the ones I believe are good.

Director Cliff: So we're still letting someone else name our organic weapon platforms?

Liaisons Head Yorkshire: Sir, I think it's a very good idea.

Director Cliff: Explain to me how contradictions are a good idea.

Liaisons Head Yorkshire: We are still choosing the name, sir. I believe it's a good diplomatic move to choose a name coined by someone in the city. They would think we're listening, that we're taking their opinions into consideration. We need to keep our public relations in the positive after last year. There will always be people smearing our name, and we need to stay on top of them.

Director Cliff: (Scowls) Some of these names here are actually pretty good. (Pause) We'll call
them… 'The Powerpuff Girls' from now on.

Media Ops Lead Glitchfell: Ur- sir- I didn't circle that-

Director Cliff: I know very well you didn't circle that name, Glitch. I didn't choose that name because it sounds good. I selected it because it still has a part of us left in it. Make sure the entire city knows about our decision. I want that unit name made official in the USDO.

Media Ops Lead Glitchfell: Yes, sir.

Chief Finance Officer Silverslick: I think it has a great ring to it. It's got good marketing potential.

General Blackwater: Says the used car salesman who nearly got them killed.

Chief Finance Officer Silverslick: What did you just call me?

General Blackwater: You heard me right. Or do you need a sensory checkup in the medical bay?

Chief Finance Officer Silverslick: I was just doing what I was hired to do you jock!

Director Cliff: Shut up! Both of you!

(Silence)

Media Ops Lead Glitchfell: You know, we could put up a few billboards and newspaper ads featuring the Powerpuff Girls and their new name. Public service announcements and things like that.

(Sound of doors opening)

Director Cliff: Make it so. And where the hell is Professor Utonium!?

Professor Utonium: Right here, sir.

Director Cliff: You! What the hell did you do to B-48!?

Professor Utonium: Buttercup, sir. She has a name and it's Buttercup.

Director Cliff: Don't you dare lecture me after what you did! I want an explanation, now!

Professor Utonium: Very well. I've been working on the means to advance the progress of Project Powerpuff beyond what we have now-

Director Cliff: And why do we need any further progress when we have B-47, B-48 and B-49? Why not just manufacture more copies of them?

Professor Utonium: As I have mentioned a million times, they are prototypes, accidental ones at that, and they are not meant for any kind of field deployment in the first place.

Director Cliff: So why not just take the best of the three, B-47-?

Professor Utonium: Blossom, you mean-

Director Cliff: And clone a few more of her? I believe we still have the stem cells from her DNA source?

Professor Utonium: It wouldn't be ethical and-
Director Cliff: I think we all know what you mean. You want Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup to be unique. You've fallen in love with those bioweapons-

Professor Utonium: Don't… call them bioweapons.

Director Cliff: (ignoring Utonium) and you've taken them in as your own. And now you want the best for them. You're treating them like children - your own children, to be precise. You've built yourself a little dreamland.

Professor Utonium: It's hardly any sort of paradise with what they're being subjected to every day - when they weren't meant for field operations in the first place.

Director Cliff: Enough. I don't care what your motivations are, as long as I'm getting results. I want to hear your proposal, and it'd better be something. I don't like how you've just taken one of the Project Powerpuff subjects offline without my approval. You're lucky I haven't thrown you in a cell and reassign someone to be their handler.

Professor Utonium: I- urm- have been working on something I have been calling the 'Anti-X'. It is a three-stage Chemical W-assisted compound that could neutralize the powers of a Chemical-enhanced being. It is a cocktail of compounds that renders stabilized Chemical X inert by bonding with the stabilizing agents to prevent them from bridging with mundane molecules, before irreversibly reacting with them to effectively destroy them and disconnect them from the Chemical X. The Chemical X itself is destroyed by the presence of Chemical W-

Director Cliff: So you've basically created something to destroy Chemical X?

Professor Utonium: Yes, and it worked too. The results are encouraging. I have effectively reverted Buttercup to the baseline of a 5-year-old human being… except she is still bulletproof… and still has a prodigious healing factor - about a quarter of what it used to be, but still far above baseline. She is normal in every other respect now. My medical examinations have revealed no other abnormalities.

Psychiatry and Social Services Department Head Alice: Upton, what about Buttercup herself? How does she feel about this change in her physiology?

Professor Utonium: She's deeply upset, I'm afraid. But she'll cope. She always did.

PaSSDH Alice: I'll check up on her later.

Professor Utonium: It's much appreciated. She'll need help making adjustments.

Director Cliff: We need to get back on track. What do you hope to accomplish with this… 'Anti-X'? It seems counter-intuitive to create something to destroy Chemical X.

Professor Utonium: I'll be frank. I want Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup released from service.

Director Cliff: And you've created Anti-X to retire them from service and give them a normal life, am I right?

Professor Utonium: Pretty much, yes.

Director Cliff: And what makes you think I'm willing to accept that?

Professor Utonium: I have continued my research in Chemical X. I can create something better for the USDO's use.
Director Cliff: Go on.

Professor Utonium: The Girls were created by accident when I decided to test the effectiveness of an incomplete Chemical X formula. I have continued working on the original formula, and I believe it could - no - will result in a... urm... bioweapon that is far better than what we have currently.

Director Cliff: How far along are you to a finished product?

Professor Utonium: I've already begun testing the complete formula - we'll call it Chemical X2 - on plants. I believe I will be ready to create a new enhanced operative within a few days.

Director Cliff: Hmm. And you will. I believe the USDO and Townsville could stand to use a new bioweapon on its side. Crime is on the rise - it's never been down, to begin with - and some of them are being perpetrated by enhanced individuals who your Girls are generally too inept to stop, it seems. If what you say is true - that you could come up with something better, I think it just might win us the war.

Professor Utonium: So, regarding my Girls' retirement-

Director Cliff: Your Girls' retirement! You don't seem to be grasping the stakes here!

Professor Utonium: (slams table) You think I don't!? You've been sitting behind your comfy boss chair, behind an expensive desk, guarded by a hundred soldiers in HQ while my Girls are doing all the dirty work! I had to watch my Girls come home every day, tired and injured and psychologically scarred! I know the stakes very well! I've been closer to the front lines than you'll ever be! And it's been nearly 3 months!

Director Cliff: (Laughs) You want your 'Girls' to retire? Fine, I'll let them retire.

Professor Utonium: You will?

Director Cliff: There are conditions though. First - create me my reinforcement. I want it in the time frame you gave me.

Professor Utonium: It's done.

Director Cliff: And second: They will remain active even with said reinforcement deployed, on reserve at least and deployed alongside the newer enhanced operative at most until my reinforcement is ready to operate alone.

Professor Utonium: Fine.

General Blackwater: I have my own conditions for you to fulfill, prof.

Professor Utonium: What conditions?

General Blackwater: I will be selecting the DNA to be used instead. I know you, and you'll likely choose something unsuited for combat. Doctor Vanum will be assisting me. Right, Vanum?

Doctor Vanum: Right.

Professor Utonium: You said 'conditions'. Are there more?

General Blackwater: The new Powerpuff subject's training will be put under my direct supervision instead. You've done enough damage in that respect.
Professor Utonium: So the child will be living with you?

General Blackwater: No. That's about the only thing you've done right. You'll be taking care of it for me. It's better that all Powerpuff subjects be housed in one building.

Head of Logistics Wiggums: It'll make the logistics easier, at least.

Director Cliff: Now wait a second - this new bioweapon… It'll still be a child physically?

Professor Utonium: Possibly. There's no telling how Chemical X2 will react with human cells, if it will even be different from Chemical X in any way.

Professor Utonium: Since we're on the subject of conditions, I have some of my own.

Director Cliff: And what makes you think you're in any position to make any demands?

Professor Utonium: I don't. But it would really be nice if you'd listen. I'll know for sure that I'm working for a good organization that cares about the welfare of its personnel.

Director Cliff: (laughs) Those Girls sure did a number on you, did they? Color me interested – what do you want?

Professor Utonium: I want full severance and isolation from the USDO for Selicia, the Girls and me after your next bioweapon is fully ready – fully prepared, educated and trained. I want the Girls to be funded for the next twenty years of their life, up to college. And I want the USDO to leave us alone after retirement. No drafting, no matter what emergency it is.

Director Cliff: (Mocking) You drive a hard bargain, professor.

CFO Silverslick: You have more financial know-how than you let on.

General Blackwater: This is unacceptable!

Director Cliff: Agreed. It is outrageous that you've neutralized one of our bioweapons without my express permission, to begin with! B-47, B-48, and B-49 can't just be cut loose from the USDO. They're assets even if they will be obsolete eventually.

Professor Utonium: But you agreed to retire them if-

Director Cliff: But I did not agree to your conditions. I will only agree to the 'girls' – your 'children' being put on reserve. I want them on reserve in case your next creation couldn't do the job one day.

Professor Utonium: Then that's no different from active duty.

Director Cliff: We could… agree to a limitation to the level of emergency they will be called in to neutralize.

Professor Utonium: Level 10. Please. (Note: Level 10 refers to emergencies threatening humanity on a global level)

Director Cliff: Level 5. (Note: Level 5 refers to any emergency involving hostile enhanced individuals)

Professor Utonium: Seven.

Director Cliff: This is not a negotiation. Five.
Professor Utonium: (Sighs) Fine.

Director Cliff: And please, for goodness sakes! Find a way to reverse your Anti-X! B-48 is one of the more productive of your 'daughters'!

Professor Utonium: If unnecessary killing is productive to you…

Director Cliff: I don't need a morality lesson from you.

Professor Utonium: The effects of Anti-X might not even be reversible. We're standing on the bleeding edge of science here. I've been driving in the dark.

Director Cliff: Then you'd better switch your headlights on and find me my destination!

Professor Utonium: What about the rest of my conditions?

Director Cliff: You and Selicia are staying in the USDO. It is a matter of national security that you do. The only thing I'm willing to grant is funding for your 'daughters' existence. That's about it.

Professor Utonium: That's not very different from our present arrangements. What's there to stop you from declaring every engagement with enhanced individuals an emergency for my Girls to handle?

Director Cliff: Nothing. What did I tell you? You aren't in any position to make demands. You should be lucky I even considered retirement for the bioweapons you call your 'Girls'. You'll either take my terms or leave it, and if you leave it, I'm reassigning you to the North Pole and throw in General Blackwater as the 'Girls' 'father'!

(Silence.)

PaSSDH Alice: Thomas…

(Door opened forcibly before slamming shut.)

Director Cliff: Now that that's over and done with, what's next on the agenda, Yorkshire?

General Blackwater: You don't need her to tell you what it is. Security's next.

Director Cliff: Yes, crime's on the rise again. It's like those bastards are multiplying like vermin. Solutions?

General Blackwater: Our forces are fully engaged at the moment. They are at 100% capacity. There's nothing more we can do unless…

Director Cliff: Unless what?

General Blackwater: As much as I don't see eye to eye with Police Commissioner Davis and his merry band of blues, their assessment of our strategy makes sense. We're combating crime as if it's the Vietnam War all over again.

Director Cliff: And what's wrong with that?

General Blackwater: We lost the Vietnam War, and we're not exactly fighting a war here with two armies going toe-to-toe on a dance of death here. We need to adapt to the situation in Townsville.

Director Cliff: Your proposal?
General Blackwater: We need to reorganize our forces. As it is, our largest deployable unit is a squad of fifteen to twenty, and we're usually sending our men out by the platoons. We can only be in so many places at once, and sometimes we'd end up sending a hundred men on the wildest of goose chases to arrest one or two men for what turned out to the possession of toy guns and chewing gum rather than illegal firearms and plastic explosives.

Director Cliff: And you want to break our deployed units down into smaller bits? Do you realize how that sounds?

General Blackwater: I'm fully aware of it, but it's either that or be ineffectual and lose Townsville's support eventually. We break our squads and platoons up into fire teams and send them everywhere, and we'll be able to do something.

Director Cliff: In other words, we'll be more like the TPD.

General Blackwater: Yes. But better. Even one of our fire teams is better than a few of their patrol units combined.

Director Cliff: Very well. Make it happen. What about our 'Powerpuff Girls'? They're one lab rat short.

General Blackwater: We have almost a thousand guys in Townsville. We'll reinforce them with some good old-fashioned boots from the ground.

Director Cliff: They can't exactly fly, Blackwater.

General Blackwater: No they can't, but some of our equipment could, and fast enough with the kind of modifications we've been making.

Director Cliff: Very well. Make it so. Vanum, what's the status of Project Klendathu and Project Cyclops?

Doctor Vanum: We've been testing different versions of the power packs we've been making using Chemicals A through to X for energy storage. We've discovered that we have options, and Chemical A might not be the best one. We're weighing our options right now and refinement the power pack design of the best ones. In the meantime, we're making refinements to the final designs of the Klendathu power armor and Cyclop mechanized suits.

Director Cliff: How soon before we can field them?

Doctor Vanum: There's going to be a delay. June or July, probably.

Director Cliff: Are you serious?

Doctor Vanum: You know, Professor Utonium's been lending his expertise in helping with the power packs and designs - in his free time, over the internetwork and phone. If it weren't for him, it would have been next year.

Director Cliff: You watch your tone with me. If it weren't for me, we wouldn't even have any of these projects - Powerpuff, Klendathu, Cyclops. And if it weren't for my forgiving nature, you'd be shipped off to Uganda right now. I heard they could use another drill bit technician for the Duranium mines. The last one died from a cave-in, and slowly too, from what they said.

-TRANSCRIPT END-
Chapter 42: The Wages of Sin (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Blossom and Bubbles have to fight crime without Buttercup, but the USDO does not intend to let them go at it undermanned.

Chapter 42: The Wages of Sin (Part 1)

The City of Townsville. Sky. En Route to Downtown.

18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 1123.

Blossom was troubled, and that was an understatement. Nothing seemed right ever since she woke up. Bubbles wouldn't speak to her, and that was on top of her deteriorating self-control because of her new power. Buttercup, on the other hand, had the opposite problem. Her Dad had taken away all her powers, and she was severely weakened as a result. Even though it was well-deserved and necessary because of her psychotic tendency to kill and hurt without the need to, and sometimes even without provocation, Blossom could empathize with her wayward sister, how scary it would be to lose all her powers, and how sad she was to suddenly be capable of nothing - to not be able to fly, to not be able to fire her eye beams or lift heavyweights. Those were things that Blossom felt had made her Daddy proud - she'd seen him smile whenever she showed him a new trick she'd learned.

It also meant that she was one girl short, though her friends had an answer to that…

"This is Flight Control Five, please confirm the status of Bravo-Four-Eight, over," her radio came alive while she was thinking. She hated how some of the people in the USDO she knew had these weird number-names for them. She couldn't phrase it, but she hated being called by a number.

"What do you mean, Miss Flight Control Five?" Blossom asked - the officer on the other end of the radio had used some terms she was still having trouble understanding.

"Why is Buttercup not with you? Over," the woman on the other end said, her patience slipping.

"She's lost all her powers. She can't fight crime anymore," Blossom reported. It was sad to see Buttercup meltdown the way she did when she was told off for trying to go with them in the first place…

Buttercup had rushed into the Girls' room as soon as the USDO hotline rang. She was slow compared to Blossom and Bubbles, but she just so happened to be in a nearby washroom when it happened. By the time she had opened the door on her sisters changing up, her sisters were already putting on their armor. Buttercup had gone ahead to change into her uniform despite being disempowered, much to Blossom and Bubbles' confusion. And she had to take a long time to do it because of how slow and clumsy she had become.

'Buttercup, you're not supposed to come with us anymore,' Blossom had told her even as she was putting on her green military fatigues.
'You can't fight crime like this. You don't have your powers…' Bubbles added, but Buttercup had brushed her off.

'Shut up, cry-baby!' Buttercup had shouted rudely at Bubbles while she was being a klutz with her boots, which she had to heave out of the walk-in closet. Bubbles had taken offense to this – had it not been for Blossom restraining her, she would have thrown Buttercup across the room.

'You can't even fly anymore,' Blossom had continued, but Buttercup had gone quiet as she continued to change into her uniform - with difficulty. Her point became much clearer when Buttercup tried to lug her guns out of the closet. She had to drag her MP5 out with the stock making a ruffled line in the carpet. She had to give up halfway, with sweat pouring down her face, and settle for the pistol, which looked like it was weighing her down anyway. She had to carry it two-handed as if it was a heavy machinegun.

Dad walked in on them after that.

'Buttercup? What are you doing?' he questioned the disempowered little girl, who had frozen the moment she was caught - she didn't use to do that, but now, she was scared easily, and she couldn't help it.

'I'm going with Blossom and Bubbles,' Buttercup had forced herself to be who she was. 'I'm going to fight crime.'

'You can't, honey,' Dad had said. At the very least, he didn't look angry, but more amused than anything. 'You can't even fly anymore.'

'That's what I told her,' Blossom had said. 'But she wouldn't listen.'

'But…' Buttercup wanted to rebut everyone but found that she didn't have anything real to defend herself with. Not only that - it took immense effort to even try to think her way to her desired goal. 'What am I supposed to do now?'

'Be the little girl you've always been, Buttercup. That's what you're supposed to do,' the Dad had said, and as he was saying this, Buttercup was pouting. 'Have fun. Play with your toys or watch the TV. Or sleep. You know, like a little girl.'

'But I don't want to!' Buttercup whined. Ever since losing her powers, she was more prone to crying too. 'You want that but I don't want it!'

It was at this point that the look of Buttercup being downcast, looking completely purposeless, was carved into her mind forever. Buttercup didn't even look like Buttercup anymore, as if she had lost her soul as if she had lost a huge part of herself. Blossom knew what Dad had said - that Buttercup couldn't feel as much as the rest of them because she was 'sick' and 'messed up' inside, but it looked, then, that she was feeling sad enough.

'You'll get used to this, Buttercup,' Dad had said again. 'Give yourself some time, and you wouldn't even want to think about fighting crime anymore.'

Buttercup had, of course, stubbornly rejected this notion and ran out of the room in tears.

"Status confirmed," Miss Flight Control Five said over the radio. "Someone will be taking her place. They are on the way now."

"Who?" Blossom asked.
"You'll see. You need to slow down and let them catch up. Over and out," the flight control officer said cryptically. It'd kept Blossom quiet for a while as she tried to guess on her own who it would be, and how he or she would be taking Buttercup's place - how they could even do that, considering that no one else was capable of flying like them or fighting the way they could.

"What do you think, Bubbles?" Blossom asked her only other attending sister as they were flying towards their destination. They were answering another call, which would no doubt be another middle-of-the-road situation that would be neither too hard nor too easy to deal with, as if designed to waste their time. "Who do you think is taking Buttercup's place?"

Bubbles remained silent.

"Bubbles?" Blossom pressed her sister, deeply worried as to what was going on with her.

"I don't care," Bubbles said coldly.

"Why are you being like this all of a sudden?" Blossom asked, and caught another flash of her eyes - those deeply disturbing eyes, which were pink and bloodshot as if exhausted. At that exact moment, her eyes had flashed red.

Bubbles simply glared at Blossom, and the leader sister did not pursue the issue any further, for fear of setting her off.

They were on their way to another part of the city. When it came, they didn't expect it. The thumping of… something was their first sign. Then Blossom looked in the direction of the strangely regular sound. It was distant at first, but catching up to them. Blossom zoomed in with her enhanced vision and saw something spectacular.

It was the biggest helicopter they had ever seen, and the only kind they had ever seen were small and belonged either to the police or Townsville News Network. This one was so big that it had two 'spinning tops' on the roof, as the Girls had taken to calling the rotors.

It was a Chinook helicopter transport, and it just so happen to be painted dark green, a color which reminded Blossom of Buttercup.

"Morning, Girls. Looks to me that I'll be flying with the two of you today," a familiar voice said on the radio after it crackled to life once more.

"Mister Blake! Is that you in the helicopter?" Blossom returned the greeting with delight. As she was looking at the Chinook troop transport coming up rapidly towards them, she saw someone lean out of a side door on the giant helicopter and wave at her and Bubbles. Blossom could recognize the greying hair, the aviator sunglasses and slightly wrinkled but strong-featured face of Agent Blake.

"Sure is," Blake replied on the radio. "My condolences to what had happened to Buttercup. But I heard it's for the best."

"It's for the best…" Blossom agreed, albeit reluctantly. Sadly. She had lied to make it happen, and that was the worst part.

With the Girls forming a wing with the Chinook on either side of the helicopter, they flew towards the scene of the crime at the transport's top speed.

Just when they thought the long days were over, it'd turned out that it was just the beginning. The first call they attended to didn't even need the kind of firepower the Girls and the Chinook were
packing. The crooks had robbed a pawn shop, and when they saw a military troop transport tailing them with two of the City's most feared little girls in formation with it while they were getting away in a busted old car, they gave up almost immediately – almost. They tried to shake them off by taking some sharp turns, but after the Chinook flew ahead of them and the rear gate opened up with a machine gun for a tongue, shooting out their tires, they stopped and surrendered while begging for their lives.

Bubbles took the opportunity to vent her frustration on a few of them before she could be stopped, knocking out most of the thieves. There were no openings for her to kill Blossom so far, and it was frustrating. In the back of her mind, she didn't even want to do it – but the drugs! She needed them so badly, she needed them to feel good! She knew she needed them or she would suffer a thousand pains – and so she wanted it to be done and over with as soon as possible.

It wasn't over after that. Lieutenant Blake, who took overall command of the Girls' 'unit', was alerted to another matter needing their attention, and this time, it was dire…


18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 1205.

The two Girls had to be led by radio all over the Business District of Townsville. Agent Blake and his crew's insertion into the newly-named Powerpuff Girls had been fortuitous, as he had many years of experience leading high-speed chases.

An armored truck had been led off from its destination by a group of highly organized robbers. When Blossom heard the initial sitrep on the radio, she'd dismissed it as just another wild goose chase, just another way to burn off the Chemical X in her blood and get knocked out cold by night. But then the additional descriptions of the perpetrators coming in told her that it wasn't usual.

There were five of them. And they were described to have green skin and of wildly different body shapes. One was a midget, and another was basically an elephant. The other three were somewhere in between.

By the time Blossom, Bubbles and Blake's Chinook had reached the armored truck zigzagging across the city, it was already too late. The armored truck, which belonged to a security company likely hired by a bank, was being tailed by a couple of old-fashioned cars. While it was retreating across a T-junction, something huge came out from around the corner and tackled - TACKLED - the armored truck. A gigantic form of a man, green-skinned and evidently powered by some manner of Chemical, not unlike Chemical X. The armored truck had veered off the road as a result and ended up planting itself into a lamp post. A third car came up beside it, having raced downrange from the opposite direction. The chasers stopped behind the halted armored truck and got out.

Blossom could recognize who they were, and she could easily name one of them. Ace. The Gangreen Gang. Evidently, they were still in business despite their (relatively) peaceful resolution during Christmas at the Battle of Morbucks Industries Research Labs. Blossom thought that she had made an impression on Ace and his gang, turned them into good people. Dad had taught her that there was good in people, even the criminals, and she had taken his lessons to heart. Now, that was all up in the air.

Blake's Chinook stopped flying forward and hovered. Blossom and Bubbles followed and hovered in place too.
"That big one looks dangerous," Blake on the radio said. "Blossom, Bubbles, go straight ahead. My
crew will circle around and shoot."

"I want to talk to them," Blossom said.

"They don't look like they're in the mood for a chat, kid!" Blake said over the radio. Bubbles, in the
meantime, looked trouble and stayed silent. In her mind, she had been fighting the urge to use her
drugs. It wasn't about the ability to fight crime any longer. The drugs' effect was cumulative, and
she would find herself getting into a rage and whipping up a storm the moment she had to fight.
She had been feeling like an absolute wreck since waking up in the Princess' mansion. She knew
that using the drugs would make her feel good again, but she had only enough for one moment of
high… and no way to know when she could carry out the fairy godmother's wishes and get more.

Ignoring Blake, Blossom flew ahead and landed next to the tall and lanky one with the angular
shades. Bubbles followed her as the other two normal-sized Gangreens had just pulled two security
officers out of the armored truck's cabin. One of them was incapacitated. The other looked
unconscious. Either one of them could be dead.

Ace, the tall one, had already noticed Blossom and her sister, however. He'd noticed long before
they arrived. The Chinook Blake was in was loud, and it'd announced their presence.

"Well, well, well, look who's here," Ace greeted Blossom with a smile, a genuine one, exposing
his sharp teeth. He was armed to the teeth. He had a bulletproof vest on. A sword hung on his belt.
It was the same Duranium sword he'd used to cut and stab Blossom, very nearly killing her. A
sniper rifle was slung on his back.

"Mister Ace," Blossom addressed him, leader to leader.

"Remembered my nicky-name too!" Ace said to his gang members. Billy, the big one with ginger
hair covering his eyes, was leaning against the truck. He laughed stupidly when he heard it. Arturo
the midget, who had just unlocked the back of the armored truck, peeked from behind it.

"She did? That's smart for a 5-year-old," the small one said, unaware that they were antagonizing
someone far younger.

"Let's kill them, Blossom!" Bubbles barked, caught in the moment – it was easy for her to do that
these days.

"Whoa, slow down there, hotshot," Ace said, putting up both hands, though the gleeful, mocking
look on his face never left. If he was shocked at the look Bubbles was giving him, he wasn't
showing it. He turned to Blossom after that: "What's going on with your sister? Was she bitten by a
dog or something? She looks like she got some rabies in her!"

Ace's boys sniggered at his remarks. Bubbles gritted her teeth. Saliva dripped from her mouth. Her
eyes were shining hellish red, had been since she smelled blood. It'd what prompted Ace.

"How are you, Blossom?" Ace then said, a little more civil than before. "I'm sorry I hurt you so
badly the last time."

"I'm much better now," Blossom said even as Blake's voice was egging her on to start fighting the
Gangreen Gang. "W-why are you doing this?"

"I've told you before, I still have people to feed, Blossom, and…" Ace had explained until his
voice broke. "this winter hasn't been kind. We didn't have the money, so we didn't have enough
food, wood, and medicine. People got sick. People died."
"But you're stealing! And stealing is wrong!" Blossom said. "Can't you ask for help? I'm sure there are many nice people around."

"No. There aren't many nice people around. Not enough anyway, not in a town like this," Ace said. "You'll understand one day. In the meantime, I gotta go. It's nice chatting with you."

With that, Ace made a move for the armored truck's cabin. Arturo had closed the back of the truck, coming up to Ace like some kind of a familiar, cackling and gloating about how they had stolen millions of dollars in one go.

"I can't let you leave, Ace!" Blossom insisted. Ace stopped in his tracks. "I'm sorry about your friends, but I can't." Stealing was wrong - Dad had taught Blossom that - and it was worse if it was an entire truck - a real truck - full of stuff. Blossom didn't know what they were stealing as she didn't know what armored trucks were for, but it didn't matter what it was.

The tall, lanky one turned around. Although his shades had hidden his eyes, Blossom could sense displeasure in behind them. Injustice, even.

"Then neither will you leave," Ace threatened before pulling out his sword. "I've compromised enough and let you live and my friends died because of it! I ain't having no more of that!"

"In fact, you remind me of everything I hate," Ace went on, and his words hurt when it shouldn't even. "A white knight goody two shoes protecting those who didn't need protectin'! Hurting the weak and the sick and the poor!"

"But-" Blossom tried to speak, only to be shut down instantly.

"No! Shut up! I told you a sad story about my people dying, and this is how you treat me?" Ace went on. "I should have killed you while I had the chance. There were children I know who died because you had to act all angel-like!"

All around him, his gang had formed up. Arturo snarled at Blossom, looking like a Chihuahua from hell. Big Billy stopped leaning against the armored truck and came up behind Ace threateningly - he'd uprooted the lamp post the armored truck had struck, using it as a gigantic club. Snake got out of the cab of the armored truck and drew his Uzi submachinegun. Grubber pulled a few raspberries... and a pistol.

Blossom couldn't help but feel vulnerable despite her superior enhanced abilities. But worse of all, she couldn't help but feel betrayed by what Ace had said. Why should she be hated when he was committing the crime? She'd felt a connection with him before, that he was a good man despite what he was doing. She was able to relate to him because of the commonalities they shared - They were both leaders. They both possessed the power to do good. They were both doing what they felt were good things.

In fact, Blossom was about to talk some sense into her counterpart on the other side of the war on crime when Bubbles acted first.

Coming forward, she gave out a sonic scream, blowing Ace and his cohort back and knocking them against the armored truck, overturning it. Blossom had to get out of the way and cover her ears, shaken out of her wits by the suddenness of the noise. In the middle of it, she saw blood spraying out of Bubbles' hateful eyes. She screamed for her to stop, but her own voice was drowned out by the sonic scream.

By the end of it, Blossom was lying on the ground, her own ears ringing – her vision blurry and
distorted. She continued shouting at Bubbles, trying to gain her attention, but she couldn't tell if she did. All she could hear was ringing in her ears, and all she could see were splotches of colors.

Bubbles immediately charged at her punchbags. Blake's men started shooting from the side door facing the Gangreen Gang.

Ace was able to draw his blade and slash Bubbles across the chest as she was flying towards him, causing her to tumble and hit the bottom chassis of the armored truck.

"Grab what you can and split!" Ace ordered his gang as he himself ran for the bags of money that had spilled out of the back of the truck. The boys did the same, fleeing bullets fired from the Chinook, which, under Blake's orders, began turning its back so it would face the self-righteous robbers. The back gate of the Chinook opened, revealing a wall of men and guns arrayed against the green-skinned enhanced individuals. The machinegun in the center opened fire, and so did the rest of them.

Blake himself was wielding an Anti-material sniper rifle loaded with Duranium rounds. Aiming at Big Billy, he started putting them in his back as he was bumbling away and yelling in pain, money bags spilling from his cradling arms.

The amount of firepower they were putting out had even floored Arturo, the smallest of them, and Snake had to abandon his bags of dough to rescue him.

Blake thought he saw blood, but before he could confirm anything, the Gangreen Gang had rounded the corner. He'd thought about ordering his Chinook transport to give chase, but orders were orders. The plan relayed to him was to intercept the criminals assailing the armored truck. Should the Gangreen Gang retreat, it was up to the police and other units to hunt them down. In the meantime, he ordered his Chinook to land.

Time passed, and Blossom's senses had gotten better as she gave herself a moment to rest. As the ringing and veil over her eyes went away, she saw that Bubbles was sitting and leaning against the overturned armored truck.

"Bubbles!" Blossom shouted when she saw that her sister was hurt. The Kevlar vest that was supposed to protect her had been cleanly cut through - no doubt the work of a Duranium blade powered by enhanced hands. Speeding to her, she tried to tend to Bubbles, but Bubbles pushed her away.

"No! Don't hurt me!" Bubbles yelled, staring fearfully at Blossom. It had Blossom confused. When she tried to come closer to Bubbles, the latter Girl punched the former across the face and pushed her away.

"Ow! I wasn't going to!" Blossom claimed as she was clutching her jaw, rubbing it.

"You did this!" Bubbles stood up and accused, looking like she was more angry at Blossom than she was hurting from the wound. Her eyes were still red. "This is your fault!"

"What are you talking about?" Blossom said, honestly confused as to why she was getting blamed for an injury she did not cause.

"You did this to me!" Bubbles screamed madly, and Blossom became terrified of her own sister, such that she wouldn't dare to come anywhere close to her. "You did this to me! You did this to me! YOU DID THIS!"

"Whoa! Whoa! What's going on here!?" Blake asked as he was running up to them. Bubbles' evil
eyes told him everything he needed to know.

"You need to calm down, Bubbles," the USDO officer added, but Bubbles didn't look like she was capable of calming down.

"It's all your fault! It's all your fault! It's not my fault! IT'S NOT MY FAULT!" Bubbles continued screaming, and she wasn't referring to the injury Ace had inflicted on her at all.

"Bubbles! You're scaring me!" Blossom exclaimed fearfully. More men were disembarking from the modified USDO Chinook. All of them were keeping their distance, and none of them dared to raise their guns at her - and it wasn't just because they knew her.

"Bubbles, what's the matter?" Agent Fields, Blake's right hand, asked, but Bubbles had continued chanting her madness.

"Bubbles, please, tell me what's wrong!" Blossom said as she decided to risk it all and approach Bubbles. She didn't look like she was going to hurt anyone - the way she was on her knees and clutching her head as if it could fall off at any moment.

But the moment she was close enough, Bubbles had launched herself at her, dragging her across the asphalt so hard that they were creating a path, damaging the road.

"What the hell!" Blake shouted as he witnessed this impossible sight - something that only enhanced individuals were capable of.

"Bubbles, what are you doing!?" Blossom shouted when she finally came to a stop, all sunken into the ground at the end of the path Bubbles had made. Her entire back felt raw from being dragged across the road. "This isn't you!"

"The Bubbles you know is DEAD! And it's all your fault! Your fault!" Bubbles screamed madly while she was sitting on top of Blossom, her bloodshot eyes widely open, as if staring deep into her soul. "You wanted a hard-core Bubbles! Well, now you have a hard-core Bubbles!"

Panting madly, Bubbles raised a fist and opened up her fingers like claws, and Blossom shielded her face with both her arms.

"Stop! Let her go!" Blake ordered. He'd raised his XM9 anti-material rifle at her. Bubbles turned to glare at him, as if to consider killing him too, before dashing up into the air, screaming away at breakneck speed, her baby blue X-energy contrail tainted by red energy at its core.

With Bubbles gone, Agent Blake was able to check on Blossom. While he was coming up to her, however, Blossom sat up on her own without his intervention. She didn't look like she was physically wounded, surprisingly, but Blake knew that emotionally, it was a completely different story. She looked like she was on the verge of tears. With or without enhanced abilities, which kid wouldn't be? Blossom had just been assaulted by her own sister, and Blake knew that they were supposed to be close.

"I need to find her, Mister Blake," Blossom said, while she was holding back tears and sniffling. "Dad will be mad if I don't."

"She could be anywhere by now," Blake said. "There's no point doing that."

What Blake had said had likely driven Blossom to tears as she started bawling and wiping her tears away in front of her.
"B-but she's my sister! I can't just give up on h-her!" Blossom cried, struggling to express herself as she did. "And something's wrong with her! She's never lost control like that before!"

"Hey... That's not what I meant," Blake comforted the little girl as she hugged his leg. He put a hand on her back. "I would never leave her be like this. All I meant to say is we need to call this in and get some people to help. Okay? Can you let me do that?"

Blossom let the man go. He bent down. "I'm sure we'll find her in a few hours, just in time for dinner. Be strong, Blossy. It's not the end of the world."
Chapter 43: The Wages of Sin (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Blossom disappears as well because of sinister causes...

Chapter 43: The Wages of Sin (Part 2)

The City of Townsville. Downtown. USDO Headquarters.

18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 1623.

'This is Sierra-Hotel-Seven Lima, we have a Run-Away situation with The Powerpuff Girls. I repeat, we have a Run-Away situation with The Powerpuff Girls,' Blake's message had gone out hours ago. 'Bravo-Four-Nine is now MIA since the Business District.'

Although Lieutenant Blake wasn't far removed from the foot soldiers of the USDO, his message had serious implications, which meant that all available units had to conduct search patterns throughout the city to find Bubbles. The news had floated up to the chain of command as well, all the way up to General Blackwater, who would then have to decide on the strategies involved in the search and the priorities of the USDO. Since Detective Mullens and his task force were most familiar with the newly-named Powerpuff Girls, he was roped in to search for one of the missing Powerpuffs.

Agent Blake and Blossom had been circling the city multiple times in search of Bubbles, waiting for news from the numerous units involved, but to no avail. Blake had pushed his Chinook to the breaking point in pursuit of that goal, and even though it was modified to stay airborne at high speeds for far longer than the stock model, it had to stop to refuel and undergo maintenance eventually.

While fuel was being pumped into the tanks of the Chinook and maintenance technicians were giving it a once-over, Blossom was sitting on the edge of the roof, her legs hanging off the edge.

"And- and- she just flew away after she hit me-" she was crying into her high-tech cellphone with Dad on the line. Blake had heard it; he was walking up to her from behind when he did. He stopped to give her the time and space she needed to speak to her father and find comfort in familial connections. "I tried finding her but she wouldn't come out."

"Thanks, Dad. I'm sorry I lost Bubbles again," Blossom sobbed, her voice tired and raspy. "No, Dad. It's all my fault. She... she said so herself. It's all my fault."

"I don't know. I can't help but b-blame myself-" she'd gone on in her conversation with Dad. Blake couldn't hear Professor Utonium's voice beyond an indecipherable, muted garble. "Okay... Thanks, Dad. I'm still sorry, though."

"I'll try," the conversation was concluding. "I love you too, Dad. I can't wait to see you again. Bye. Hugs and kisses. Bye."

"How did your dad handle the news?" Blake asked after giving Blossom a moment of silence.
"He wasn't angry, but he's upset," Blossom said, her eyes wandering into the horizon, still teary and shell-shocked. "He didn't sound like it, but I know he's upset."

"How can you tell?" Blake asked as he came up to her, chose a spot on her right and sat down beside her.

"I just know. It's the way he talks, I guess," Blossom said, but was unable to describe what she meant. She knew from the slight tremble and pauses in her Dad's voice that her Dad was holding his emotions back, trying to mask them, trying to be strong for her. She had no idea how to express all this, however. Blossom broke into tears again after that. "Bubbles- she's still upset because of what I did!"

She leaned against Blake, desiring the comfort he provided, and Blake allowed it. He put an arm around the enhanced little girl and she scooted up to him. Blake couldn't help but notice just how tiny she was - how unnatural and surreal it was that she was cast into this situation, sitting on top of the HQ of a federal law enforcement-military agency, wearing her heavy armor. Sure, he had months to get used to the fact, but being away for so long from her had made him raw to it. Come to think of it, he was never really used to it - all the while, he had only time to roll with it and not think about it.

"Is it what you did at the cineplex?" Blake asked, keeping his voice a soothing whisper and respectfully low.

"And that wasn't even the half of it," Blossom said. "I'm so stupid…"

"Don't say that. Everyone makes mistakes. You can't change the past, kiddo," Blake said. "But you know what you can change?"

"What?" Blossom asked.

"That rumbling stomach of yours," Blake revealed. One of his men was just coming up with a juice box and wrapped burger. "You're going to need to keep your strength up if you want to find Bubbles."


18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 1920.

Bubbles had been hiding ever since blowing up in front of everyone in the Business District when they were supposed to be fighting the Gangreen Gang. She'd been feeling ashamed of herself ever since, but as it was right now, that was the least of her worries.

Since the morning, she'd been silent the entire day and giving Blossom the cold shoulder because she knew she was going to have to kill her. Her silence, however, wasn't just to make it easier. She had been ever-watchful for opportunities to do so, and she had been spending every single minute thinking about the deed she had to commit, all for the sake of her next hit of His Secret.

She just couldn't stop going round and round in her mind, trying to convince herself that her actions were justified, only to realize that she was about to make a big mistake, then convinced, once more, that what she was doing was for the best - on and on. She couldn't help but imagine a hundred ways to get it done, to make sure.

And hours of it, combined with the pain and trembling and other withdrawal effects she had to endure at the same time, she couldn't help but go a little… crazy when Ace had sliced her with his
The City of Townsville. Business District. The Captain's Chair (Restaurant)

18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 1921.

The entire day was too slow for comfort, just to drive the knife in. Blossom was miserable, and all she could think about was Bubbles. It didn't even occur to her that she was seated in a high-class restaurant, a fish out of the water with all the men in suits and ladies in dresses staring at her. Blake had thought that the least he could do was to give her a treat because of what she'd been going through, and so he landed his Chinook on the roof of a tower and brought her down to a restaurant in the same building.

Blossom, however, could be in a dingy and unsanitary eatery and she wouldn't have noticed. For the time being, she was alone as Blake was away, speaking to a waitress about the restaurant's arrangements and billing. It was another thing she didn't notice as she had long retreated inwards that she might as well be in a coma, a walking vegetable.

That was, until her cellphone began ringing with the familiar tone of the USDO hotline.

Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz! It cried, begging for attention as if it knew what's coming. Reluctantly, Blossom reached for her pocket and pulled it out, flipping the high-tech cellphone open... only for her eyes to go wide.

On the digital screen, 'Bubbles is calling' was written in the center with a pixelized font. She pressed the 'Answer' button without hesitation and pushed the phone to her face quickly, afraid the call would disappear the very next moment.

"Bubbles! Where have you been? I've been so worried about you!" Blossom cried into the phone.

"I'm where you tried to leave me behind," Bubbles' voice said, unconcerned about the obvious worry and anxiety in Blossom's voice, cold and careless. "I want you to come alone. Don't tell anyone... or I'll kill myself."

Blossom froze when she heard it. She couldn't just feel a lump in her throat forming. It was as if she had just swallowed a huge rock, and it'd gone down to her stomach, and it felt heavy there. The restaurant was supposed to be heated to a comfortable, warm temperature, but it felt cold all of a sudden. She couldn't help but tremble - it didn't sound anything like Bubbles on the phone, even though she knew the voice belonged to her. It was completely nothing like the Bubbles she knew. Even while she was panicking while fighting Ace, Bubbles was recognizable.

Something was wrong. Terribly wrong.

But she had to get her sister. Feeling that there was no other choice, she donned her flight pack, extended the glider wings and flew out of the restaurant, past frightened and shocked patrons, ignoring Blake and his men as they were shouting for her to come back. She busted through doors, and out into the night sky. She knew where she was going - but even as she was cutting through the
"Bubbles? Where are you?" Blossom called out to her sister the moment she reached the place and stepped through the door. The adult products business office had been left derelict ever since it was found out to be a front for Townsville's biggest child trafficking ring, and in just over a week, it was already starting to look the part. Graffiti was everywhere on the previously pristine walls and the floor was littered with syringes and take-out packaging and used condoms. As Blossom passed by a room, she saw discarded ropes on the floor and blood everywhere. Another had a dead body in it. Townsville being Townsville, the place was overrun with crime and vice the moment it was disowned.

"Bubbles! Come out, please!" Blossom called out again but stopped. She thought she could hear whispering, and it'd made her hair stand on end, given her goosebumps. Something was wrong. Red flags were being raised in the endless rows of flagpoles in her head, everywhere. Shouldering her MP5, she followed the hollow sound of whispers coming from deep in the abandoned office.

The path she took felt familiar to her, even when she was hovering towards the whispers. Halfway along the way, she'd realized that she was taking the exact same route she took towards Bubbles as that terrible day, when they had trouble finding Bubbles, and- Blossom still could not understand what exactly did Bubbles suffer that day. It wasn't as if she was shot with Duranium bullets or sliced up with Duranium blades…

"I can't do it - I can't do it - I can't!" Bubbles was throwing a fit in the distance, unseen but heard very clearly, and it'd made Blossom very tense. Her ample imagination was playing all sorts of games with her. Bubbles sounded completely off-kilter - and with her BerXerker power seemingly more out-of-control than it usually was, Blossom could not imagine what she might have done to herself, considering that she threatened to kill herself on the cellphone.

"Please don't make me - please don't make me - please don't make me!" Bubbles ranted as Blossom got closer. She could only wonder who her sister was talking to - or what - if she was even talking to someone. "I... I don't... I don't want to..."

"She's a bad sister!" Bubbles suddenly growled. Blossom was close now, just a few feet from the door that would open to the red room and her sister. "She hit me and... she hurt me, bad - she's a bad sister! A bad sister!"

The door to the red room was ajar. Blossom pushed it open with the muzzle of her MP5. It'd opened smoothly at first until it creaked while it had nearly swung fully open. Blossom gritted her teeth at her failure to keep silent. There wasn't time to wait and think anymore. She would have to speak to Bubbles then and there.

Detective Mullens had been in his muscle car for the last twenty minutes. His daughter was sitting in the shotgun seat beside him. Stanley Talker, the talking dog, was in the backseat, scratching himself. The last few days had been hectic, and he knew a bunch of smokescreens and mirrors
when he saw them. Crime was rife lately, and he'd chalked it down to the Amoeba Boys riling up the underworld to keep law enforcement busy - to what end, he had no idea. As a result, he'd been chasing ghosts and shadows, and his case-building had stalled to a point where he was beginning to wonder if he should just turn in his chips and hope that it was enough to bring down the Amoeba Boys. Maybe land them in prison for a few years, tops. A few years of their reduced involvement in crime could be a stepping stone to a cleaner Townsville, even if it meant that it wouldn't be anywhere near as clean a slate as he had envisioned in his 'pipe dream', as Detective Wednesday put it.

"This is Lieutenant Blake of the USDO, PTF-Three. Please respond, over," Mullens' radio had said while he was still sitting there, stuck outside the headquarters. "I repeat, this is Lieutenant Blake of the USDO. Please respond."

Detective Mullens did not respond immediately. He'd known that he had poked the bear for far too long, perhaps even gone too far and now the bear was going to bite back. He could sense it now - Townsville had been feeling the effects of an awakening giant that was the criminal underground. He wondered what his next radio call was going to be about. He reached for the radio.

"This is Detective Mullens. What are you doing on this channel, Blake? Over," Mullens replied on the radio. The USDO and TPD did not share the same radio frequencies for their activities and operations. Neither law enforcement organizations trusted each other. The USDO saw the TPD as being rife with corruption and generally incompetent while the TPD saw the USDO as being untrustworthy for being more shadowy and autonomous than they should be, of having their own agenda. They would only sync up their radios whenever they were working together in joint operations, and they tend to do it on the spot to avoid criminal espionage. That Agent Blake knew the TPD's Investigative Branch's frequency was fishy in and of itself.

"It's Blossom and Bubbles – they've gone missing, over," Blake replied. Mullens straightened up. The Girls were in trouble, and that was enough to get him riled up. His daughter, Olivia, did the same, but all she could do was look at her Dad tensely, not knowing what the hell was going on and possessing far less handle over the situation as the junior detective and the inexperienced one. It went double with her status as Garrett Mullens' daughter.

"Any idea where they could be?" Mullens asked, so concerned he didn't think of the right questions first, as a good detective should.

"I was hoping to find out from you," Blake said on the other end. "You've been working with them for a while now. Any information that could lead to their whereabouts?"

Blossom and Bubbles. Oddly, Buttercup wasn't even involved at all.

"I need the circumstances and context," the detective asked, driven to solve this case even if it wasn't his. The Girls had reached him, let him find himself again. They were responsible for his reunion with his daughter. He owed them one. Or two, or three. "What about motivation?"

"They were fighting. Some kind of sibling rivalry thing was going on between them – I wish I wasn't away – I should have seen it coming." Blake had started freaking out on the radio. Mullens thought it was uncharacteristic of a USDO soldier – a veteran officer no less. But through this, he was able to tell that it was a genuine response. No ulterior motives and backstabbing involved. Even USDO personnel were suspects in his book.

"Calm down, Blake," Mullens said. "Did they say anything? They were having a shouting match, right? Like kids usually do?"
"Bubbles said that something was Blossom's fault," Blake tried to remember the tiny details. Being an agent to a shadowy organization, he was able to recall most of it with clarity. "She said that Blossom had done something. And there was something about being hard-core."

It was all starting to come together in Detective Mullens' mind.

"I think I know where they are," the detective said.

---


18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 1947.

"Bubbles," Blossom called out and struggled to think of what to say next. It wasn't supposed to be like this - it was never this way mere days ago, and it was all joy and laughter before things started going crazy in February. "Are you okay?"

Bubbles was on her knees, in the middle of the dilapidated red room lit by a single dim table lamp. She was trembling, and slapping herself over the side of her own head as she was speaking - Blossom knew now that her sweetest sister was alone. She had been talking to herself all along.

"Am I okay? Am I?" Bubbles answered oddly with another question.

"Okay, Bubbles, you're really scaring me," Blossom said. Her submachinegun was still up. "You were gone for so long and I was really upset and worried that you… killed yourself."

"You were upset and worried?" Bubbles asked cryptically. Her back was still facing Blossom, but she'd gotten up slowly, rising to her feet.

"Yes… Please, Bubbles. Let's just go home. Dad's really worried and sad too," Blossom pleaded with her sister.

"You're a liar, Blossom," Bubbles suddenly said. "This is where you did it. You tried to leave me here."

Bubbles' words had hit Blossom like a semi-truck. When Blossom realized just how deeply she had hurt Bubbles, partly with her Dad's lessons, it'd hurt her badly as well. Words could not express how she loved her sister - her sweetest sister, who would previously never hurt a fly, who'd treated even people who didn't deserve it nicely. She'd changed, and Blossom had always blamed herself for it.

"I… I'm so sorry, Bubbles. I really am," Blossom said, coming closer. Looking to her right, she saw the heart-shaped bed, now filthy with all kinds of stains, where Bubbles was held - for what, Blossom did not know. She assumed that Bubbles was there when she was attacked - or something. "I wish I didn't do it too…"

"I needed you, and you tried to leave me here," Bubbles continued. "I needed you, and you left me here!"

And she finally turned around, revealing what had become of her visage. Her eyes were a hellish red, more bloodshot than before. Her lips were dry and flaky. She had clawed herself in the cheek, and it was bleeding. Blossom lowered her MP5, disarmed by how contorted by hatred Bubbles' face was.

"You left me here!" Bubbles continued blaming Blossom for her past mistake, and the latter little
girl didn't even try to defend herself because she knew how wrong she was. "You left me here and I could have died! I could have died, and you left me! YOU LEFT ME HERE!"

"Bubbles, please - believe me - I'm so sorry - I am so, so sorry!" Blossom cried as she backed away from the manic and crazed Bubbles, who was coming closer and closer to her. She'd backed away until she'd fallen into the heart-shaped bed. There, she sat, paralyzed by guilt. "I wish… I wish I could take it all back- I wish I was a better sister-"

"But you can be a better sister," Bubbles said as she grabbed Blossom by the neck, and she didn't even resist. Before she said another word, she slammed her hard down on the heart-shaped bed and straddled her there. Putting both her hands around her neck, she started squeezing, reluctantly at first, before doing it for real. "You can be a better sister by dying for your crime."

Blossom couldn't breathe - Bubbles had meant it, and she was giving her throat a squeeze so hard that she completely blocked her windpipe. Blossom's hand went up to Bubbles' wrists, but she didn't tug at it. Within ten, twenty seconds, that changed, however, as her reflexes took over and she began pulling at her wrists.

However, Bubbles was stronger as she was under the corrupting influence of His Secret 2.0. Blossom, on the other hand, was under the influence of Bubbles. The words she said had hit home. There and then, she truly believed that she deserved to die for what she did, and if it would make Bubbles feel better. As such, Blossom was even trying hard not to resist, to just let it happen and be over with.

Soon, she could feel herself drift as she became light-headed, as she slipped ever-closer to unconsciousness, with death not too far away.

'Do you see the holes these nails made, Blossom?' Blossom remembered Dad saying a week ago. 'They represent what happens every time you act poorly on your anger. For every wrong thing you say or do, you're hurting someone or something, and sometimes, they can be permanent like these holes.'

'Bubbles…' Blossom remembered that day as if it was a movie she watched five minutes ago. She remembered seeing the holes in the fence post made by the nails she had driven into it and imagining that it was Bubbles. She'd imagined it so well that she could see a vision of her driving Duranium nails into her own sister. 'I did this to her…'

She remembered her dear old Dad's words of wisdom - he didn't force her to make promises that time. He'd gently guided her to it then, the way only the kindest Dad she knew would.

'I'll be the nicest, sweetest sister to her ever,' Blossom remembered the promise she made all those days ago, and now she could make it right with Bubbles.
Chapter 44: The Wages of Sin (Part 3)

Chapter Summary

Blossom and Bubbles attempts to work things out... with less than ideal results.

Chapter 44: The Wages of Sin (Part 3)

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

10 FEB (Friday) 1989. 2147.

The fight at the Silver Age Cineplex in the Tenement Area had taken a lot out of Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup. It wasn't quite over when they had gotten back home as their Dad had to patch them up, and that meant enduring stitches while sitting still like dolls. It was worse than fighting the bad guys as there was nothing they could do but to just take it lying down, and it was Dad doing the stitching. Even Blossom couldn't quite get the feeling out of her system that it was as if Dad was hurting them, even though she knew that it was exactly like taking a bitter pill to get better. Like how she had to drink water laced with painkillers occasionally.

Bubbles was the first to get the stitches, and she'd cried so profusely despite the stunning un-Bubbles-like display of berserk rage she'd put up to trash Naga like never before. Blossom had gone next - and her machete slash wounds required dozens upon dozens. Her gunshot wound was a separate, more painful matter. She tried with all her might not to cry as she knew that it might interfere with Dad's work, but she'd failed anyway. Even when the local anesthesia kicked in, it was still frightening.

It was only by her Dad's skill that it was over quickly. But even before that time, something else was on her mind.

Bubbles. And the realization of what she had done.

When the professor was done with her, he'd left her on a recovery bed next to Bubbles and gone away to work on Buttercup, who still had a sword stuck in her thigh, among other things.

Bubbles was still crying while she was recovering in the patient bed. It'd made Blossom feel terrible - as her leader, it was her responsibility to make sure they came out on top and in control, not half-dead after a close shave. It had also made her remember - and it made her remember well. Bubbles was half-naked in bed, and in pain and distress. It had mirrored that day in The Strip when she had tried to abandon her, even though she was miserable and had suffered in some way that Blossom didn't quite understand - all she knew was that Bubbles wouldn't cry for no reason.

"Bubbles," Blossom had called out to her poor sister.

"H-hmm?" Bubbles managed in between choking sobs.

"I'm sorry for what I did," Blossom had apologized. "I'm sorry I've been hitting you and making you cry. I'm sorry that I've been a terrible sister..." And she started sobbing too.
"Don't say that, Blossom," Bubbles had said.

"But I've been a terrible sister..." Blossom had stubbornly continued to berate herself.

"No, Blossom," Bubbles had met stubbornness with stubbornness. "Stop saying that. I'm happy to have a sister like you. I was always scared and weak and you were trying to help. You were always there for me. You protected me and played with me..."

Bubbles had said this, though, knowing that Blossom had slipped up more than once. She just didn't want Blossom to be sad and cry.

"I promise I won't hurt you again," Blossom said. "I promise..."


18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 1948.

Blossom couldn't help it any longer. She fought against Bubbles when she drew closer to death by asphyxiation. Bubbles made sure to press her fingers tighter against her neck. It was at this point that Blossom decided that it couldn't be this way - Bubbles shouldn't kill her. Dad would be upset. As narcissistic as it was, she couldn't let herself be killed for her sake, because she meant too much to Dad.

Blossom struggled and tried to scream for Bubbles to stop, but she could only manage a squeak. With diplomacy no longer an option, she gave her a double knee in the back, sending Bubbles flying forward and crashing face-first into the headboard of the heart-shaped bed, causing it to crack. Blossom took a welcoming deep gulp of air before flying off the dirty bed and facing Bubbles.

"Blossom, what are you doing!?" Bubbles screamed in disbelief and disappointment. "You're being selfish! Selfish!"

"I'm sorry, Bubbles. I can't die. Dad will be sad if I do-" Blossom said, but Bubbles interrupted her in a manic fit of rage.

"You'll die anyway!" Bubbles screamed. "And it's all your fault!"

Before Blossom could say another word, Bubbles launched forward, blindingly fast, throwing a right hook, which Blossom dodged.

"Bubbles, stop!" Blossom pleaded even as Bubbles continued assaulting her – following up with a left hook, then an upper-cut, all of which she dodged. She was getting backed into a corner, so she gave Bubbles a hard push while her guard was loose, sending her crashing into the heart-shaped bed. One of its legs gave way.

Bubbles didn't give Blossom time to even speak. She sat up growling at her, her eyes perpetually red – not just the pupils, but the white around it as well.

"We're sisters! We shouldn't be fighting!" Blossom tried to reason with Bubbles. Bubbles replied by charging at her and swiping at her with her nails. Blossom parried the first swipe, but felt Bubbles' nails jabbing into her side, though it was thankfully caught by a Kevlar plate, which she could feel was damaged as if shot by bullets.

Pushing Bubbles' arms away, Blossom jabbed at her face with her fist, motivated more by fear than
self-defense, and it connected, drawing blood.

Bubbles stumbled back, clutching her face.

"You said you wouldn't hurt me…" Bubbles cried deliriously. "You promised!"

"I- I'm sorry," Blossom blubbered at what she had done – she never wanted to fight with her sister. Bubbles, however, was less than sorry, as she took the opportunity to charge at Blossom and deliver a left punch, screeching like a banshee as she did. Blossom was able to parry that punch, but it had only been a distraction: she could feel nails swiping across her left cheek, raking skin.

That was followed up by a punch to her stomach, which was excruciating. Blossom sunk to the ground, on one knee. Determined to make good on her intention to kill, Bubbles reached for Blossom's neck once. Blossom, however, did a quick-draw with her pistol and fired only to miss when Bubbles slapped it away, the pistol tumbling far away, before reaching for her neck again. Blossom countered by grabbing Bubbles by her wrists.

Bubbles pushed with all her might, and she was winning before Blossom pushed back, trying to stand back up, only for Bubbles to compensate with a kind of strength unnatural even for an enhanced individual. The ground began cracking as a result, as if a sinkhole was forming. Blossom head-butted Bubbles in the teeth in an attempt to free herself, only to make her mad with the spilled blood in her mouth an afterthought for both of them. Frustrated and feeling cracks in her very psyche, Bubbles lunged at Blossom, sinking her teeth into her neck and biting down hard.

Blossom screamed in pain, but the same pain had given her strength. Forcing herself to her feet, she shoved a thumb into Bubbles eye to get her to release her jaws, and when she did, Blossom jabbed her in the side with a side-kick to create some distance before giving her the hardest uppercut she could manage, throwing Bubbles across the room.

The leader of The Three stumbled back, clutching her neck. Blood was spilling from her neck. She could feel that her skin and flesh were torn.

Bubbles, crazed as she was and riled up by the taste of her sister's blood, scrambled on the floor and got on all fours. She snarled at Blossom like an animal, with her blood all over her mouth and cheeks, before flying up and crawling away at a shocking speed on the ceiling into the darkness.

Seeing her sister like this had scared the living daylights out of Blossom. Was this really the work of her BerXerker power going out of whack? Blossom wasn't sure anymore.

Although her chest felt like a prepubescent heart attack waiting to happen, Blossom inched her way towards the door, still determined to bring Bubbles back. In her mind, it was the only thing to do.

"Bubbles?" Blossom called out, anxiously searching the ceiling with her eyes, which she had lit up like lanterns. "I know you're-" the pain in her neck felt like it was getting worse with every second. It was slick with blood, and her uniform felt wet from both perspiration and blood. "I know you're mad at me but… can't we just talk?"

Bubbles continued searching the ceiling as she walked out the red room and closed the door. Bubbles was nowhere to be found. A kind of disabling fear shot up in Blossom; she had a feeling that she might have run away again. That would mean she had to search for her all over Townsville again.

"Bubbles… please…” Blossom struggled to even speak. Giving up on the ceiling, she looked down – only for Bubbles to be there, rushing up to her and tackling her, throwing her through the door
she had just closed with a loud crash.

"Urgggh!" Blossom screamed as she was sent rolling, but she managed to roll herself into a kneeling position and feeling desperate, charged up her heat beam for a quick shot and fired – only for Bubbles to grab her by the jaw and push her beam out of the way. With a hand on her collar, Bubbles slammed Blossom against the wall, still keeping her heat beam, which was gushing out fiercely, out of the way.

"Stop shooting!" Bubbles demanded, and when Blossom refused to, she slammed her head against the wall and made a hole in it.

"No!" Blossom screamed her defiance as she stubbornly continued to try to lower her gaze - but Bubbles was too strong and she was in a compromised position. Her face was so glowing hot that her skull was showing through. Her tears of pain and sadness boiled, forming thin, white wisps emanating from her eyes. Bubbles slammed Blossom's back through the wall this time and a second time when the heat beam continued to burn the ceiling, providing an ominous red glow to compliment the only working source of light in the room.

Blossom panted from exhaustion. The glow in her face quickly disappeared. Her skull had gone back into hiding.

"Why, Bubbles?" she muttered, her entire body flaring up in pain. "I… I apologized and… I thought w-we've…"

Bubbles interrupted Blossom by putting her index finger on her bloody lips. "Shh…" she hushed her up.

Bubbles' drugs had run its course, but her 'BerXerker' fury was strong as ever. For once, there was some clarity in her head even as she was panting with exertion herself.

"I guess I've never forgiven you," Bubbles replied, the growl in her voice gone. Blossom had stopped panting. The hellish red glow eventually disappeared too. "But… It wasn't because of that, Blossom, and I'm sorry."

"Wha… What… do you mean?" Blossom asked. She could feel herself slipping away. She had lost a lot of blood and spent too much Chemical X, and it was on top of the operations of the day. The back of her head felt like a broken light bulb and her back was burning as if slathered with acid.

Bubbles looked away. She looked like she had a lot going on in her mind - too much for a little girl, too much for the most innocent of The Three. It'd made Blossom worried. What in Dad's name is going on? It was as if the more she uncovered, the more she didn't know. It was like trying to unearth a pyramid.

"You wouldn't understand," Bubbles simply said, before returning her sad, regretful gaze on Blossom. She raised a fist at her while she was still keeping her pinned on the wall. But she held it there as if deciding. Pearls of tears and rivulets of sweat streamed down her cheeks when she realized how close she was to doing it, washing away Blossom's blood on her cheeks. Her fist faltered. "You've never understood me when you should have."

And Bubbles' internal conflict had saved her. Flashlights shone in from outside the red room.

"Blossom, Bubbles?" A voice rang out, strong and deep, in the abandoned building.

"Mister Mullens!" Blossom called out. Bubbles noticed too late but tried to cover her mouth anyway. She was caught red-handed when multiple beams of light converged on her.
"Bubbles - Jesus, what did you do!?" a female voice questioned, agitated. Shocked. It was Olivia. Bubbles felt shame overcoming her, though it didn't last long. Her eyes went from baby blue to hellish red again. Her frustrations and anger were magnified ten-fold, and before that, it was barely bearable.

"Whar have you done?" a dog's voice spoke. "Rur-les…"

Bubbles growled before the dog did.

"Bubbles - don't!" Blossom screamed when she realized what Bubbles was going to do. Letting go of her, Bubbles flew at Mullens' group, none of whom fired a single shot. Mullens was punched in the chest and knocked out of the way, slamming against the door. She tackled Olivia and sent her crashing into a wall outside. Stanley Talker had ducked out of the way, slinking into the shadows. Bubbles, panting, turned around. With the poison in her blood triggered, her willingness to kill returned. She glared at Blossom, who was sitting against the wall, still clutching her neck. Half her uniform was redder than pink.

The drug-crazed little girl walked up to her, intent on finishing the job. But before she could reach her, Stanley Talker emerged out of the shadows, jumping in front of Blossom, illuminated by the injured little girl's eye-light and the singular lamp in the room. He growled at Bubbles.

"Rrrr… Step back, Rur-les!" Stanley Talker warned, the hostile growl in his voice clear, primal, and his fangs were bared. "Ri consider you ra friend - Ri ron't want to hurt ryou!"

"Get out of the way!" Bubbles hollered at the talking dog.

"No!" Talker defied her stubbornly. Bubbles came a few steps closer, before breaking into a run. Stanley Talker jumped at her and bit her in the arm when she raised a fist at him. Blossom could feel it on the floor - the talking dog's pounce was powerful. So powerful that he actually floored Bubbles, and he stood over her, snarling and growling as he hung onto Bubbles' forearm stubbornly, his teeth digging into her flesh, drawing blood. Bubbles screamed, but not in the usual innocent way.

Bubbles punched Stanley Talker in the eye in response - and when he wouldn't let go, she'd done so multiple times until he did, cracking his canine ballistic goggles, even the side of his helmet. Throwing the talking dog off her, she gave him a hard kick and flipped herself into a crouching position. Stanley Talker whimpered. Blossom saw that Bubbles had done some cruel damage to his eye, which had swollen shut - half the dog's face was irregular in shape and mutilated.

Still, Talker hung on and tried to snap at Bubbles once more - only for Bubbles to seize him by the forelegs and hurl him into a wall - hard. There was a loud thump of flesh on concrete, and the concrete cracked with a loud crunch… though the concrete wasn't the only thing cracking and crunching.

"Mister Talker!" Blossom shouted, still in tears, shocked that Bubbles had continued to lash out at friends and family. The talking dog did not get up after getting thrown halfway through the concrete wall. At least, it wasn't for a lack of trying. He was able to drag himself a foot or two away from the wall before falling and rolling on his back, trembling and whimpering in pain.

Bubbles was clutching her arm in the meantime. Inspecting it, she saw deep puncture marks, made by Stanley Talker's teeth, going around in a half-oval pattern. Bubbles gritted her teeth, not just in pain, but in anger and betrayal.
She came up to Stanley Talker.

"You've been a very bad dog," Bubbles said, dispassionate, seething with hatred.

"Rur-rles..." the talking dog whimpered; every word spoken had to be paid for with pain. "H-have... mercy..."

"Mercy? Mercy is for the weak!" Bubbles screamed madly.

"Y-your... father rould be... dis...sappointed..." Stanley managed to say between labored breaths. "I... knew him since... Ri wassa pup..."

The mention of her father had caught Bubbles' attention. The reason why she could even comprehend the word 'mercy' was because of her Dad. He had taken great pains to teach her the concept. The mere memory of it had calmed her down, her eyes returning to a soft, friendly baby blue.

"Dad..." Bubbles mumbled.

"Bubbles, don't do it... He's your friend," Blossom had crawled up to her and hold her hand. "We can work things out as sisters. Please, let me try."

The rapid thumping of a helicopter's rotor blades could be heard outside. There were more footsteps in the distance.

"Please..." Blossom pleaded. Bubbles looked down, for once without hatred in her eyes, but regret.

"Blossom!??" someone shouted from somewhere in the building, close by. It was a male voice. Seasoned. "Bubbles!??"

A man in black gear and armor emerged in the doorway. More of them swarmed behind him. Some started helping Olivia up.

It was Mister Blake. The men behind him were Agent Fields and Sergeant Holliday.

"Bubbles – what did you do!??" Blake echoed Olivia's words without knowing it. "Did you do all this? Tell me you didn't."

"I did..." Bubbles admitted – too tired of hiding to lie any further. Regret was coming up in full force. She had done things she would never have done otherwise, and she had caused a lot of damage as a result.

Blake entered the room to inspect the damage. Stanley Talker was incapacitated and no longer very talkative. In fact, he was silent, concentrating solely on heaving his breaths and panting. His tongue hung out, limp, as though he no longer even have the strength to lift it. Blossom was a mess, and she looked like she was dry of blood.

"Medic! Get over here!" Sergeant Holliday ordered. Two men rushed over immediately.

"Holy hell, isn't this a bit much for a little sibling rivalry?" Corporal Zach, one of the attending medics, commented. Setting down a first aid kit, he began checking Blossom's bite wound.

"We're going to have to report this," Agent Fields said to his commander. "We'll have to take Bubbles in for this."

Agent Blake stared at Bubbles, who was looking down at her boots, unable to face anyone for what
she had done. As if considering that option. And seriously, too.

Blossom had been listening. She didn't like the sound of it.

Two men, Sergeant Holliday, and Private Jessup, came forward, guns up. Holliday had an M9 Anti-Material Rifle, Duranium-barrelled.

"Sorry, Bubbles," Holliday apologized even as he was pointing his Girl-killer gun at her. Bubbles' eyes turned red. "I want your hands up now."

"Wait, no! Please!" Blossom could barely stand up, but she'd ran to shield her sister from the men. "Please don't take Bubbles away!"

"Guys, wait just a second," Blake said, gesturing for them to back off.

"But sir-" Agent Fields objected.

"Just wait!" Agent Blake repeated his order. "I didn't give any orders just yet!"

"Don't, Mister Blake!" Blossom pleaded for her sister. "It's my fault this happened – please don't take my sister away because of me. She's sorry too, right, Bubbles?"

Blossom turned around to look at Bubbles, but she didn't respond at all to what she said. Didn't so much as a nod.

"Your father needs to know," Blake simply nodded, and as he was looking down, unsure of himself anymore as if searching the dirty, bloody floor for a sign, he continued: "I'm going to have to inform him-"

"Please don't tell Dad!" Blossom pleaded. Blake stared hard into Blossom's pink, glowing eyes, searching them just like how he did it with the floor. "He'll be mad at Bubbles and… and it'll be my fault."

Blake appeared stock-still, thinking. Blossom couldn't see past the poker face he'd put up, even when his aviator shades were taken off for the night. She hated it whenever Blake became impenetrable - even though he was rarely this way. It was so not who he was, at least that was Blossom's impression of him.

"Tell you what," he finally said. "I'll leave it up to you. Tell him if you're feeling honest enough. Don't, if you think it's good for Bubbles. You're the smart one," Blake said.

"Does that mean you won't take Bubbles away?" Blossom asked, still concerned, still wearing that anxious look on her face, something which Blake found he couldn't stand. As unmarried as he was in his forties, as childless, it was something he thought should be foreign in a child's face.

"No, I won't take her away," Blake reassured Blossom.

"But sir, what about-" Agent Fields was about to advice against it, but Blake wouldn't hear about it.

"My decision's made. Now listen up!" Blake projected his voice his time, calling to attention everyone in the room. Not just Fields, not just Blossom, and Bubbles, but his inner circle as well as Mullens and Olivia, who were just recovering from getting thrown about like ragdolls by Bubbles. "Nothing happened here. Bubbles got upset. She ran away. It took us a long time, but we found her. We live happily ever after. End of story."
Happily ever after… Those words had never sounded more hollow to Bubbles than it ever was. Agent Blake then turned to Blossom.

"You make sure you keep your wounds a secret from everyone except your family, you understand?" Blake ordered her. Blossom thought he looked mad. She almost wanted to ask if he was, but she decided not to in the end, afraid that she would find out it was true.

"Yes…" Blossom obeyed subserviently.

"Now come on, let's get the both of you patched up and home for dinner," Blake said. Everything was a blur to Blossom after that, as she was stuck in her own mind, trying to get a grip and accept what had happened between her and Bubbles, trying to accept that Bubbles had basically just tried to kill her in a deserted place. When she was out of the moment, it quickly dawned on her that it was a twisted affair. Corporal Zach was able to get them bandaged up quick and orderly, and before they knew it, they were led to Blake's Chinook. Had it been any other circumstance, Blossom and Bubbles would have marveled at the insides of the giant helicopter.

Detective Garrett Mullens and Olivia Mullens were left behind. Stanley Talker was checked on by Corporal Zach, and found to be stable, but in need of a doctor - or veterinarian. The senior, however, didn't get the crew to go home immediately. He'd stayed to light up, much to the concern of the daughter.

He lit a cigarette as he paced the room Blossom or Bubbles nearly died in. He started poking around, his motive a mystery even to Olivia.

"What are you doing, dad?" Olivia finally cracked and asked when she'd had enough of watching her dad strutting around, seemingly without purpose, smoking even though he quit a month and a half ago.

"This isn't the first time Bubbles acted this way," Detective Mullens explained. "Back at the stables, she took off just like she did today. Next thing we know, there's a stiff John Doe who turns out to be a USDO agent, and Townsville's very own Charles Manson got to laugh his way to… God knows where."

"What does that have anything to do with this?" Olivia asked, still clueless.

"I asked Blossom's father about the drugs that's been turning up all over Townsville," Detective Mullens continued. "He's all but told me that Bubbles is connected somehow, even if he doesn't know it, not yet."

The detective had been very careful where he was stepping, and down on the floor, he could see scuff marks. The Girls were herculean in strength, and it was easy for them to leave traces of their presence around. He'd spotted one - though it was still faint enough that even gifted police officers like his daughter could miss. The trail led under a bed, so he got down on his knees and peeked under there, bringing out his flashlight to see better.

Sure enough, there was a metal syringe there, likely slid out of view by one of the Girls.
Chapter 45: Like The Seasons

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup attempt to deal with their personal tragedies, but life isn't going to make it easy.

Chapter 45: Like The Seasons

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 2219.

"-And they live happily ever after…" Professor Utonium finished off his last story, before leaning over Blossom to peck her on the forehead, then to Bubbles and doing the same. Walking around the bed, he sat down beside Buttercup and tried to do the same, but when she put out her hands as if to shield herself from a car crash, he decided not to and settled for a pat on her shoulder, which she shrugged off anyway. The professor sighed.

"Dad… Tell me again about the seasons," Bubbles asked just as the professor was about to get up and leave. She really didn't want him to leave. In the time since her attack on Blossom, she had come to regret her actions - and it was thoughts of her Dad that had snapped her out of it. She wanted to spend as much time with him as he could, thinking naively that, perhaps, doing so could solve all her problems.

"Which ones?" the professor asked, smiling at Bubbles' curiosity. He couldn't wait to usher the Girls into the other seasons of the year. It would be their first time experiencing them.

"The next one. Is it spring?" Bubbles requested.

"Yeah, I would love to hear about spring," Blossom added. She wanted to add summer to the list, but decided to be diplomatic about it and agree with Bubbles.

Buttercup, on the other hand, groaned at the prospect of having to listen to Dad. She was feeling exhausted despite having spent her entire day indoors and mostly idle. Everything had to be done painstakingly and tiresomely without her enhanced abilities, and it had worn her out. It was something that felt like she could never get used to, contrary to what her Dad said. She would never trust her Dad again.

"Well, spring is when it gets hotter, and the snow melts," the professor had returned to Bubbles' side, taking her tiny hand. "The sun will be brighter, the ground greener, the birds will start chirping and you can walk outside without your winter jacket and snowshoes. The trees will start growing leaves, and so will plants grow from the ground and flowers bloom. The world will be so much more colorful."

Bubbles teared up at the image she had formed in her mind. She had, of course, seen pictures of it, but she knew that it wouldn't be anything compared to the real thing. With what she'd been up to lately, it felt uncertain, somehow, that she would get to see spring even though she knew that she was going to live.
"What will we do in spring?" Bubbles asked further, her hand gripping the professor tightly. She really wanted him to stay. She was getting the shakes again, though she had been trying to hide it. She had one syringe left, and it would be an hour or two before she would dare to use it - any time earlier, and she would risk exposure.

"We could walk in the park, have a go at the playground. We could even have a picnic since it wouldn't be so cold," the professor said. "Me, Mom and the three of you. Imagine having sandwiches, fruits and orange juice in the middle of a field full of flowers under an azure sky… Bees buzzing about, butterflies fluttering around…"

"It sounds really nice, Dad," Blossom said, smiling at the imagery. It'd help her forget that her sister had nearly killed her for revenge. "I can't wait to have a picnic. It sounds like fun."

After giving the Girls his self-concocted images of spring to dream about, he switched off the table lamp and left them to join Selicia in bed.

Time seemed to pass slowly in the dark. Blossom's mind had gone back in time, to hours before. She couldn't believe that she and Bubbles could reconcile with each other so quickly after Bubbles had tried to commit sororicide.

'I promised that I will be the best and sweetest sister to you, Bubbles, that I'll never hurt you again,' Blossom had said to her while they were riding Mister Blake's Chinook towards home. 'And you can't kill me, or Dad will be really sad and I won't be with you and Buttercup. We're sisters, and we should help each other, not… kill each other. That's how it's going to be from now on, no matter what - just like Dad wanted. Okay, Bubbles?'

'Okay…' Bubbles had said, though there was something on her face that Blossom had trouble reading. With only three months of experience reading faces, she couldn't quite tell what Bubbles was thinking or trying not to reveal.

Blossom would go on to lie to Dad about what had happened later. She would defend Bubbles by lying that she had gotten angry again and said some mean words, causing Bubbles to run away, and when she found her, they fought and injured each other pretty badly. She would cover it up by saying that they had made up after that. Dad was, of course, angry, but surprisingly proud that Blossom didn't hit Bubbles at the beginning.

Touched by Blossom's selflessness, Bubbles played along, and acting on her regret, had tried to make up for what she did by being compliant and apologetic for the rest of the day, or what was left of it. There wasn't anything else she could do, at least while she was in the light.

The fairy godmother would be displeased, that she knew. But in the darkness, it was the least she could do for Blossom. Much as she was driven by her addiction to kill Blossom, she found that she couldn't do it. The fairy godmother had to understand, Bubbles tried to reason. There had to be a middle-ground between her addiction and her love for her sisters, Bubbles hoped and sincerely believed that that was the way forward.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

18 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 2315.

Bubbles couldn't sleep. Her withdrawal symptoms were killing her. She could feel that her pajamas and her pillow were soaking wet. Her shakes were nigh-uncontrollable, and she was constantly thirsty and hungry, where in previous cases, she was neither. She was hoping that the fairy
godmother would appear tonight and perhaps pity her enough to give her more of her magic, but she couldn't wait any longer.

She still had a single syringe of His Secret 2.0 left. Rolling over in bed, she spied on her sisters to see if they were asleep. It was easy to do so, as their eyes would glow when they were opened and awake, which was very visible in the dark. She couldn't see Blossom's glowing pink pupils and... were there speckles of green in the dark? Bubbles chalked it down to her withdrawal symptoms affecting her eyesight. She couldn't see Buttercup's glowing green pupils either. Both of her sisters were asleep. Good.

Folding her blanket off of her, Bubbles hovered out of bed and glided to the walk-in closet, opening the door and landing beside her tactical gear. She pulled her last syringe of magic out of a magazine pouch and padded towards the door leading out.

Her hands were shaking, and she made her way to the washroom urgently, her mind a muddled mess as she couldn't think straight. What clarity that was there in her mind was devoted to the drug, and how best to work with it - the washroom was perfect for cleaning up - she wouldn't want anyone to see the blood from injection herself with the drug, and she needed another bath to get rid of her perspiration and shakes.

All she could think of then was the drug - the drug that was in her hand. Closing the door to the washroom, she lowered the toilet seat lid and sat down.

Yes, yes, yes! She thought as she began the usual ritual for doping herself with the ambrosial substance, though at this point, it was more of a medicine to her now since a single dose could only be used to stave off the unpleasant withdrawal effects and help her get some sleep.

Slapping the crook of her elbow, she began by finding a vein, and when she spotted the largest one, stuck the needle in. Yes, yes, yes!

But what wasn't part of the ritual was the door to the washroom opening and in stepped Buttercup. Buttercup's jaw dropped upon seeing Bubbles with a metal syringe in her hand, the needle stuck into her forearm. She had been having trouble sleeping herself, as she was still getting used to being sensitive to every sensation in her body - her thirst and hunger were stronger, for instance - and she was still depressed over losing her powers. It didn't help that she was wondering what action she had missed out because of it.

Buttercup froze in horror as she witnessed Bubbles' secret. She had seen the metal syringe before - they were found in many of the crime scenes she had been to. And the way Bubbles was using it... it was as if the needle was made of Duranium.

"Buttercup! you weren't supposed to get out of bed!" Bubbles said in disbelief when she had been caught red-handed. Her eyes shone red when she realized she was in trouble, and she couldn't control it. She couldn't control the anger and madness rising in her either, as she realized that she had to try to keep her drug habit a secret. By any means necessary.

The moment Buttercup saw Bubbles' eyes turning from baby blue to hellish red, she bolted. She knew what it meant, and she was terrified as she was powerless - in all senses of the word.

"MOM! DAD!" Buttercup screamed as she ran down the hallway, screamed like a baby, like never before. Bubbles flew up behind her, catching up within seconds. Taking her by the collar and neck, she slammed her against the wall.
"Shut up, Buttercup!" Bubbles warned her sister, who promptly obeyed, afraid of what she might do to her - afraid since she couldn't fight back. Bubbles' grip was iron, and Buttercup could not free herself with whatever pitiful strength she had left. Bubbles placed her index finger on her lips. "Shhh… It's going to be okay…"

Before Bubbles could do or say anything more, however, the master bedroom door slammed open. Professor Utonium and Selicia had rushed out, zipping and buttoning up whatever they could get their hands on.

"What's happening!?" the professor shouted urgency as he started flipping switches, lighting up the corridor they were in. "Buttercup?"

"Bubbles, what are you doing to Buttercup!?" Selicia scolded Bubbles when she saw her pinning her favorite against the wall.

"Mom! Dad!" Buttercup screamed and weaseled out of a stunned Bubbles' loosened grip. "Bubbles' been using drugs! Just like how you said not to!"

"But she's lying!" Bubbles lied, but she felt backed in a corner. Her mind worked like never before, fuelled by the desperation in her veins, both for the fairy godmother's magic and the maintenance of her relationship with her parents.

There was only one way to get out of it.

"I found Buttercup with this thing in the washroom," Bubbles lied and handed her syringe of His Secret 2.0 to Dad, all the while trying her best not to reveal her withdrawal symptoms.

"You lying piece of shit!" Buttercup yelled when she realized what Bubbles was doing. Angered and not thinking straight, she pushed Bubbles only to feel a brick wall. Surprisingly, Bubbles fell backward. When she came to her senses, she'd realized, too, that she had just dug a deeper grave for herself.

"Buttercup!" Dad warned the tomboy. "Language! Since when did you learn to talk like that!?"

"But she's trying to trick you!" Buttercup shouted, incredulous that she had been targeted when she was telling the truth.

"What do you say to that, Bubbles?" Dad asked the timid one, who had shed a few tears while she was sitting on the ground where she had been 'pushed'.

"Buttercup's lying and I can show you…" Bubbles claimed. Real tears had started flowing. She couldn't believe the extent she had to go to keep her secret – sacrificing a syringe that she was so close to using – but it had to be done.

"Mom? Dad? What's happening?" Blossom mumbled as she stood at the open doorway of her room, rubbing her eyes.

"Nothing, Blossom," the professor said. "I'm sorry we woke you up."

Bubbles, much to Buttercup's confusion and Mom and Dad's curiosity, led the entire family back into the Girls' room. She went over to the walk-in closet, opened the door wide and switched the lights on inside. Dad followed her in.

Buttercup knew what she was going to do the moment she stepped into the closet. The Mom had to hold her back when she tried to stop Bubbles. Selicia thought it was for the best – she didn't want
Buttercup to get hurt and further incriminate herself.

"No! Dad! She's lying!" Buttercup cried as she tried to wriggle out of Selicia's hands, but she was too weak to do so even though she had gotten some of her strength back. "Mom! Stop her, please! Mom!"

From a huge pile of cardboard boxes, Bubbles pulled out a large one from the juicy center. It clearly had Buttercup's name on it, spelled as 'Butercub'. They took it out of the closet to be examined.

Once outside, the professor set the box down on the floor and uncovered the lid.

"NO!" Buttercup screamed. No one else in the room except her and Bubbles expected what came next.

There was something like forty or so syringes inside, all sheathed in metal. But that wasn't the only horror to be found in the box. There was a jar containing human teeth and nails, some still bloody, and some with rotten veins and bits of gum still attached. Animal bones were rattling inside as well. The only innocent thing to be found inside was Selicia's torn security gym towel, which Buttercup had taken to calling 'Blankie'.

"What is this?" the professor was at a loss for words. Angry beyond reason, he clutched a whole bunch of syringe and pulled them out of the box, holding them in front of Buttercup, who shrank away from his aggressive outburst. "How long have you been using these, Buttercup!?"

"But I didn't!" Buttercup cried. "I swear!"

"Don't lie to me!" the professor shouted. "Stop lying to me! How long!?"

Buttercup looked away instead, crying and shivering and afraid. Throwing the syringes full of His Secret on the carpeted ground, he pulled out the jar of teeth and nails and a handful of animal bones.

"How long have you been collecting these!?" the professor all but screamed at Buttercup. Even Blossom, who had no involvement in this, was terrified of Dad. However, she felt guilty for not keeping a closer eye on her wayward sister. "HOW LONG!?"

"I don't know!" Buttercup managed to answer, though she couldn't think of one at the moment because of how terrified and vulnerable she felt.

"This is sick, you know that!?" the professor scolded the little girl. He tossed the psycho-trophies back into the box and grabbed Buttercup, who hadn't and couldn't answer him, by the arm and started pulling her towards the door. "Looks like we're going to have to do a few more medical examinations on you tonight!"

"No, Dad, no! Not the medical examinations!" Buttercup cried as she struggled in vain to free herself. Tough as she was, she was afraid of what it might mean – she had already lost her powers to a 'medical examination' and she couldn't imagine what she would lose next. Her nose, ears, and fingers? Her imagination ran wild with fear.

The professor, meanwhile, thought that it was harder to drag her around, which could mean many things – the drugs might have undone what the Anti-X had achieved, or the Anti-X could be as temporary as conventional medication.
"I couldn't do it," Bubbles lamented as she sat on the snow in the backyard, her head bowed as she knew she had failed her benefactor. "She's my sister and I couldn't do it."

The fairy godmother did not respond, and it made Bubbles scared. She was shivering in the cold, her bones felt like glass, and her muscles like frayed strings. Her nerves were on fire. Without the drugs or at least the madness kicking in, she felt like paper; weak and vulnerable. The drugs hadn't done her any favors in the long run.

"Then you've just broken a rule," the fairy godmother said coldly, and she was nothing like how she first behaved. The maternal warmth was gone. "You are supposed to do everything I tell you to."

"I'm sorry… I just couldn't…" Bubbles apologized meekly. After working up the courage, she looked up at the fairy godmother and immediately regretted it. She was glaring down at her, like some displeased goddess looking to smite someone. "P-please help me. I'm in pain. I can't take it anymore."

"Neither can I," the fairy godmother said, before turning her back on her and walking away.

Bubbles couldn't help but to get mad - to the point of her eyes turning hellish red. The fairy godmother was supposed to help her! She flew towards her, winding an arm up for a punch, but then there was light. It felt as if she had hit some kind of a hard barrier, and she fell into the snow, her head feeling like a cracked egg. She could already feel a gigantic bruise forming.

"You ungrateful little brat," the fairy godmother said as she put her arm down, dispersing the shield of red energy she had conjured to protect herself. "I helped you, and this is how you repay me? With disobedience and aggression? I asked for one tiny thing that would rid you of an evil sister anyway - and you tried to strike me?"

"I'm sorry – I just… I just need it," Bubbles said as she was recovering on the ground, cowering in the presence of the fairy godmother as she came back up to her, looming over her, looking every bit like a goddess deciding her fate, capable of destroying her with one wave of a hand. "Please – I need it. I just need it!"

"You'll have to be punished for breaking a rule, Bubbles," the fairy godmother glowered at her beneficiary.

"I'll take anything – please, just give it to me!" Bubbles begged as she scrambled to her knees, pulling on the hem of the entity's long skirt.

Smiling, the fairy godmother, who seemed to have lost some of her white glow, reached into her dark blue pouch and pulled out a needle-less syringe just like she did the last time. It was even larger than before, looking like it could give her two doses at once. "What's the magic word?"

"Please," Bubbles acquiesced, feeling in her guts that she could die any minute now without the drug.

"Tell me, Bubbles, what am I? How would you describe me?" the fairy godmother continued dragging their meeting out, her smile growing wider.

"You're helpful, Miss Fairy Godmother," Bubbles spat out the first word she could think of. She
couldn't think with her insides on fire. But the fairy godmother didn't seem impressed. She glowered at her and was about to put her syringe back into her bag when Bubbles continued heaping praises on her: "You're kind, and- and nice and… really kind and-"

"That's enough," the matriarchal being stopped her before she could continue: "I'm glad you feel that way, Bubbles. Now stop talking and moving."

The fairy godmother made a hand gesture and red energy emanated from her hand, striking Bubbles. Bubbles fell backward into the snow, in a rough spread-eagled pose. She wanted to scream and beg, but she couldn't. Neither could she move her body; she had been completely paralyzed. Thrusting out her casting hand, she shot a continuous red beam at Bubbles, which engulfed her.

It was like being burned alive, but worse. As Bubbles endured the excruciating pain, she couldn't get away nor scream and beg for it to stop. All she could do was writhe a little – her mouth opened, but it was a silent scream. Seconds felt like minutes, even hours. Meanwhile, as the fairy godmother continued to render her punishment, she smiled and laughed in that silent way, her glow and blue eyes turning red, the maternal look on her face turning wicked. Bubbles' vision began to blur, then turn black…

"Wake up. Wake up, Bubbles," a female voice called out to her. She nudged her with what felt like a sharp point. Bubbles opened her eyes, hoping that it was Blossom, or even Buttercup, or Mom. It wasn't.

"Who do you think I was?" it turned out to be the fairy godmother still, nudging at her with the point of her foot. "I've compressed a few hours of pain into a few minutes. Are you grateful I've saved your time?"

Bubbles sat up with difficulty. She was still feeling raw after her punishment such that she couldn't reply. The fairy godmother grabbed a whole bunch of her hair and yanked.

"Ow!" Bubbles cried, only to receive a slap from her benefactor.

"Quiet before I punish you again!" the woman said, her glow still red. Even her dress had turned red and black. "What do you say, you ingrate!?"

"T-thank you, fairy godmother. I'm grateful!" Bubbles wasted no time in filling the ethereal woman's ears with what she wanted to hear.

"Yes you are, aren't you," the fairy godmother said. "Before I give you what you need, I have one more favor to ask from you."

"I'll do anything, please-" Bubbles begged.

"I've invested a lot in you, Bubbles, whether you know it or not. It's not easy being here in this… filthy environment, and it's not easy making the right preparations and meeting you," the fairy godmother said. "You are difficult, Bubbles. You should be lucky I haven't given up on you."

"Please don't…" Bubbles mumbled.

"So you will do this for me: You'll kill the man you call Daddy…" the fairy godmother said this as she extended the large syringe towards Bubbles' face again. "And I'll give you twelve vials of my magic."
Bubbles' eyes floated to the ground the moment she heard this, feeling powerless to resist the request.

"But if you kill Blossom on top of that…" the fairy godmother added as she lifted Bubbles' chin so they could make eye contact. "I'll give you all the magic you'll ever need. I'll take you with me to my magical land, and it'll be quite painless from then on. I'll even take Buttercup with me so you'll still have a sister to play with."

Bubbles shut her eyes, not just afraid of the fairy godmother, but also of herself, because the temptation to kill Dad and Blossom was too great, and she was seriously considering it. She could only be grateful that she didn't need to kill Mom and Buttercup…

"What do you say?" the fairy godmother asked again as she pushed the syringe closer to Bubbles mouth. Bubbles forced herself on the syringe, gripping the woman's wrist with both her hands as she sucked on it.

The taste was horrible but she loved it – loved it to death. When the syringe was dry, Bubbles withdrew herself and started coughing and throwing up a portion of the drug in the snow. Instead of leaving it alone as normal people would, Bubbles bent low to suck it back out of the snow again, and when she couldn't get all of it back, she began eating the snow.

The fairy godmother watched with demented satisfaction in her eyes as the little addict degraded herself.
Chapter 46: No Going Back (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Things are set permanently in motion while Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup tried to go back to how things were.

Chapter 46: No Going Back (Part 1)


19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 0720.

Olivia Mullens had been sitting beside the bed holding Stanley Talker for many hours. She was even sleeping in it. The past sixteen hours had been eventful, to say the least. The newly-christened Powerpuff Girls, already down a Girl, had gone missing, prompting a city-wide search by the USDO and select members of the TPD. It turned out to be a case of sibling rivalry gone too far, expressed in such a way only enhanced individuals were capable of. Blossom and Bubbles were hurting each other over certain differences.

If only that was it.

Yesterday, her dad, a senior detective made lieutenant just over a month ago, had discovered compelling evidence of something worse, something even more sinister. He found a metal syringe with 'His Secret 2.0' written on it. Signs at the crime scene suggested that either Blossom or Bubbles had used the drug. Chances were, it was Bubbles.

Olivia couldn't believe it herself when her father started putting it all together, but once the puzzle picture was assembled, it was all too obvious that she was surprised no one else figured it out. Bubbles had been acting strangely for the past week, gaining a new power that seemed mundane - increased aggression, increased strength, no inhibition, and glowing red eyes. No one in her family thought her 'BerXerker' power suited her, and they were right all along.

Her father reasoned that it wasn't a new power. He'd compared it to the cultists who had shown similar symptoms. They had interrogated said cultists, and they were all using 'His Secret 2.0' too. They, too, were more aggressive and stronger.

The other tell-tale signs of the truth had rolled out of his father's mouth smoothly. Professor Utonium of the USDO, suspected something, and he was the go-to person when it came to the stuff that made the Powerpuff Girls, or so Doctor Vanum, another prominent member of the USDO, said. Utonium was likely too biased as the Girls' father to see it. Then there were the suspicious happenings surrounding the death of a USDO intelligence agent Jackard and the disappearance and escape of Leopold Sutton, and Bubbles happened to be there too. For some reason, her dad suspected Bubbles of working with the Cult of His Promise too, somehow, despite being a mere little girl, endowed with superpowers but watched closely by parents and a federal agency.

There were still a few missing pieces to the puzzle, and one of them was the supplier - how would Bubbles be able to get a hold of her supply of drugs? They had seen her going off on the dope multiple times, which meant multiple doses of the stuff at least.
Stanley Talker's shifting had distracted Olivia from her thoughts. The talking dog had been out for fourteen hours, at least, and he had been operated on in that period, too.

When Stanley Talker was in need of medical attention, she and Detective Mullens were in huge trouble as Stanley was a sapient dog. The hospitals in Townsville were dedicated to Human patients, so a veterinary clinic was their best option. But that wasn't the end of the story. When the veterinarian on shift tried to operate on Stanley, she discovered that her instruments could not cut or penetrate the dog's skin and flesh - her scissors and shavers couldn't even cut the dog's fur!

Olivia had to call the USDO for assistance. They were surprisingly receptive, perhaps because of the need for inter-agency cooperation and PR management. They'd sent in a doctor, Simmons, to assist. The rest was smooth-sailing, if graphic and bloody. The USDO doctor had brought along instruments made of Duranium to operate on the dog, and within a few hours, were able to fix the fractures and flesh wounds in Stanley's face - most of it, anyway. Only time would tell what the prognosis would be.

"Rur-rls… No… Stop…" Stanley Talker whimpered as he shifted. His legs started sliding on the mattress as if running. A nightmare, likely. The blanket covering the dog had nearly fallen off, but Olivia pulled it up. Her effort was quickly undone, however, when the talking dog sat up, barking in shock as he transitioned from dream to reality. Olivia stepped back, giving him space - she knew what Stanley was capable of. A single accidental chomp from him could put her in retirement forever.

"Rrr… Sorry…" the talking dog apologized, before lying back down in bed, careful with the half of his face that was mending.

"Don't worry about it, doggy," Olivia said. Returning to his side, she adjusted her chair and sat down again, holding one of the dog's fore-paws.

Silence. Dreadful silence.

"Rur-rls… She…" the talking dog uttered. "Ris she… alright?"

"She stood down, Stan," Olivia said as she stroked the dog's paw. She felt sorry for the creature. He was only two years old. In dog years, he was little more than an adolescent, still, and yet, he had suffered much - experimentation under the USDO, being hunted like an animal for weeks - after making a transition to becoming something more than a mundane animal - and finally, getting beaten to pulp by a little girl he thought was his friend. "Blossom and Blake took her home. I think she's sorry she did this to you, 'cause she stopped and…"

Olivia couldn't think of what to say any further.

"Ris she alright?" Stanley repeated his question and Olivia nodded as she understood why.

"She wasn't hurt," Olivia said and decided to keep it at that: simple and optimistic.

"Ris it over?" he asked further. Olivia shook her head as her eyes wandered down.

"No," she said. "My father thinks there's a lot more to it. He thinks Bubbles have been acting under the influence of drugs."

"That… Ractually makes sense…" Stanley Talker was still struggling to speak. The bandaged half of his face was still on fire.

Before they could continue their conversation, the door leading to the room they were in – a kind
of animal ward – opened. Two figures walked in. A kindly woman in her forties with a stethoscope around her neck, the veterinarian, and someone familiar to Stanley Talker. There was something in his hand. A paper bag.

He was an old man from the USDO. Both the talking dog and Olivia could see a mix of both USDO soldiers and police officers guarding the corridor outside. The man was wearing a lab coat of some kind, with a USDO ID tag clipped onto his breast pocket. The talking dog sat up again on his hinds, startled by the USDO presence.

Doctor… Simmons? Stanley struggled to remember the name of the old man. He wasn't as developed the last time he met him, but this he knew: Doctor Simmons was one of the kinder humans in that hellhole of steel, glass, and experimental instruments and chemicals. Right up there with Professor Utonium and half his staff.

"-full recovery within days by your projection," the local veterinarian had just concluded she and the doctor's discussion when they came in.

"How's our little puppy?" Doctor Simmons asked, his voice a soothing, paternal, kindly tone. It brought back memories. "Ah, I see he's awake. That's good."

Stanley's memory of his younger years was fuzzy, formed mainly by smell, and hearing. And something else was causing other memories to float. As Doctor Simmons got closer, he took something out of his paper bag. A styrofoam box. The smell of meat was strong.

"It's not healthy to feed a dog meat and food processed for human consumption, you know," the veterinarian - a woman in her forties - warned.

"No, this canine's different. He's enhanced, and that includes his diet. He's healthy as heck, too, as one of you younger generations would say," Doctor Simmons explained. He opened the styrofoam box and set it down beside Stanley Talker. There was a beef burger inside, stuffed with an egg, lettuce and tomato ketchup. Turning to the dog, he went on: "It's not the same as those medium-rare steaks from the cafeteria I gave you when you were a pup, but I'm sure it'll serve."

"Roctor Rimmons," Stanley Talker greeted the man. When he got close enough, he lunged for a hug, giving off a whimper, a good kind of whimper analogous to how humans would cry when meeting a friend dear to them after a long absence. "Ri rissed you!" He gave him a few licks in the face before letting go.

"Look at you – all grown up and serving the public as an officer too!" the doctor said and admired the dog as one would a human son. "I knew you had it in you – the USDO was wrong to write you off. I heard the stories from Detective Mullens and it more or less confirms that you wouldn't have been a liability if you were made a prisoner. I mean, just because you can talk – in great volumes too – does not mean your audience will ever be the enemy-"

Olivia cleared her throat to signal to the doctor that they had to move on. Detective Mullens happened to be at the doorway leading in too, leaning against the door frame. Olivia knew that he was going to talk about business the moment he stepped in.

"Look at Talker, pops," Olivia said to her father. "He's already moving about, right as rain."

The senior detective came up to them, looking over shoulders. Stanley Talker was taking intelligent bites out of the burger, using his fore-paw to hold it in place, quite unlike a normal dog which would have spilled food everywhere.
"That's... great," the detective said. Olivia knew better than to raise an eyebrow. She knew what was next. But it wasn't so for the rest of them. "Listen, we need to talk. Something big's going down and we need to be ready." He then turned to the veterinarian. "Scuse me, ma'am, but can you give us a minute? Police business."

The vet walked away really quickly. In Townsville, police business wasn't just serious business. It was lethal business - no matter what kind of police officers were in the room - angels or demons, someone was likely to end up dead or wishing he was dead.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 0833.

There was no church this Sunday. Blossom did not know why, but from her perspective, she believed that it was her fault somehow, and it was because of what happened yesterday, both between herself and Bubbles and Buttercup. Thinking back, Blossom thought she had a good feeling about the warehouse church - the Church of the New Trinity. It would have been fun if they could be back there as they were treated like royalty, but it was not meant to be.

Instead of going outside, the Girls ended up playing in their room after breakfast instead. For the past twenty or so minutes, Blossom and Bubbles had been operating a daycare center with dolls and soft toys for babies. Bubbles had participated half-heartedly, while Blossom thought that this was what they needed.

Buttercup hadn't joined in even though Blossom had tried very hard to recruit her to run her daycare center. Instead, she had opted to hide in the walk-in closet, hugging 'Blankie', her Mom's discarded gym towel, which she had saved from the trash over a month ago, and more recently, saved from destruction the previous day.

Speaking of the previous day, it was traumatic for her. The professor had dragged her down the underground lab, poked her with needles and stuffed her with medication. She remembered getting drowsy from some of the bitter stuff and being sent into the MRI machine. She remembered being barely conscious when she fought against being strapped into the Duranium bed, likely to be gassed with whatever it was that took away her powers, only Dad had just stood there, looking over her, thinking, himself emotionally affected. Upset.

He was trying to scare her, Buttercup believed so. And she was scared and scarred out of her mind until she was released and put back into bed.

"This baby needs a new diaper, Bubbles," Blossom said to her sister before handing a life-like baby doll to Bubbles, who didn't look any better than she was the previous day. Her whole daycare center pretend play had inadvertently reminded her of the baby she saved at the Cult of His Arm compound. She could only wonder how the baby was doing now, as Mister Mullens didn't tell her.

"She's yucky," Blossom pinched her nose and pretended that the baby (which was so obviously real) had defecated into its diaper and stunk as a result.

Buttercup took the baby wordlessly, averting eye contact with Blossom, before setting it down on a proportionately small plastic toy table before her. She had held the baby wrong by picking it up by the neck and plopping it down on the little table butt-first.

"Bubbles, what's wrong?" Blossom asked, but Bubbles was tuned out, going through the motions with changing the diaper on the baby, at one point standing the baby on its head while she undid
the 'soiled' diaper. Blossom knew that something was supposed to be wrong – it's why she decided to play with her… to work things out so they could be close again, like before.

"I think we need to forgive each other, Bubbles," Blossom went off the seat of her pants. Forgiveness was the problem, wasn't it? At least, she thought it was.

"You'll forgive me, Blossom?" Bubbles asked. Her question had raised others in Blossom. There was something off with the way she phrased it, though she couldn't put her finger on it.

"Yes, of course," Blossom said, deciding that it was nothing. "You're Bubbles! What would I do without you?"

"I forgive you too," Bubbles said. "I just want you to know that before…"

Bubbles fell silent after that.

"Before what?" Blossom asked, further confused.

"Before our third month's birthday, I guess," Bubbles said, picking something off the top of her head, though it wasn't quite at the summit of it. Something ugly had already occupied that spot.

"That makes sense," Blossom said. When Bubbles was finally done with the baby, she handed it over to her sister, who returned it to a toy cradle. The toy baby was able to fit snugly in it even though it was comparatively small.

They continued playing for some time, though it wasn't as fun as it used to be. Blossom would feed the baby a bottle of formula, while Bubbles cradled another in her arms, going through the motions, more like clockwork than a mother. Her mind was elsewhere, even the naïve Blossom could tell.

"I wonder how it'll be like to be a mother and have my own baby…" Blossom rambled as she rocked the cradle of her toy baby. "Taking care of it like how Dad and Mom took care of us…"

Bubbles remained silent. Blossom thought she looked bored, though that was far from the truth, just like how the fact that her growing up, having a baby and caring for it would never be reality - not that Blossom knew.

Sensing that they needed a new activity, Blossom switched out their daycare center set and took out their stable set. Hoping to get Bubbles to be more involved and invested, perhaps mend their interactions, she invited her to set up the toys, which consisted of a stable for horses, a corral and numerous horse figures of various breeds. Bubbles, however, didn't look more involved and invested, as she continued looking away. She didn't look like she was having fun, as she was sluggish about it, lacking the energy and vigor of excitement while she was setting up the toys for play.

"Neigh… Neigh!" Blossom imitated a horse's call as she moved one of the horses closer to Bubbles. Bubbles, on the other hand, hadn't done anything. Her eyes were dead, staring into the distance. "Don't you wish we'll get to see a real pony? I want to see a real pony and ride one too, in a real stable, not like the one with cultists in it…"

Bubbles remained silent. Blossom stared at her, upset that she hadn't responded.

"I remember Dad saying he'll take us there someday, when it isn't so cold, like in spring," Blossom continued, still trying to connect with her sister somehow. Bubbles turned to look at her.
"Spring?" Bubbles repeated the word. Before the fairy godmother and the crazy drugs she got her hooked up on, it was one of those things she was obsessed with.

"Yeah," Blossom said, encouraged by Bubbles' attention. "Remember what Dad said yesterday too? We get to do picnics too in spring, and all sorts of things. Maybe all of them in one day!"

"Maybe..." Bubbles mumbled. She pushed a plastic horse closer to Blossom's, right up beside hers. She didn't look like she was having fun, though. She even looked upset after moving the horse. "I guess the flowers would be nice. Like the Dandelions."

BRZZZ! BRZZZ! BRZZZ! The USDO hotline interrupted. Blossom sighed. The harsh, urgent tone of the deceptively cartoonish phone was a reminder of how her days were like these days – all crime-fighting and no fun. With Bubbles losing her grip on her true self, it was the last thing she needed.

"Can't we just have one day to ourselves?" Blossom said dejectedly before reluctantly scooting over to the phone and picking it up.

"Powerpuff Girls! We're in trouble!" an unlikely voice, panicky, screamed through the phone. Blossom almost didn't recognize it. But there was something else that caught her attention. "Big trouble! Help!"

"What did you just call us?" Blossom asked. "Did you just call us Powerpuff Girls?"

"Yeah. Don't you know? That's what everyone's taken to calling you these days," it was Mayor Wilford, and he wasn't his normal self. Blossom thought that the venerable old man would be the last person in Townsville to freak out.

"I like it! It's even better than 'Angels of Justice' and waaaay better than-" Blossom exclaimed. The Mayor had to interrupt her. Being named something awesome had all but distracted her from her troubles, and evidently the Mayor's.

"There's no time! Please hurry! The City Hall's under attack!" the Mayor screamed again into the phone, his voice higher-pitched than usual. There was the sound of machinegun fire and grenade explosions in the distance.

"Hold on Mister Mayor, we're on our way!" Blossom said urgently before speeding into the walk-in closet to get changed. Bubbles followed suit. Buttercup had to duck out of the closet, though she discovered something along the way – she was faster than before! Sure, it wasn't like before, not by a longshot, but she'd still be able to win Mac in a footrace by a mile in her sorry state. Her powers were returning!

Blossom and Bubbles were decently surprised when Buttercup had taken out her stuff after them. The fact that she could carry all her gear in a single pile was a clear indication of her return to form all by itself.

But she was slower and more sluggish with her load. If she had recovered her powers, it wasn't total.

"Are you sure you should be following us?" Blossom asked.

"I sure am! I can't wait to kick some butt!" Buttercup exclaimed confidently, though her speed had a different façade. Even by the time the other Girls were done, she wasn't even halfway through her speed-changing. But they did saw her hover as she was putting on her military cargo pants though.
Rapid footsteps outside the door, however, put a damper on Buttercup's confidence. The door opened while Buttercup was still in the middle of wearing her vest.

"Buttercup?" Dad said, looking just as unsure of himself.

"I'm going, Dad," Buttercup said defiantly as she was quickly attaching her Kevlar leg guards. Although she had regained a part of her strength, she could feel the weight of her gear.

"And I won't stop you," Dad said, to Buttercup's surprise. He came up to her and gave her a hug. This time, she did not resist, though she was anything but warming up to it. "I've thought about it, and I guess being just a little girl isn't who you are."

Of course, that wasn't the only reason. The USDO had ordered him to cease and desist and let Buttercup be. However, his personal reasons weighed heavily – and that had stopped him from applying more Anti-X on Buttercup and claimed ignorance when it came to the reversal of her disempowerment.

"You just have to make me a promise, Buttercup," Dad said firmly. "And keep it, or I'll make sure you lose your powers again."

"What is it?" Buttercup asked, still vulnerable enough to be affected by Dad's threat. Looking around her, she felt herself surrounded by enemies who would help Dad go through with his threat. Bubbles had revealed her dark secrets, her skeletons in the closet, while Blossom was Daddy's Girl, and would never fail to tell on her and force her into the straight and narrow road… which she hated with a passion.

"No more trophy collections! I don't want to stumble upon another jar of teeth in my house again," Dad ordered - he couldn't believe the kind of words that were coming out of his own mouth. A jar of teeth as a trophy? It wasn't the kind of thing a normal family would talk about.

"Okay…" Buttercup grudgingly said. She had wanted to object to it but felt it more prudent to let it be.

"No more drugs – I know you think it's normal or cool to use it, but those criminals were criminals for a reason!" Dad gave his second demand.

"But-" Buttercup was about to claim innocence, but she was quickly interrupted.

"No buts! And no more lying to me again!" Dad demanded. Buttercup stared at him long and hard in the eyes, before withdrawing her eyes in submission. It was the only way out.

"Okay…" Buttercup said.

"And finally, no more unnecessary hurting and killing," Dad hit the nail in the coffin, wagging a finger at Buttercup.

"I promise…” Buttercup said, without really believing in what she said. However, she knew she wouldn't be able to pull off any assassinations any longer – everyone knew what she'd been doing in the dark and would always be watchful of her. And one of them just so happened to be able to see through walls.

"Good. Now don't let me keep you," the Dad said, before sitting down on the Girls' bed. Mom stood at the hallway, looking almost horrified, too much so to enter the room. Buttercup caught sight of her, and when she called out to her, she didn't come any closer. A look of disgust, not quite plain as day, but visible, was on her face. Buttercup knew what it meant.
"Remember to stay together out there, Girls," Dad said before they flew out of the circular windows.

"You'll have a family as long as you do," he'd said this, and it was obvious even to the Girls that he did it with less conviction than before. He wasn't blind to what was going on between the Girls, at least not totally. There would be a fallout between Bubbles and Buttercup, and Blossom and Bubbles would need time to rebuild their love and trust for each other after the intensity of the fight between them, as far as he knew. Just by treating their wounds, he knew that they were furious with each other. Their wounds were severe, which meant that they weren't holding back from hurting each other - Bubbles far more so than Blossom, which was expected considering her BerXerker spiraling out of control like a failing airplane.

It went without saying that the state of Blossom and Buttercup's relationship had a lot of uncertainty, too.

When the Girls finally flew out of the windows, Buttercup was floating lazily out compared to the others, with little green sparks sputtering still, no doubt from the Anti-X still contaminating her bloodstream. The wayward one had time to look back, still fixated on Mom. Professor Utonium sighed, and Selicia walked into the room and sat down next to him, putting an arm around his shoulders. The professor sighed.

"What am I going to do with them?" he said, putting his face in his hand. "It's as if they aren't sisters anymore - so much for nurture. Nature has won; like their very cells know they aren't related. And Buttercup… I still can't believe what I saw yesterday."

"Thomas, stop," Selicia hugged him tighter. "You're not alone - stop taking this burden on your own."

"It's not like the USDO is helping," the professor lamented.

"I'm talking about us. I was there yesterday when I saw it too. I know I'm fucked up but that jar of teeth and nails… Those drugs…” Selicia couldn't help but ramble as she spoke. She caught herself doing it and went on: "I don't think it's as bad as it really is, Tommy. They're kids, and they've been through some serious shit. I've never heard of this happening before, not even in the third-world countries I've been to; it's beyond even the child conscription going on in those places."

"That's dark," the professor said, sounding like he'd gone beyond rock bottom after what Selicia had said.

"My point is, they're better than they appear. I've seen some of my security colleagues handling it worse. Some guys snapping in the middle of combat and didn't quite recover after that. But our Girls - they are enhanced. They will recover after this - when it's over," Selicia tried her damnest to sound optimistic. The Girls were gone by now - Blossom and Bubbles couldn't be seen, while Buttercup was tiny against the wintry dark sky. A pink streak of light soon returned, going around and behind the green light that was Buttercup, before pushing her and accelerating her out of view. Selicia smiled at the little light show. The professor had seen it too. It'd offered him a glimmer of hope. But it was but a glimmer, and now it was gone.

"The USDO council wouldn't let them go after I create their reinforcement," the professor revealed, and it'd taken the words right out of Selicia's mouth when it did. "I tried making a deal with them. We leave the USDO forever and they'll leave us alone forever unless something's going to blow up the planet. They rejected my proposal. Said that we're still in the program. The Girls too, and they'll have to fight if the reinforcement couldn't handle things."
"What did they offer? What did Cliff give us?" Selicia asked.

"Just reduced responsibilities for the Girls," the professor said. "Which is nothing. We all know how the director is like. He's going to make them fight every time some second-rate mutant freak from the Foundation shows up."

"The Girls are barely hanging on now," the professor cried. "And if this keeps up…"

"It's a start, Thomas," Selicia comforted the professor. She gave him a kiss on the cheek that calmed him down, slightly. "If you create this 'reinforcement', the Girls will have help. Cliff's still giving way, even if it's only a little." She stood up and beckoned for Thomas Upton to do the same, guiding him with her hands on his chin. "You stood up to him for the kids, and you made him budge. You're the only man to have managed that besides… I don't know, Blackwater?" She pressed her forehead against his, lowering his head to allow it. "You're strong. You always have been."

"I don't know about me, but are we strong enough? Are the Girls?" the professor wondered.

"Come on, Thomas," Selicia took the professor by the hand and led him out of the Girls' room. "You worry too much. There's nothing more you can do. I'll show you a little something to take your mind off everything…"
Chapter 47: No Going Back (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Bubbles goes rogue, leaving a path of destruction in her wake.

Chapter 47: No Going Back (Part 2)

The City of Townsville. Sky. Towards Central District.

19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 0857.

"Bubbles, slow down a bit!" Blossom shouted at the top of her lungs at Bubbles, who was forging far ahead, nearly out of earshot. It was by dint of her superior lung capacity that she was able to shout loud enough. The winter wind was especially strong this day, and both Blossom and Buttercup were unable to extend their glider wings with the former boosting the latter and the latter's arm around the former's neck. They were slower as a result, and without their glider wings, they were spending more effort steadying their flight path.

Bubbles slowed to roughly their same speed, only to look back with hellish red eyes as if with ill intent, a frown on her face that scared even the freshly-empowered Buttercup - something even the tomboy couldn't manage.

"I think we should stay away from her," Buttercup mumbled, afraid that Bubbles would hear.

"You really shouldn't have followed us, Buttercup," Blossom turned to her and said. "You're still weak and so you need rest. I didn't even think you'd get your powers back. Dad said you wouldn't."

"She's getting away!" Buttercup exclaimed. By the time Blossom looked at Bubbles, her streak of baby blue streak (with a red core) was all that was left.

"We need to hurry!" Blossom screamed and pushed herself to maximum speed. "Fly faster, Buttercup!"

"I'm trying!" Buttercup shouted. But they couldn't catch up with Bubbles. Despite the dark sky, they couldn't even see Bubbles' X-energy contrail anymore. "Why is she in such a big hurry anyway?"

"Oh no..." Blossom uttered when Buttercup had made her realize Bubbles' intentions. "We need to hurry too! She'll hurt lots of people if we don't stop her!"

There was no other reason for it. Blossom knew intimately how it was like to be really, really angry. Whenever she was, all she ever wanted to do was to scream at people and hit things, even hurt people, like Bubbles - something she had regretted time and time again. Something she knew that Bubbles would regret in the future, for a long time to come.

What she couldn't understand, however, was the reason why Bubbles would be set off like that. Blossom thought she'd been very accommodating and serious about mending their sisterhood. She thought she'd showed it well enough with her carefully chosen words and playtime activities,
which was the first thing on her mind even before breakfast. What had gone wrong?

---

**The City of Townsville. Central District. City Hall.**

**19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 0857.**

Amid blaring orders in the radio from the various flight control towers to control Bubbles, Blossom and Buttercup flew towards the City Hall, where the emergency was. By the time they reached the governmental building, there was a hole that looked like it was made by a wrecking ball, but they both knew who made it.

Flying through the hole, they could immediately see for themselves how right Blossom was - though it had gone way further than what Blossom's innocent mind could conceive.

Bubbles stood in the center of a lobby area, her back facing them, her MP5 held in one hand, smoking. Her legs, her arms, and her gun were covered in blood. But that wasn't the worst part. The floor was completely carpeted with them - with whoever had started the emergency in the first place. Bodies were torn up, bisected, blown up, split apart, intestines spilling, blood streaming, pooling around the mat of torn flesh, organs and skin. Heads had rolled, and this time in plentiful quantities, all over the place.

Blossom and Buttercup landed a distance from her, afraid to come close. Had this been a week ago, Blossom wouldn't have believed it - Her! Afraid of Bubbles! Buttercup had her own submachinegun drawn - without her powers fully restored, she had become fully dependent on conventional weapons. The leader sister signaled for her to keep her weapon down.

"Bubbles?" Blossom called out to the blonde enhanced little girl. There were beads of red in her hair, too. "What did you do?"

"What I'm supposed to do," Bubbles said, her back still facing them. Her gun still smoking. Blood still dripping down her vest, her hands. Her gloves were torn again. She had been clawing at whoever the carpet of human remains used to be. "Fighting crime."

"But this is not the way to do it," Blossom said in a hushed tone as she was afraid that speaking too loud might set her off again.

"Then HOW am I supposed to DO IT!?" Bubbles screamed anyway, whirling around and marching up to them, her eyes flashing red and bloodshot to boot. Her face contorted by hatred. "Isn't THIS what YOU want!?! The way she was acting right now had reminded her of Buttercup, but much, much worse, and Buttercup was supposed to be 'messed up' in the head.

"Bubbles, I think there's something wrong with you," Blossom finally said - expressing the epiphany that was going on in her mind. If Buttercup wasn't right in the head and Bubbles was much worse, then she must be something worse than being 'sick in the mind', as Dad had explained in simple terms. Somehow, she was starting to think that it couldn't be her BerXerker power. None of their other powers had that effect on them, no matter how deadly they were.

"Gee, you think?" Buttercup had muttered unwisely, the lack of wisdom in it topped only by the volume of her mutter; both Blossom and Bubbles heard it.

"There's ALWAYS something WRONG with ME!" Bubbles screamed in what was becoming her usual manner: unhinged and aggressive to the extreme. "NO! There's something WRONG with YOU! BOTH OF YOU!" She took aggressive steps towards Blossom, who backed away a few
Buttercup raised her MP5, putting it to Bubbles' head in the hopes that it would scare her as it used to, but Bubbles didn't even react to it.

"Bubbles - stop!" Blossom pleaded with her sister. "We talked about it yesterday! Please - w-we're a family…"

"NO! I WON'T STOP!" Bubbles screamed madly, knocking away Buttercup's MP5 and standing closer to Blossom. "I'll NEVER stop! I CAN'T stop! I can't! From now on, I'm flying ALONE!"

With that, Bubbles flew back through the hole she made with a louder explosion of energy, rather than the usual, quiet and even soothing 'pew' sound. She had disappeared so quickly that they couldn't tell where she was going.

Before Blossom and Buttercup could give chase, however, a familiar voice had called out to them.

"Powerpuff Girls!" Mayor Wilford had emerged out of a door leading to some kind of a lounge area, Miss Bellum and four mayoral bodyguards, with bandoleers thrown over their suits and armed with heavy weapons, behind him. He didn't look glad at all to see them. "I need to have a word with both of you. Now!"

"Powerpuff Girls?" Buttercup muttered, confused.

"That's our team name now," Blossom clarified with her sister.

"It looks like the emergency's over, Mister Mayor," Blossom said. Despite being far from Bubbles' handiwork, some of the blood had managed to get under her boots. She made a face and sidestepped the stream of blood flowing towards her. "Even if it didn't end the way I want it to…"

One of the mayoral bodyguards had gone up to the pile of dead bodies. Kneeling down and setting aside his M16, he rolled one of the more intact bodies over. He looked like he recognized some of them. The mayor and his USDO contact, Bellum, turned to look, and they, too, had that face, the kind one would make when someone was familiar.

"Over? Over!!" Mayor Wilford turned to Blossom and exclaimed all of a sudden, incredulous and angry. He stamped his cane on the marble floor. His one good monocled eye was glaring so hard at her that she thought it might emit laser the next moment. "Your sister, Bubbles Utonium, is out of control! She's worse than these... suicide minions the Lombardi had sent!"

Blossom's eyes drifted to the floor. Her hands felt like they didn't belong anywhere all of a sudden, so she kept them folded over one another in front of her. It felt as if her past was coming back to haunt her again. The mayor's harsh, loud words had reminded her of Highway 13, and how he had dressed them down for wounding over sixty civilians and accidentally killed several of them while chasing a few criminals in a car.

"Three of my bodyguards were out here, Blossom Utonium!" the mayor shouted at her, jabbing his crooked finger, which resembled a twig, into her collarbone. He was surprisingly strong for a man born in the previous century. "You are supposed to be her leader, her commander!"

"I know, I've been trying to-" Blossom couldn't finish a sentence when she was cut off.

"Remember that surprise I mentioned a couple of weeks ago? I have half a mind right now to cancel it! And it's a huge, huge surprise too!" the mayor reprimanded the little girl.

"No!" Blossom exclaimed - she had been looking forward to the surprise, thinking about it almost every day.
"Just go! I don't think your crazy lunatic of a sister is done yet. I don't want to hear it - actions are louder, so go and stop her before I do it my way!" he said as he stamped his cane on the ground harder.

Blossom and Buttercup scrambled off before Mayor Wilford could say anything more, and took flight, with Blossom wiping tears from her eyes.

---

**The City of Townsville. Sky. On Patrol.**

**19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 0907.**

Much of the day had been spent trying to catch up to Bubbles. The flight control people had been trying to help, too. The plan was simple: they would issue a mission over the radio on the Powerpuff Girls' general frequency. All three of them would hear it. Mission parameters would be exaggerated to lure Bubbles to the established location. Externally-issued missions from the TPD and other federal and local agencies were rejected and Project Powerpuff was officially brought offline until the matter was resolved.

Bubbles, however, simply did not want to be found. But she had left a trail of breadcrumbs in her wake. Bloody, gigantic breadcrumbs, smeared against sidewalks and brick walls and lawns. Blossom, feeling responsible for the citizens Bubbles had assaulted, attended to all of the victims. Those who would talk told the same stories. An office worker had littered and was given a savage beating for it. He had to be taken to the hospital for a few broken bones. A kid whose basketball had smashed a window by accident was punished by being thrown through another window. He suffered numerous cuts and bruises as a result and had to be taken to the hospital as well. A woman who was dragging her son across a street had the snot beaten out of her. Blossom had gotten the story from the son, not the mother. The mother was still unconscious with blood pooling beneath her head on the concrete when paramedics were attending to them.

All these minor incidents, little more than vigilante justice, were perpetrated by Bubbles while she was flying from one operation to another. The criminals who happened to be found during the operations had suffered worse. None of them survived their encounter with the out-of-control Bubbles, and all of them had to be scraped off the floor, wall, ceiling or furniture after she was done with them. The only good news – and miracle – was that no other innocent lives were lost.

---

**The City of Townsville. Tenement Area. Long's Apartment.**

**19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1318.**

It had been hours and five operations, and Blossom and Buttercup were still unable to catch up with Bubbles. The trail of injured civilians and mutilated criminals, torn apart as if by animals or heavy industrial machinery, was becoming bloodier every step of the way.

A flight control officer had put it down to misfortune, as they had to select real crimes-in-progress to act as bait for Bubbles, most of which wouldn't happen anywhere close to each other.

The next one, however, was therefore fortuitous. A major case of arson which resulted in a burning apartment building, and it was just a few minute's flight from where Blossom and Buttercup was. Still, they sped towards the burning building as fast as they could, afraid that they might miss Bubbles again - which would be a waste as they hadn't had such an advantage the entire day.

While they were on the way, someone else's voice came through the radio.
"This is Agent Blake to Blossom. I'm speaking on a private one-to-one channel. Do you copy? Over," Blake said, his voice almost a whisper, discreet, as if afraid that someone else would hear.

"Mister Blake, I'm here. What's going on?" Blossom replied, immediately sensing that something wasn't quite right - besides the fact that what was supposed to be her sweetest timid sister had gone ballistic on practically everyone.

"Detective Mullens and Olivia contacted me just this morning. There's a reason why Bubbles has been acting this way, and it's more serious than I thought," Agent Blake said, and Blossom found it odd that he wouldn't reveal the specifics. Her thought process was simpler though: Why all the mystery? "We need you to bring her to a secure location for neutralization and extraction. Somewhere she wouldn't suspect a thing. How about the roof of the Townsville Mall in Downtown?"

"Wait, Mister Blake - isn't Bubbles acting this way because of her powers?" Blossom asked - while she had suspected something else, she had no idea about the cause. By now, Buttercup had caught on to the fact that Blossom was talking to someone special, and not some random flight control officer.

"No. It's… I will discuss it with you once we have Bubbles," Blake said over the radio. "For now, I just need you to get Bubbles to the Townsville Mall. Can you do that?"

"Yes…” Blossom said.

"Is Buttercup with you? I have reports from my friends in the towers that she is," Blake on the radio said.

"Yes. She's getting her powers back," Blossom said. "But she's weak…"

"Hey!" Buttercup exclaimed behind her.

"Good. We'll need all the help we can get," Blake said. "I'll figure something out for her. Carry out the plan, over and out."

Shortly after, Blossom and Buttercup had reached Long's Apartment. The building, which was about ten floors high, was ablaze. The fire had reached the upper floors. The fire department had arrived with several fire engines, and firefighters were dragging hoses out of their trucks, spraying water at the lower floors to put the raging fire there out. Ambulances were rushing into the scene. Crowds of bystanders stood far behind, some watching with shock, others with morbid interest. Some were crying. Some looked like they were evacuated from the building as they were poorly dressed for the winter and looked roughened up by the emergency. The police had formed cordons to hold them back.

Before Blossom and Buttercup could land, Bubbles had streaked towards them, giving them a dirty look when she hovered up close. An explosion in Long's Apartment distracted the three of them, and they turned to look at the scene. It wasn't the first time they had seen a fire going out of control. All three of them descended down next to the firefighter giving the orders on the ground. An older man with a bushy, gray mustache.

"It's the Powerpuff Girls!" the fire chief's aide exclaimed. The both of them looked up as the city's most celebrated little girls came down next to them.

"Powerpuff Girls?" Bubbles spat - perhaps not all was lost since she still had the capacity for curiosity.
"It's our new team name, Bubbles," Blossom said, hoping that it would distract Bubbles somewhat from the crazy inside her that Blake had refused to explain. "It's nice, don't you think?" She was ignored, of course.

"How can we help, Mister Fireman?" Blossom offered as she was hovering at the chest level of the fire chief. The firefighters around him were still unable to believe what they were seeing - most had never seen them in person, and only knew about them from the television or news.

"Get back to work!" the fire chief screamed at his men, waving a hand at them. His men skittered away, returning to their job on hand. Then, turning to Blossom and her sisters, he continued:
"There are still some people trapped on the tenth floor - you can see some of them at the window. We estimated fifteen of them, even up to twenty, and some of them might still be deep inside the apartment - trapped or fainted from the smoke."

Several men and women had broken through the police cordon to see the Powerpuff Girls, despite the officers' best efforts.

"Please, my husband and baby boy are still inside! Please, help them!" one of the women screamed, followed by the others.

Fifteen people were in danger. Maybe even up to twenty. Blossom felt that it was impossible - they would have to save up to twenty people between her sisters and her, and one of them was still weak and the other was out of control and even antagonistic.

"This is Flight Control Five, you are cleared to render humanitarian aid, but keep in mind our primary objective: secure Bubbles. Do your best, over," the Girls' radio crackled and the flight control officer in the area said. Blossom turned to her sisters immediately. She knew from the raging fire and explosions and screaming that time was running out.

"Buttercup, I need you to carry the people at the window down to the ground," Blossom said to her recovering tomboy sister, then turned to Bubbles - who wasn't there anymore. Alarmingly, she was already flying at full speed towards the building, her corrupted baby blue streak forming a line that bystanders wowed at; they had no idea what was really going on. "BUBBLES! Stop!"

But it was too late. Smashing through the brick wall of the burning building, Bubbles began her 'rescue work' solo.

"Buttercup, let's go!" Blossom ordered, and together with her remaining sister, began flying up to the higher floors of the apartment building, taking people and lowering them down to the ground four in total at a time. There were only six men, women, and children at the window. Ascending back up to the top floor, they flew through the windows and dived back into the inferno. There were more explosions inside, but they didn't sound like they were caused by fire.

Bubbles. It must be her. Blossom could only hope that she was rescuing people and not… something else.

"Let's split up and save anyone we can!" Blossom ordered. She grabbed Buttercup by the shoulder before she dashed off. "And if you find Bubbles, stay with her."

The fire was spreading quickly. The Girls worked even faster, breaking through doors and flying through apartments for a quick pass. The tenth floor was empty, and it made sense, as those hoping to be rescued were banking it on being reached by ladders.

On the ninth floor, Buttercup found a babysitter and her charge, unconscious from inhalation on
the floor. Before she could reach them, a wall came down on her and she screamed. Blossom could barely hear it, but she did. Rushing to her, through fire licking the walls and reaching even the ceiling, she lifted the entire section of concrete, plaster, and rebar off of her. Buttercup was covered with fire such that Blossom had to help tear off her flaming gear and uniform while Buttercup was howling in pain.

Bubbles was still somewhere in the building, along with more citizens in need.

"Buttercup, take them and go! I'll find Bubbles!" Blossom ordered, and Buttercup was inclined to listen, but only because she didn't want to linger in the uncomfortably hot burning building any longer, nor risk getting fire on her once more – while the Girls were immune to burning or heat injuries of any kind, it was still a painful, uncomfortable ordeal.

Heaving one of the survivors, an eight-year-old girl, on her back and picking up the babysitter, Buttercup flew off, leaving Blossom alone with the aggressively roaring fires all around her.

The explosions were still happening one after another in the building, sequentially. Blossom could tell that there was an intelligence behind it – albeit a dangerously compromised and damaged intelligence. Taking in a deep breath of burning, smoky air, Blossom started hovering towards it.

It was like being in the belly of a dragon. Blossom had read about them in fairy tales. And the explosions were like the beating of its heart, and as she flew towards it, sometimes breaking through fragile doors and walls, it got louder, until finally…

"Bubbles!" Blossom called out to her sister just after she had broken through another wall. Bubbles didn't speak – her new self didn't like to speak, it seemed. Instead, she glared at her. "What are you doing!"?

"Bubbles?" Blossom repeated herself. Bubbles, however, didn't change her tune. Curling up her hands into fists, her knuckles sung their bony threats. Blossom had forgotten how to breathe then.

"Someone help! Please!" the voice of a boy, not even seven, resounded in the building, loud enough for them to hear. Both Blossom and Bubbles turned to it. Whoever the voice belonged to was clearly distressed, afraid. Come to think of it, it sounded like part of the roaring of the flame, except it'd been the boy all along. Blossom caught a glimpse of Bubbles' eyes - it'd turned blue again, and without another word, Bubbles dashed towards the boy and Blossom followed.

The sight of Bubbles recovering from her BerXerker fury had filled her with hope. Could Blake be wrong?

Blossom could barely catch up with Bubbles - in her fervor, she was fast. Within seconds, they came by two shapes in the fire - and they had to jump through a pond of licking yellow, orange and red to get to them.

The sight was ghastly. The ceiling had come down on two persons - a man and a boy. The man's lower half was crushed by the ceiling. The boy's leg was trapped beneath. The man was completely charred beyond recognition. The boy was getting there, with his burned T-shirt stuck to his skin, half his face either charcoal black or gory red, much of his body too. He had barely any hair left.

Bubbles took the boy by both his arms as he cried in both pain and relief. Blossom pulled the piece of ceiling off of the boy's leg, instantly freeing him. His leg was a mangled mess - pale, ashen-white bones poking out in multiple places, out of charred flesh, bent like a fossilized tree branch.
Cradling the boy, Bubbles began running, herself burning - though the fire wasn't hurting her, just causing her some pain. Blossom followed, and overtook her, clearing rubble that happened to be in the way, making their path easier for Bubbles to get through. The boy coughed and vomited on the way. Sensing the urgency to get the boy to safety and some help, Blossom began blasting holes through walls with both fists and heat beams, making an expressway through wall after wall until…

They were able to jump out of the building and fly their way down to the ground, where firefighters, paramedics, bystanders, Buttercup and the people she rescued waited. The firefighters were quick to put them out with fire extinguishers. While Blossom's uniform and gear had remained largely intact, Bubbles' was another story, as they were no longer recognizable. Flakes were falling off her.

"P-p-power…puff…" the boy in Bubbles' arms muttered as she set him down on an ambulance gurney wheeled in quickly by a pair of paramedics. "Always… wanted to… see…" Numerous eyes were on him, and everyone knew that those were his last words when his one good eye closed and never opened again. The mother ran up to the charred boy, hugging him.

Bubbles' eyes were stuck on the dead boy. Blossom stared at her, her eyes misting up, worried too if this tragedy was going to set her off anew.

The mother's eyes soon turned to Bubbles, full of raw emotions.

"My son's dead! You put others ahead of him!" the woman screeched, completely out of her mind. "He's just a boy! A BOY! You KILLED him!"

"I- I tried to save him but he was in the fire and…" Bubbles explained incoherently as she floated closer to the woman, hoping for some kind of understanding. "He was all burned up-

The woman gave her the hardest slap she could manage. "And now I don't even have a proper body to cry over because of you!"

"You're useless! Useless, useless, USELESS!" she screeched, and she had gone on screaming even as Bubbles' eyes were tearing up, a hand shielding a cheek as if she had been struck by a sniper bullet there.

Useless, useless, USELESS!

The words didn't just sting deep, penetrating into her very soul, tearing her nerves into a million different strands. They were like Duranium piranhas, eating away at her rapidly, destroying her, annihilating what little clarity she had left, what little sanity she could retain after taking so many syringes of 'His Secret 2.0'.

"You're useless, Bubbles! Useless, useless, USELESS!" Blossom had screamed at her once, even before the battle at the Silver Age Cinema started. 'Dad told me to forgive you! But you're USELESS!"

Just being reminded of it made Bubbles furious to the point of insanity. Her eyes glowed red anew. Without thinking or even hesitating, she pulled her sidearm out and fired at the woman with gritted, grating teeth. The grieving mother had only time to make a dear-in-the-headlights kind of face - and had Blossom not seen this and wrestled for the gun, she would have shot the woman cleanly through the forehead.

"Bubbles, no!" Blossom screamed as she managed to wrest the pistol from Bubbles' hand and kick
her down to the ground. The firearms discharge had sent bystanders scurrying and hollering for help. Police officers at the cordon had drawn their guns and pointed them at the Powerpuff Girls.

"Bubbles, calm down," Blossom tried to reason with her sister. Bubbles flipped herself up to a standing position, looking like she was about to flip out again. Police officers, in the meantime, surrounded them. "Listen to me."

Surprisingly, Bubbles turned to look at Blossom despite looking like she was ready to kill every normal human being around the burning building.

"We can't do this here - just follow me, okay? I know a place where the police won't catch us," Blossom suggested. Bubbles merely glared - having been reminded of Blossom's harsh words in the past, she was at least thinking twice about listening to her again at all. All Blossom knew was that she had a plan - one that would save lives, and put Bubbles where Mister Blake wanted her.

With that, Blossom reached out for Bubbles' hand, and Bubbles let her take it, mainly because there was nothing for her left around the burning building. Together, they blasted off into the sky, flying away from the burning building, with not a single shot fired by the police as they were surprised. Buttercup followed behind them, a towel wrapped around her as much of her uniform was burned off.

After putting enough distance between them and the cops - with enough distance judged by the lack of noise coming from the site of the burning building, Blossom stopped, and the moment she did, Bubbles shrugged her hand off and folded her arms, her eyes still dangerously red. Buttercup was shivering from the cold, with only a towel and a pair of pants and boots that could barely stay on for warmth.

"Buttercup, you look terrible. Go back home and get changed," Blossom ordered her roughest sister first. "You need a rest."

"Gladly - it's cold…" Buttercup agreed and zipped off - though she was slow enough that it took some time for her to get out of earshot - at least in Blossom's view.

"We need to talk," she reached for Bubbles' hand again, only for her to slap it away.

"It's fine if you don't want to hold my hand," Blossom said, but her intention was elsewhere - on the execution of her plan, for instance. "But we can't talk here. We need to keep moving before they catch up with us."
Chapter 48: No Going Back (Part 3)

Chapter Summary

Blossom attempts to talk down a half-crazed Bubbles.

Chapter 48: No Going Back (Part 3)


19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1346.

"Good, you're heading in the right direction," Blake's voice whispered cautiously into Blossom's ear via her earpiece and radio as the enhanced little girl was leading Bubbles towards the Townsville Mall. "Keep going and keep her talking. I'll be there."

"Why won't you talk to me, Bubbles?" Blossom continued trying to get Bubbles to open up. They were halfway on their flight to the mall, but Bubbles had been keeping mum ever since the burning apartment building.

"You said we'll talk when we're far away from that place," Bubbles said curtly. "We're not there yet."

Her eyes were a permanent glow of angry red. Blossom could only guess at what she was thinking, but Judging by her eyes, it was likely nothing good. She knew that the mother of the boy she tried to save had struck a nerve, said some things, and Blossom had some idea why those things would set her off. The woman sounded exactly like her, back when she hadn't learned her lesson of patience and anger management yet.

But that wouldn't be fair to that lady, as Bubbles was already upset long before the burning building. It was the whole reason why she had been tracking her down in the first place. What was Bubbles so upset about? Didn't they make nice to each other? Especially after their vicious fight in The Strip?

They flew for some time, rising closer to the clouds so that the noise from the city was drowned out.

"Where are you taking me?" Bubbles asked when the silence wasn't palatable even to her.

"To someplace we could talk, where they'll never find us," Blossom lied. "The policemen were mad at us, and we need to let them cool off." The mall came within view shortly after. It was a huge mecca of commerce, and even from the top, looked much larger than any other building for miles. There were other malls, of course, but they were like children next to the Townsville Mall, imitations that paled in comparison to the original.

Blossom led Bubbles on the descend, down to just yards above the tallest buildings at Downtown. For a moment, Blossom stopped beside a billboard, and Bubbles aped her action despite her waning respect for her authority.
The billboard had a gigantic version of her, photogenic and posing in her combat gear, winking with one hand holding her MP5 singled-handed and the other hand pointing to an advisory: Jail Time or No Crime - You Decide. 'The Powerpuff Girls are here to save the day!' A not-so-subtle subtitle read under the art.

Blossom couldn't remember ever posing for that shot. Back in January, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup had attended a few photoshoots for a few newspaper articles and public service announcement arts, but not in recent weeks, and certainly not for her likeness to be mounted on billboards on top of tall buildings overlooking the middle of Downtown.

However, it wasn't the time and place to mull over such an unimportant thing; Her sister took precedence. Resuming her course, Blossom took Bubbles to the roof of Townsville Mall, which, unlike the rest of it, was gray and austere and uninteresting. They touched down there, and Bubbles sat down on a vent. It was freezing, but she didn't care. Her insides were tortured and groaning and calling for the fairy godmother's magic, and a little freezing was nothing next to it.

Blossom retracted her glider wings and sat down on a vent opposite Bubbles but close to her. When she found it cold, she set down her flight pack and placed her jacket over it before sitting down again.

"Keep her there for a few minutes, Blossom," Blake's voice whispered to Blossom on her earpiece, like an angel offering a divine way out. "Good job. We'll be with you shortly, over and out."

Blossom's eyes returned to Bubbles when she heard it. 'Good job,' Blake had said, but Blossom couldn't tell what she was doing so well. She was going against her own judgment again, her own morals; Lying and plotting against her own sister when she would rather just try to reason with her.

"The winter's getting hotter, isn't it?" Blossom commented as she turned to look at the sky, Blake's order to stall for time with Bubbles half-forgotten. She had her own reasons for bringing Bubbles to the mall. "Dad said that spring will be here next month."

"It's not any different," Bubbles said absent-mindedly. "Nothing is. Nothing changed."

"But everything's changed. We're getting better at fighting crime. We've been helping more people and…" Blossom's voice trailed off. Not everything had changed for the better. Bubbles' eyes turned to her, wide and all-seeing. It made Blossom think she had said something wrong or done something wrong – besides the sins she had committed against her in the past.

"We've changed, Blossom. We used to be so close," Bubbles said.

"But we still are," Blossom said, and yet she was afraid; of the way Bubbles was looking at her, of her in general. "We can still be…"

"Buttercup hasn't changed. Mom hasn't. Townsville hasn't changed. Spring isn't coming," Bubbles said, her eyes drifting to the snowy concrete beneath her.

"But it will – things always change, that's what Dad said," Blossom corrected.

"DAD!" Bubbles screamed out of the blue, jumping off her vent-seat. Blossom had nearly fallen off hers. Alarmed, she got off it as well.

"Daddy this, Daddy that!" Bubbles screamed maniacally as she stepped closer to Blossom.

"B-bubbles, what did I-" Blossom stuttered, afraid that yesterday was going to repeat itself again.
"DAD DOES NOT KNOW!" Bubbles screamed. "He's supposed to know but he doesn't! He's supposed to know things!"

"What are you talking about?" Blossom asked, confused and scared out of her mind. Things were calm and going well before.

"I'm TALKING about ME!" Bubbles hollered madly. Her eyes had never gone back to blue ever since they were in the air. It was beginning to concern Blossom, more so than usual. It had always been a sign that things would soon spin out of control. "And… and…"

"What, Bubbles?" Blossom asked, but it was as if something was stuck in Bubbles' throat. "You can tell me – is it something to do with your new power?"

"I've changed - I've changed and I wanted it – But I… I've changed but I don't want it!" Bubbles blubbered as she began crying, the only sign of it was the tears as her eyes were already bloodshot.

"Bubbles, what is it?" Blossom asked again. Concerned and afraid for her sister, she came closer to try to hug her, but Bubbles backed away as if avoiding a plague victim.

"NO!" she screamed, afraid, but the look on her face soon changed to that of rage.

"Don't touch me! Don't you touch me!" she screamed manically as she wrapped her arms around herself for futile reassurance, looking a little like a mental patient.

"I wasn't going to hurt you," Blossom tried to reassure her sister.

"I can't tell you anything," Bubbles said, relatively calm, though that wasn't saying much, nor did it have anything to do with Blossom's efforts to quiet her down. "I can't tell you anything. I don't trust you."

But Bubbles' words were sharp, and it stabbed at Blossom right at the heart. Blossom gasped when she heard it, her hand going up to her chest as if she had been punched there.

"You don't mean that!" Blossom gasped. It wasn't something she had expected from her sweet little Bubbles at all.

"You DID all those things to ME!" Bubbles resumed her mad ravings. "Buttercup DID all those THINGS to me!"

"I know! We fought in the backyard and I made her stop!" Blossom defended herself, but it was a feeble attempt and they both knew it. Her eyes were beginning to mist - if only all this would just stop! "I tried to make it stop!"

"And you started DOING it to ME!" Bubbles screamed. "Hurting ME!"

"Bubbles… I'm not lying when I told you how sorry I am," Blossom said tearfully. "Remember when we were in the lab after the cinema? Please, try to remember!"

Bubbles closed her eyes; she thought Blossom's words meant something this time. She tried to remember through the red haze of blind rage and madness in her. She thought she saw something. Her own apologies, how things looked right then. Blossom hadn't laid a finger on her since. Remembering their time together since she saw that Blossom hadn't gone back on her words – and it was all her fault yesterday that they fought.

Bubbles opened her eyes tearfully, which were, for once, her signature baby blue.
"Bubbles – what's happening to you?" Blossom asked again. It couldn't just be her BerXerker ability causing her to lose her mind, could it?

"I had to get away," Bubbles finally opened up. "I… I didn't want to be anywhere close to you and Dad. I didn't want to be - I can't. I can't be close."

"Why?" Blossom asked. Bubbles averted her gaze and didn't speak any further. Blossom tried prodding her for answers more, but she had clamped up.

That was when the familiar sound of loud beating in the air began. A huge helicopter ascended into view from behind a building and sped towards them at top speed nearly equivalent to what the Girls could do, admirable for something achieved by regular human beings.

Bubbles glared at it, her eyes glowing hellish red anew. She then turned that murderous gaze on Blossom.

"You DID this!" Bubbles screeched at her. "You TRICKED me!"

"Bubbles, wait-" Blossom tried to explain things, but Bubbles wouldn't have it.

"You were always the smart one and you TRICKED me!" Bubbles screamed, then clasped her head with both her hands. "You LIED to ME! I TRUSTED you!"

The helicopter spun around in mid-air hazardously such that the tailgate was facing them. The wind from its rotors would have blown the Girls away had they not countered it with their hovering force. The tailgate opened, revealing a squad of men, two of whom were armed with what appeared to be net guns. Lieutenant Blake was one of them. They fired the nets at Bubbles without hesitation.

One of them missed because of the wind and Bubbles had sidestepped it easily. The other was well-adjusted for both wind and evasion, catching Bubbles by surprise, who fell with a yelp. Bubbles tore at the net, which seemed surprisingly strong for something that looked flimsy. The 'ropes' were actually steel cables forming a flexible wire mesh.

"Blossom, restrain her!" Blake ordered over the radio. Blossom rushed up to Bubbles, only to receive a hard kick in the stomach. Despite the tensile strength of the steel cables, Bubbles was able to rip it apart, freeing herself. After shooting Blossom and Blake a half-insane dirty look, she flew off.

"Blossom! Pursue her! We can't let her get away!" Blake's voice blared on the radio. Blossom did not wait – she knew what she had to do. There was something severely wrong with her – Bubbles wouldn't have tried to avoid Dad and her in any other circumstances.

Bubbles was fast – in her insanity, she had given no thought to conserving her Chemical X at all, and was traveling at top speed. In fact, it seemed that her newest power had completely beaten exhaustion into submission as Blossom was struggling to keep up at such a speed.

"Bubbles, stop!" Blossom yelled at her as she tried to gain on her, but it was all in vain. The shape of her sister was growing smaller with every second elapsed. What was worse was that she had left her flight pack behind in a hurry, which meant that the wind was constantly throwing her off left and right easily.

Blossom tried to think of a solution: her guns could help, but she didn't want to hurt her own sister and lose whatever remained of the trust between them. The same went for her heat vision. Besides, in her current state, she wasn't even sure if she was capable of feeling pain. Her smoke grenade
could block Bubbles view and slow her down – if only it could hover. Her flashbangs – yes, her flashbangs!

Taking a flashbang from her vest, Blossom removed the pin and primed it. After taking careful aim, she lobbed it as hard as she could, and was decently surprised that she could throw it ahead of Bubbles. She covered her eyes quickly, but the light blast had partially blinded her all the same.

But it was working. Bubbles screamed madly as she spun out of control and fell, landing on top of an apartment building, putting cracks in the rooftop floor. Blossom, also disorientated, let herself drop, and landed on the same apartment roof in a crouched position.

"We're not going to hurt you," Blossom tried to reason with her sister. Taking a quick look over her shoulder, she saw that Blake's Chinook was a mere dot on the horizon; she was on her own now. "We just want to help you!"

Bubbles was just sitting up when she said this, cupping her eyes as though they were burning, screaming intermittently like a rabid dog.

"Liar! LIAR! LIAR!" Bubbles screamed. "She said you're evil!"

Her response forced Blossom to rush her, but before she could even grab her, Bubbles swiped at her with fingernails – which Blossom blocked with her Kevlar arm guard. Bubbles' nails were hard enough to carve deep fissures into her arm guard.

Blossom tackled Bubbles before she could do any real damage, before pinning her arms on her chest. Bubbles struggled against her as she screamed like a wild animal to be let go.

"Who said that? Who said I'm evil?" Blossom asked; the plot was thickening, and she wasn't sure where the end of it was or what she would find at the end of it.

"Let ME go!" Bubbles screamed and threw Blossom off with sheer willpower and strength. She took off immediately. Blossom air-braked herself and flew at full speed to give chase.

"This is Blake to Blossom, where is Bubbles going!?!" Blake asked over the radio.

"I don't know!" Blossom shouted over the radio while she strained herself once more to match an errant Bubbles' flight speed.

"Take a guess! You're smarter than you know!" Blake said urgently over the radio.

Blossom thought hard about it. Bubbles did mention something about getting away from her and Dad. Why? Why her and Dad? She tried to kill her yesterday… Which meant-

"Oh no…" Blossom's face had gone pale when she realized what Bubbles was going to do. She pressed the button on her radio and practically screamed into his ears. "She's going home to kill Dad!"

It made perfect sense. The flight path they were on would take them straight home in a beeline. She'd memorized the local map and could see it as though it was a 3D projection before her when it was all in her head.

But why? Why? Blossom still had no idea why Bubbles would want to kill Dad of all people – if it was her, it would have made sense. She had failed as a leader and sister when she had counted on her. But Dad? Why?
Professor Utonium had been busy poring over the final results of his Chemical X2 plant trials. He had pages upon pages of data to go through, and he wasn't the only one generating them. His science staff, under Doctor Vanum who still reports to him even though he no longer outranked him, was involved as well. It'd accelerated his progress towards providing his Girls with reinforcement that they sorely needed – reinforcement which would exceed their capabilities, and hopefully, take over so completely that the Girls would have to beg for a chance to fight crime.

Bzz! Bzz! Bzz! A phone rang in the vicinity. Just what he needed; more bad news. But this time, there was something different. It wasn't his desk phone ringing. It was his USDO cellphone.

Pulling it out of his pocket, he flipped the phone open and checked the caller ID. Agent Blake was on the line. After giving a frustrated sigh, he accepted the call.

"Blake. What is it now?" the professor said, the tone of his voice betraying every bit of how he was feeling; defeated, ever more dreary and afraid of the unexpected. It made him wonder if he should just jump the gun and use his Chemical X2 to create the reinforcement there and then, instead of going through the usual scientific method.

"Professor! There's no time to explain!" Blake was shouting at the top of his lungs, and the background noise, which was filled with the beating of helicopter rotor blades and men yelling. "She's coming to assassinate you! I don't know why! But she is!"

"Who?" the professor asked. He knew that sooner or later that someone might want to take this life; he was an important person – contributing greatly to the USDO'S technological output and more recently, as the scientist in charge of the Girls. "Is it Naga? Or those Confederates in the Foundation? Is it Blisstina? Isn't Blisstina deceased?" there was no one else he could think of. With Blisstina, the evidence of her death wasn't complete enough to substantiate it.

"It's Bubbles! We have a Tantrum event! She's coming! I've signaled security at The House!" Blake revealed. It'd caught the professor off-guard. Bubbles? Why would she? "Stay in your lab! ETA 10 minutes! We'll sort this out!"

It couldn't be. It simply couldn't be. Just yesterday, she seemed fine…

Bubbles could not sleep with the thought of killing her Daddy in her head. Needless to say, she hated the idea. But it had to be done. It must be done. If she didn't, she would be in pain for the rest of her life, and the fairy godmother would add more on top of that, and there was no telling what she would do to the rest of her family. She would never experience true happiness, the kind that only the drug could provide.

Was there any real reason to kill Dad? She searched through her memories for one. Surprisingly, it wasn't hard to do so, especially when she was motivated by pain and drug deprivation to.

Dad had never been there when she needed him most. Day after day, one after another, those she would call family would hurt her right under his nose. Day after day, she would be sent out to fight
even when she didn't want to - even when she couldn't. Day after day, she suffered, and Daddy didn't stop it.

It scared her. Bubbles felt anger and hatred welling up inside. She couldn't believe that she could be angry towards a man who had done nothing but took care of her, hateful towards a man who had only loved her, who was just as much a victim as she was. But now, she hated him enough to want to kill him.

Slipping out of bed once more, Bubbles flew to the door and left the Girls' room, more cautious than ever. She checked her sisters' twice, thrice - and knew that they were asleep this time. Buttercup had been sedated during her medical examinations, and the speckles of green that remained in her eyes did not shine. Blossom was dark too.

Bubbles flew to her Dad's door. It was decided. She wanted to kill him, and she wanted to just get it over with. But how? She wasn't a mastermind, but she knew enough to know that Dad had to die in a way that wouldn't implicate her. She flew to the living room, searching for something to aid her in her patricidal quest, and when there was nothing she could use in the living room, she moved on to the kitchen. She had killed enough to know her own modus operandi - she had killed with fists, guns and even her sonic scream. She couldn't use any of those.

Her eyes ran over the kitchen, and on a counter, she saw a block of kitchen knives. Landing on the kitchen counter, she pulled one out to discover that she had taken a cleaver. She didn't like the idea of having to take off Daddy's head, so she put it back and chose a slimmer one. A chopping knife for cutting vegetables and fruits. A single stab through the neck would do.

Gripping the knife underhanded, she flew back up to the second floor and landed in front of her Dad's door. Hovering up, she gripped the doorknob with her other hand.

She couldn't help but hesitate. The door was locked only by love. Yet she could feel the beginnings of the drug's withdrawal effect in her. She sighed and remembered how Dad had raised her right from the beginning - if it weren't for him, she wouldn't even have known how to walk, talk or even use the toilet without making a mess. She remembered all the times they spent together - how much time her Dad had invested in her, so lovingly, so unconditionally.

She had to push it all away, and, with great effort, replace it with hate. Dad was weak. Dad was stupid. He was careless and he didn't help her in her times of need when it truly mattered!

Twisting the doorknob, she swung the door gently, wide enough for her to hover through. Dad and Mom were fast asleep, or at least it looked like it. Mom, at least, was snoring with a gentle and quiet rise and fall of her breathing. Bubbles touched down on the carpet, and couldn't help but hold her breath.

Holding the kitchen knife before her, she padded towards Dad, barefooted and in her pajamas, looking nothing like a killer, at least until her eyes turned red with sustained hatred. Her hands shook as she got closer, just another arm's length to within striking range.

Then she saw movement before she was ready. She quickly hid the blade behind her back. Dad had turned and opened his eyes. Despite her red eyes, he didn't so much as a gasp. Reaching out for his lamp, he turned it on, and saw Bubbles close to him, holding her hands behind her back.

"Bubbles? What's wrong, honey?" he asked in that tired voice of his, barely awake. He yawned after that. "Were you having a nightmare again?"

What Daddy had said had reminded her of that time back then, two weeks ago, when nightmares of
that day in the Morbucks Industries Research Labs, when she was stuck in a hole, had plagued her relentlessly. Dad was there to comfort her. He was there in her time of need when it truly mattered. And he was here now.

"Y-yes… A really bad one," Bubbles found herself replying, tears streaming down anew. If only it was all just a nightmare - the fairy godmother, the drugs, her lethal intentions, everything.

"Hop on, then," Dad pushed himself deeper into his bed and patted the space he had made for her, beside him. His eyes were closed once again. He was likely very tired. Helpless.

Bubbles wasted no time in slipping the kitchen knife under her father's bed and clambering into it, snuggling up to him. The Dad covered her up with a blanket and put an arm around her. He remembered, too, to leave the lights be.

Bubbles couldn't help but whimper and cry.

"Hey… Everything's fine. It's just a nightmare, it'll all go away…" Dad said, without knowing how wrong he was - that it wasn't a nightmare, and it wouldn't go away just like that. Bubbles turned and planted her face into his shoulder.

"Promise?" Bubbles asked, wishing desperately for it all to just end.

"Promise," Dad said and gave her a peck on the back of her head.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1404.

Yes, Bubbles was fine yesterday, being her sweet old self despite the difficulties she was having with her new BerXerker power. Except… He thought back to that night when Bubbles came up to him. He thought he saw a glint then, like a reflection. A knife? How could that be? If his good memory served, he thought he heard something sliding on the carpet before Bubbles joined him in bed.

He had to know. He needed to. Getting up, Professor Utonium started racing up the stairs to the surface. While the airlock cycled, he banged on the keypad as if it would cycle the airlock faster - it wouldn't. He had never acted this way before. He ran across the living room, where Selicia was. As it just so happened, she was on her USDO cellphone as well.

"Thomas! Wait!" she shouted as he was running past. He didn't stop, didn't wait. He had to know. Running up the stairs, two steps at a time, he proceeded straight to his room and looked under the bed.

Sure enough, it was there. A kitchen knife, right under his bed. Picking it up, he sat down on his bed and felt like he would be stuck there until the heat death of the universe. Holding it up, he saw his reflection on it.

Bubbles intended to kill him last night.

There were heavy footsteps outside. Someone running. The professor knew it was Selicia, but the knife before him and what it meant was too upsetting for him to care.

"Thomas! Bubbles' gone rogue!" Selicia warned the professor, the phone still clutched in her hand,
but stopped when she saw what was going on.

"T-tom? What are you doing?" she asked, fearing what could happen next. She had no idea about what the professor had learned. It looked as if he was about to take his own life. He didn't reply immediately, and it made her terribly worried. Normally, she was able to capture his attention, enthrall him. Now, something else had taken the lead. "What are you doing with that knife?"

"It's Bubbles' knife. She left it here. She wanted to kill me last night," the professor said, face pale, looking shell-shocked. What Bubbles had done, however, was far more damaging than any shell could be to the professor.

Everything had snapped into place for Selicia the moment he mentioned it. No wonder something felt missing in the kitchen this morning! She was whipping together breakfast for the Girls, and although she didn't need the knife, she thought something looked off with the kitchen when she entered it.

Buttercup poked her head in from the outside, wondering what all the excitement was about.

"I know you feel like roadkill right now, but we need to keep you safe!" Selicia reasoned. Coming up to the professor, she tried to lift him off the bed, only for him to shake her off.

"No, Selicia! What's the point? Bubbles wanted to kill me last night," the professor went on. He was barely there. Likely heartbroken. Disappointed. Upset. Perhaps even suicidal.

"You still have Blossom and Buttercup to look out for!" Selicia tried to reason with him again. Taking the knife by the handle, she put it away before dragging him to his feet. "You still have me."

Silence. Then the professor cranked his head to look at her wearily, with almost nothing in his eyes.

"Yes… Yes… You're right," the professor said, though he sounded half-dead.

"Now please," Selicia pleaded with him as she held his face. "Lock yourself in the lab. There's a safe in there with a Duranium rifle, behind the painting near your desk. The combination's your birthday. Take it, just in case."

Wordlessly, the professor started towards the door, his movement stiff as he had lost much of his will to do anything. Selicia turned to look at him leave and saw Buttercup standing by the door. The professor stopped beside her, before ruffling her hair as he rubbed her scalp affectionately.

"Buttercup, Blake suggested that you help defend your Dad," the Mom said, less loving to her favorite as usual. "Do you want to?"

Buttercup had to actually think hard about it. There simply wasn't much left to defend. She had lost all hope of ever becoming her Dad's most loved. There was simply no going back from his discovery of her trophies and shadowy activities. Even Mom seemed to be giving her the cold shoulder.

"Yes…" Buttercup said, slightly unsure of herself. The only reason why she would even agree to it was that Dad was still her provider. Who else was she going to turn to for pancakes, toys, clothes and a gazillion other things? Or even that rub in the head he gave her as he was shuffling towards his lab? For what it was worth, it felt pleasant when he stroked her in the head.

"Then get suited up and wait for me outside the lab door," Selicia ordered. Buttercup zipped to her
room to get prepared for battle while Selicia did the same, throwing on a Kevlar vest and pulling out an XM9 anti-materials rifle and XM4 carbine.
Chapter 49: No Going Back (Part 4)

Chapter Summary

Blossom and Bubbles raced towards home to see who can get there first.

Chapter 49: No Going Back (Part 4)


19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1405.

When Blossom was out of options and ideas, she decided to reuse her previous tactic. Unclipping another flashbang, she unpinned it and primed the thing, all while she was flying at top speed in pursuit of Bubbles. Hurling it in front of her, she covered her face just before the flashbang detonated.

There was an explosion of light and noise, and Blossom's ears sang while her vision swam in whiteness despite her precautions.

Bubbles was prepared this time, as it wasn't the first time Blossom had used a flashbang on her. Like Blossom, she'd hid her face from the blast, but since she was so close to it, she was still completely blinded and deafened by the blast.

With the strong wind and her senses blown, Bubbles couldn't control her flight as well. She descended, and accidentally smashed through the window of an office building, screaming as she went through a wall and rolled on the ground, scattering paper and workaholics working the weekends.

Blossom couldn't help but feel concerned about Bubbles, but she knew she couldn't stop to check on her. Flying ahead, she continued on her way to The House, feeling relieved that she had taken the lead.

But then there were explosions and screams. Blossom had flown a fair distance away when that happened, yet she was still able to hear it. Behind her, Bubbles had shoved herself through a window on the opposite side of the building she crashed into, breaking the glass and launching herself back into the race.

Looking back, Blossom saw that Bubbles was easily on the verge of overtaking her – in a matter of seconds, she would be within an arm's reach, and she didn't even want to think about what Bubbles would do to her once she was. Unslinging her MP5, Blossom pointed it behind her one-handed and started firing wild shots at her sister. Her flight path became unsteady from the multi-tasking. Bubbles veered left and right to try to avoid Blossom's aim, but she was too accurate. Blossom was able to buy distance and time with bullets - but for how long, she didn't know. All she knew was that she had to get to Dad before Bubbles.

"Blossom! Come in, Blossom," Blake said over the radio while Blossom was busy firing on Bubbles and getting home at the same time. He didn't wait for her to reply. "I've informed your family and as many people as I could! You'll have help!"
"What about Bubbles?" Blossom replied as she fired another burst of bullets at her sister. "I don't want her to get hurt!"

Like last time… Blossom thought.

"We'll think of something, over and out," Blake said vaguely as if he was in a hurry. As if he was dodging questions. Blossom continued firing rounds behind her until she was out. With her enhanced agility, she replaced her magazine with a fresh one within a few seconds and continued her suppressive fire.

Bubbles had to block the bullets constantly from getting in her face. Frustrated, she shouldered her own MP5 and started firing back at Blossom. As she was flying behind her, she had the advantage of being able to shoot where she was looking - she was able to put a full burst of munitions into her sister's back. Blossom fired back in vain, yelling on top of her lungs as she took burst after burst of pain and bullets. The distance was closing; Blossom could feel fire in every part of her body as she was exhausting herself just to stay ahead.

When Bubbles ran out of ammunition for her submachinegun (she usually carried less than her sisters), she dropped the gun and pulled her sidearm out and started firing more shots. Blossom replaced her second magazine with a third, and, in a bid to recover lost distance, flipped herself around and started flying backward, allowing her to aim downrange, her SMG over her belly.

Blossom started firing on full auto. Bubbles covered her face as usual, but something else happened - a red aura - a kind of energy bubble, appeared around her. Blossom could see her tracer rounds bouncing off of it.

Bubbles stopped shielding her face, revealing a demented smile. Blossom emptied the rest of her magazine into her sister's red bubble uselessly, in some vain hope that it would do something, but it didn't. She screamed, her face contorted in fear as she watched Bubbles gaining rapidly on her despite everything she had done.

Bubbles threw a punch at Blossom the moment she got within range, without warning or compassion. It'd nearly knocked Blossom off-course. In her desperation, Blossom began firing her heat beam - despite being exhausted halfway to the underworld - but Bubbles was able to block them off too, with gritted teeth and tough smile on. It'd done nothing, but Blossom was able to free herself and give herself another burst of speed.

Bubbles kept pace by doing the same. The nightmare wasn't over.

"STOP!" Blossom screamed in desperation when she noticed that Bubbles just wouldn't let up no matter what she did. The suburbs had appeared in the distance, but it seemed so far even though it was close.

Bubbles flew on top of Blossom. Throwing a gaze over her shoulder, Blossom fired another infrared burst, doing nothing but searing red energy. Bubbles delivered a chop to the back of Blossom's neck, stunning her and causing her to drop. Bubbles, however, wasn't done with her. Landing on Blossom's back, she let herself fall with her sister. Putting an arm around her neck, she began choking her as she groped her chest for the smoke grenades attached there. When she'd found the pins, she pulled them off, one after another, before pushing the levers, one then the next.

When that was done, Bubbles let go and jumped off of Blossom, using her as a springboard during free fall, while at the same time kicking her towards the ground. She continued flying towards home, while Blossom, half-conscious and nearly out from the pain, exhaustion and smoke inhalation, could only watch as she fell, and soon, she wouldn't even be able to do that after her
smoke grenades burst into clouds of smoke.

After falling a certain height, the kind that would have killed a normal kid ten times over, Blossom crashed through the roof of a suburban home, going right through the ceiling and into the room of a teenage goth girl, who jumped and sat up at the shock of such a thing happening out of the blue. Rock music was playing in the playground, but Blossom's landing was far louder.

The door to the goth girl's room slammed open as if rehearsed beforehand.

"How many times must I tell you!?!" a man at the doorway scolded. "Keep your temper tantrums to yourself and turn that satanic music… down…" the man, the Goth's father, stared at the thing that had made a crater in the floor. A little girl, dressed like she was going to dominate a war game, utterly flabbergasted by the destruction in his home. "What the hell is that!?!"

"Don't look at me, dad," the goth girl said. "I didn't cause her to fall through the ceiling!"

Together, the father and daughter approached the little girl with caution. Studying the girl, they noticed the smoke grenades on her vest, which was still giving out some smoke. Looking up, the father noticed that there was a column of smoke from the sky. He reasoned that smoke grenades were detonated in the sky, which meant…

They had seen the USDO operatives before, but mostly on television. He was told by the neighbors that they would emerge from somewhere around the neighborhood while he was away at work and return in the evening, but he had rarely seen the sight before.

While the suburban folks continued to study the newly-named Powerpuff Girl, her eyes fluttered open and she gave a shout out of surprise. The father and daughter jumped back from being startled, shouting just as much out of surprise.

Blossom remembered the trouble with Bubbles immediately upon waking up. There was no time for explanations, apologies, and pleasantries. After shuddering from the pain all over her body and discarding the spent smoke grenades, Blossom kicked off into a hovering position.

"Sorry about your roof," she apologized quickly before flying through the hole she made with a muted 'pew' sound. The goth girl and her father exchanged looks as another piece of the ceiling dropped, reminding them that the Powerpuff Girl named Blossom had torn a new skylight into their home.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1409.

As Bubbles tore through the air towards The House, her home, she realized quickly that the USDO security force around it was fully prepared for her arrival. Airburst munitions were fired at her from humvees. The explosions threw her about like a ragdoll left and right, tearing away at her Kevlar armor until she started evading them. A recently acquired Apache attack helicopter, scrambled from the nearest USDO outpost, had arrived just in time to fire its miniguns at her. Numerous high-caliber rounds had struck her despite her speed and agility, though all they had done was to cause her pain and make her angrier than before if that was even possible.

But she couldn't stop. She could feel it - she was so close. Ignoring the vehicles and men firing at her, she crashed through the front door of her home, only to find more opposition - Selicia and Buttercup stood before her, standing between her and the airlock leading down to the lab, where
Bubbles knew Dad would be.

Selicia was still in her T-shirt and jeans, with her vest hastily thrown over her and an XM9 Anti-Materials rifle in her hands. Bubbles had seen it before; her Mom had used it to wound Naga back in the Battle of Morbucks Industries Research Labs.

Buttercup had changed and was fully ready to do battle with her, with her MP5 clutched tightly in her hands, though the glow in her eyes was faint and Bubbles knew what it meant.

"Go up to your room before someone gets hurt, Bubbles!" Selicia warned.

"And I know who that someone will be!" Buttercup boasted, raising her MP5 at Bubbles. Bubbles glared at them – they were family, but they were selfish. They had been tormenting her for months. In her twisted mind, whatever good memories she shared with them were shoved aside, forgotten in her rage.

Without warning, Bubbles dashed towards them in a zig-zag fashion. Selicia couldn't even begin to track her with her Duranium rifle. Buttercup was ripping up the living room with her submachine gun, and even if she had hit Bubbles, she wasn't showing any sign of it.

By the time Selicia fired a Duranium round, Bubbles had already gotten up to her, pushing aside the Duranium barrel of her gun and charging into her and knocking her into the wall. Clutching the barrel of her gun, she pulled it away, disarming her, and hurled it out of her reach.

"Mom!" Buttercup shouted as she was exchanging her empty magazine with a fresh one. Letting Selicia slide to the floor, Bubbles threw a punch at her, lightning-quick, and Buttercup couldn't dodge it in time.

The train coach that was Bubbles' fist had knocked her to the floor, yards away. Buttercup's gun went off, putting holes in the ceiling.

Bubbles followed Buttercup as she skidded on the ground, and didn't let up by giving her a few kicks when she was down.

Fortunately, she didn't have long to do much damage as Selicia had drawn her stun baton, which was set to maximum charge, and jabbed at Bubbles' back with it, shocking her.

Bubbles screamed, but it hardly immobilized her and she was able to get away from the baton easily to avoid any further electrical pain. Selicia thrust it at her for a second strike, but Bubbles was able to dodge it easily before grabbing it and Mom by the neck.

Selicia screamed bloody fury as she tried to pull away, but Bubbles' grip was vice-like. Wrenching the baton out of her Mom's grasp, she gave her a right hook before she could recover.

Her head was slammed against the wall hard, and there was a splatter of blood. Selicia slid down the wall a second time, painting more of it red on the way.

Buttercup, in the meantime, had recovered enough to shoot laser beams at her from where she sat, but they were too weak to do much damage, merely carving her Kevlar vest as she came towards her. Bubbles gripped her Mom's stun baton tightly. Buttercup switched back to firing her gun, but it was futile.

When Bubbles came within range, she smacked Buttercup's MP5 out of her hands and kicked her in the face.
"This is for hurting me!" Bubbles yelled before jabbing the stun baton into her side while she held Buttercup by the collar. It'd made Buttercup squeal in pain as she thrashed about on the floor. Bubbles didn't stop until she stopped squirming - but on seeing her eyes, which were still open, and hearing her moaning, she slammed Buttercup's head into the floor, making a crater there, where blood began to pool.

Just when she thought she could walk through the airlock leading to the lab unimpeded, something crashed through a window in the kitchen before bounding towards her.

Blossom dashed to block Bubbles from entering the airlock, sliding into position as her momentum was strong. In her entrance, she had seen what Bubbles had done to Mom and Buttercup. There was a lot of blood. They looked as though they would need to be hospitalized, at least, or buried in the dirt, at worse.

And the worst part was that Blossom didn't even have the time to be shocked, to act like the little girl she was.

"What did you do, Bubbles!?!" Blossom scolded her out-of-control sister.

"They deserved it! They were both hurting me!" Bubbles shouted defensively. "Like you!"

"And now you've hurt your family," Blossom said, and that got Bubbles to quiet down as she couldn't think of a counter-argument, as damaged by drugs as she was.

Instead, Bubbles reached behind her and pulled her first-aid kit out. Opening it roughly and breaking it open, she pulled a Duranium scalpel out of it and trashed the rest of the first-aid kit on the floor. Bandages, band-aids, bottles of antiseptic, pain medication and rubber gloves spilled from the ruined kit, abandoned by Bubbles.

Letting out a shriek, Bubbles lunged at Blossom without a warning, when the latter was expecting her to say something. Blossom fired her heat beam at her, only for Bubbles' new red bubble shield thing to block it. Within a second, Bubbles was all over her, trying to stab her with the Duranium scalpel. She was able to pin Blossom against the wall and lift her off her feet with one hand, no matter how hard Blossom tried to push back.

Blossom's hand had found its way onto Bubbles' wrist, trying to push the Duranium scalpel away, but it was looming closer, the blade inching towards her, coming… But not yet, as Blossom head-butted Bubbles and pushed her away while she was rubbing her nose, which bled copiously from the force.

Glaring at Blossom, Bubbles, looking especially unhinged with blood all over her face, screamed and charged at her again, swinging the Duranium scalpel wildly at her, forcing her to back away towards the middle of the living room. Drawing her pistol, Blossom fired at her in self-defense, though even without her new red bubble ability, Bubbles wasn't even fazed by the gunshots.

Eventually, one of Bubbles' swings had sliced Blossom in the hand, forcing her to drop the pistol. Shocked at the amount of pain it caused, the wound it dug in her, Blossom wasn't able to react when Bubbles lunged at Blossom a second time again, tackling her to the ground. Bubbles, again, tried to stab Blossom with the Duranium scalpel, but Blossom was able to grab Bubbles by the wrists, after accidentally slitting her fingers on the blade of the scalpel in the scuffle.

The scalpel floated over Blossom like some doom pendulum in an Edgar Allan Poe story. With a crazy scream, Bubbles applied all her strength to it, putting her weight and entire upper body strength into it. The scalpel came ever closer to Blossom, who screamed as well, but not in
bloodlust and aggression, but in fear, until…

Blossom felt it penetrate her, piercing through her as if the scalpel was a butter knife and she was the butter. In the struggle, the scalpel had gone deep into her shoulder. The pain was unbearable, so much so that for a split second, Blossom thought she might have lost consciousness there and then, and though it was but for a split second, it was long enough for Bubbles to direct two more punches at her, until she was limp, until she had lost consciousness for sure.

Bubbles stood back up when she saw that she had finally done it - knocked Blossom out for the count. For a time, she stood there, just gazing at Blossom, wondering if she should finish the job. But in the end, she decided that killing one family member was enough - two would be too much. The fairy godmother promised a dozen syringes if she killed her evil Dad, and that had to be enough. She really didn't want to have to sacrifice two of her kin if she could help it. She'd thought, perhaps, that the fairy godmother might see it fit to reward her more of her magic anyway if she would just obey her like a good girl and kill her father without any further hesitation.

Walking away, Bubbles padded towards the airlock.

"Fire!" a USDO PTF soldier ordered from a living room window. More soldiers started popping out of windows and doors, firing their weapons at Bubbles.

"Leave me alone!" Bubbles screamed and turned around, firing a red ion beam from her eyes that swept across the windows and door of the living room. Men screamed in fear, pain and confusion. It was a new power but she didn't care; she was absorbed in her own pain, regret and need for the drug. She tried opening the airlock door, but found it sealed, so she pried it open anyway, forcing it open. There were creaks in the door, which groaned and bent and screamed as Bubbles broke it open. Walking into the airlock, she closed the door back up. Bullets ricocheted against it as she forced her way through the inner airlock door as well, as the few USDO PTF soldiers who weren't injured or dead tried futilely to slow her down.

Despite her rage, despite her insanity, her mind twisted by the workings of someone or something, Bubbles could not help but feel a little nervous, and anxious. Would her Dad fight her in an attempt to defend himself? She was still unsure if she would back out, even if there was a huge bounty on his head. Regret wormed its way into her, as always, even though she hadn't gone through with it, even if she hadn't discovered if she would lament her decision to silence her Dad, such that she would never hear his soothing voice again…
Chapter 50: No Going Back (Part 5)

Chapter Summary

Everything comes to a head at The House.

Chapter 50: No Going Back (Part 5)

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1416.

'That's good, sweetie,' Dad, dressed in white like an angel with his white lab coat, said as he was holding Blossom up by the arms and mounting her feet on his own. 'Now use your legs and keep yourself straight.'

He started walking, and as Blossom was standing on top of his feet, she started walking too. She squealed in delight at discovering walking. It was such a simple thing, walking, but she was simple back then too, and it brought her so much more joy than flying for the umpteenth time on patrol ever could.

'Now try it yourself,' he said before carrying her by the armpits and putting her on the carpeted floor. She was able to stand on her own as strength wasn't the issue. He crossed the room and put his arms out. 'Come to papa!'

Blossom tried to put one foot in front of the other, and for a few steps, she succeeded. But on the fourth or fifth, she tripped on her own foot and fell, knee first. She bawled like a baby, and Dad ran towards her, holding her tightly, cooing her.

'It's okay to fall, Blossom,' he said. 'It's how we learn to get up again.'

It's okay to fall

'Dada…' Blossom struggled to do what Dad called 'speaking'. Although she didn't even know the word then, she was thankful for her Dad's coddling.

It's okay to fall

But then a kind of mist started swirling around her. She tried swiping them away, but they wouldn't go away. When she looked around at her Dad again, he had turned into a skeleton. She couldn't even begin to scream when she saw that Daddy was no more.

It's how we learn to get up again.

Blossom came to the moment she heard the airlock door slam shut, though, with her mind numb and fuzzy, she couldn't decide what the noise was at first. Sitting up, she felt immediate, sharp pain in her shoulder, and when she looked down, she was met with a ghastly sight - Bubbles' scalpel was buried deep in her shoulder. The entire blade had disappeared inside. The pain would erupt with any slight movement. Blood had started running down the handle and dripping from its tip the moment she sat up.
Then everything hit her like a sledgehammer. Dad. Bubbles. She looked at Buttercup and Mom, hoping that they could protect him in her absence, but their lights were out, and judging by how much they were bleeding from their heads, they weren't in any condition to fight or even defend themselves, much less protect Dad.

She tried forcing herself to stand up, but she crashed back down when the pain in her shoulder became unbearable, instantly. The Duranium blade inside was sharp, and it was rubbing against the walls of her wound the moment she moved.

"Y-you… h-have… to take it out…" Mom, who had come to as well, said, though she was barely conscious, and she wasn't moving at all. "Please… H-hurry. Y-your Dad…"

"I can't! It hurts so bad!" Blossom cried the moment she realized her predicament was inescapable – at least not without feeling an obscene amount of pain. She felt like hurling just by thinking of pulling it out.

"You have to hurry… please…" her Mom said, before falling silent once again. Even though it'd hurt enough to make her nauseous, Blossom crept up to her to hold her hand, but all Selicia could manage was a weak squeeze before she passed out again.

"Mom? Mom!" Blossom cried – and though she would have preferred Dad's company, Mom still meant something to her. That she couldn't help feeling devastating on top of everything. "Don't leave me like this…"

But even as she was crying, she knew she had to get to Dad and stop Bubbles, somehow. Gripping the handle of the scalpel hesitantly, she started pulling it out, bit by bit, the sharp blade slicing and biting against her raw flesh, causing bleeding anew.

She screamed aloud, before and after she yanked it out.

Even Bubbles could hear her bloodcurdling scream from underground, as she descended the stairs towards Dad. She could have flown down the stairs, but she wanted to take her time this time, perhaps to think about what she was about to do, or perhaps to think of a way out of this. But she knew she wasn't Blossom, and the pain in her internals was doing the deciding for her. The only way was forward, towards Dad, and towards his end. In fact, she was beginning to regret leaving Blossom alive as the fairy godmother had promised an unlimited supply of her magic – and a new life for Buttercup and Mom too, if she did. It felt like the kind of good - the only good - she could do to redeem herself for killing Dad and one of her sisters.

But that decision would have to be decided later as she had arrived at the foot of the stairs, not far from Dad now, wherever he was.

When she emerged into the wide space underground that was the laboratory, she had expected to have to search every nook and cranny for her Dad. She had looked up to him, but she knew that he was only human and a regular human at that - weak, slow and afraid, and regular human beings tend to either die fighting in vain or run away and hide.

But no, Dad didn't do either of those. He was sitting behind his desk, looking at something. Bubbles couldn't see, and so she walked closer, still avoiding flight altogether until she could see what he was doing.

Dad was looking at a framed photo. Her sight was good enough - better than most people on the planet - that she could see from afar that he was looking at a picture of them, the entire family. On the desk was a large sniper rifle, the exact same model as Mom's - which he wasn't even holding.
"Dad," Bubbles said to the man coldly, her eyes still an unwavering hellish red. He seemed to shrink upon hearing her voice, hunching as though the entire house had collapsed upon him. Then, with his forearms braced against the desk, he pushed himself up to stand, as if with difficulty. His hand had found its way to the XM9 anti-material rifle, but he wasn't shouldering it. He was carrying it as if it was a briefcase, not a weapon.

"Hello, Bubbles," he greeted his adopted daughter.

"Are you going to shoot me, Daddy?" Bubbles asked as she stood rooted to the ground. The professor looked down at the Duranium gun he was holding as if deciding.

"No," he said. "I won't. I can't. I love you, Bubbles." With that, he set down the gun on his swivel chair.

"What happened to you, sweetie?" the Dad asked, taking a step forward. There was no fear in his eyes, just concern, and sadness.

"Bad things…" Bubbles said, herself upset. Faced with this moment of truth, she couldn't help but weep at the inevitability of things. "Lots of bad things."

"You can tell me, Bubbles," he said and came even closer. "This can end here."

"No," Bubbles clamped up.

"I'm your father. I can help you," he went on, now almost within arm's reach. "You've come back from this before. Remember? When you and Buttercup were fighting here? You can do it again."

"YOU don't know what I'VE been GOING through!" Bubbles screamed all of a sudden, but her Dad wasn't deterred. He wasn't even shocked at the slightest. It was as if he knew she was going to explode. "You don't know!"

"I know, Bubbles," Dad said.

"You don't know," Bubbles ranted madly. "You don't know! You can't know! I haven't told you!"

"It's the drug, isn't it?" Dad said. Bubbles opened her mouth, before shutting it, saying nothing more, so he went on: "I examined Buttercup last night, Bubbles. I couldn't find any sign of the drug in her. It threw me for a loop for a while, until Blake called."

"It's a lie," Bubbles denied. "He's LYING!"

"Let me help you," Dad offered again. He was close enough, and he'd bent down to bring himself to her eye level, putting his hand on her shoulder. "I can help you."

Bubbles closed her eyes, tears spilling out. But then she opened them again, her eyes were still a shocking red, and now she was glaring at him.

"You were never there!" she snarled at him, before giving him a punch in the stomach, which sent him sprawling. He tried to get up again, but there a sharp pain in his gut prevented him from rising from his knees. "You were never there! You COULDN'T protect me! You were SUPPOSED to PROTECT me! Now LOOK at me, Dad! LOOK AT ME!"

"Bubbles… I…" the professor uttered as he was clutching his stomach while kneeling on the tiled floor. Before he could say anything more, Bubbles picked him up by the collar and tossed him into the wall, where he slid down in a heap, his legs sprawled out in a rough sitting position, as if he
was a ragdoll thrown against the wall. He wasn't moving after that.

"STOP!" came the voice of another little girl. Bubbles turned around and saw Blossom hovering lazily towards her, down the stairs, unsteady. She was clutching her shoulder, where there was a lot of bleeding. Blood was still dripping onto the floor from her, forming red beads. In her other hand was Mom's anti-material rifle, and when Blossom touched down and started walking towards her, the barrel was dragging on the ground. The moment she saw Dad slumped on the wall, she tried to raise the rifle, but Bubbles was faster. Quick-drawing her pistol, Bubbles pointed it at the unconscious Dad.

"NO! Don't!" Blossom screamed. She lowered her rifle again, afraid that Bubbles might go through with it, ending the life of a father she loved beyond words. "Bubbles, PLEASE! Don't do it!"

"Why shouldn't I?" Bubbles said, her pistol still trained on Dad, her hand shivering slightly from her drug problem.

"He's your Dad! Our Dad!" Blossom screamed desperately. "Don't kill him! Please!"

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1419.

A red muscle car pulled up on the driveway of The House. The scene was one of utter devastation. In the distance, up in the sky, an Apache attack helicopter was on the retreat, likely rendered useless by the number of friendlies on the ground precluding mad minute tactics. Half the USDO PTF soldiers looked like they were victims of a lab accident involving lasers, though surprisingly, no one was killed. Whichever hospital was taking them in, however, would have its work cut out for it. The other half of the soldiers had to tend to their injured squadmates.

Detective Mullens got out of his car from the driver's seat. Olivia disembarked from the shotgun. A huge German Shepherd weaseled out from the back after opening the door by itself.

"Talker, stay behind me," Garrett ordered as he was pulling out his pistol. "Olivia, beside me."

They had been working in the background all along, informing Blake of their discoveries, planning Bubbles' capture and whatever contingency plans they needed - except it had all gone to shit. Bubbles was unpredictable, he knew, but the degree of it was unknown. Who would have thought that her own family would be a target?

The detective and his companions ran straight through the door of The House with reckless abandon. There was no point in caution - if they were in, they were all in. No amount of cover and firearms could protect them from the kind of hurt Bubbles could put out. No, he wasn't counting on either of that to win the day, if it was at all possible.

He knew there was no guarantee of getting out of this one alive. All he knew was that he owed the Girls.

When they were in the living room, it was as if they were stepping into a war zone. There were cracks and craters everywhere, bullet holes riddled the walls and ceiling. Bubbles had drawn a trail of destruction with her newly-discovered ion beam.

Selicia Goodwin and Buttercup were bleeding on the floor. Detective Mullens went straight for the woman. His daughter tended to Buttercup.
"Still alive," the detective said after he felt for a pulse and found one, thankfully. Had Bubbles killed her own mother, he doubt that the little girl would be able to come back from this.

"Buttercup's breathing," Olivia announced.

"Poor kid..." Stanley Talker said as he began licking Buttercup in the face. "Ri ron't ragree with her way rof doing things, but no rone deserves this."

"Olivia, Stan, get them both fixed up," the senior detective said, just as he had caught sight of the ruined door of the airlock leading down. "I'm going in."

With that, he raced down the stairs to the lab, his pistol still out due only to force of habit. At this point, his firearm was more liability than an asset. There was no doubt that he was on the right track - as his track was marked by blood - whose, he could only guess. What he was sure of was that it was bad, no matter whose blood it was.

His fears were confirmed when he emerged into the huge, wide-open space of the lab, where Bubbles was keeping her own Dad, who was unconscious and slumped against the wall, at gunpoint, and Blossom was crying helplessly, pleading with her sister to stop.

"Bubbles!" Detective Mullens called out to her. She reacted by pointing her sidearm at him. He raised his arms in surrender, his pistol along with it. "Hey, easy, kid! I'm just here to talk!" Blossom looked at the detective, fearful of what might happen next.

Bubbles, without warning, shot him in the chest. Confirming Blossom's fears. She jumped when she did, fresh tears spilling anew. Mullens was knocked off his feet by the force of the gunshot, crashing to the ground, his pistol clattering on the ground, his hands going up to his chest. After coughing and wincing and curling up, he fell silent, all while Blossom had to look.

Bubbles returned the aim of her gun back to Dad.

"You- You just killed Mister Mullens!" Blossom screamed hysterically. "You killed him!" Bubbles was silent as she studied her sister.

"Why, Bubbles?" the leader sister wondered aloud as she started pacing. "Why now? I thought we worked this all out!"

"We tried to kill each other, Blossom, my dear sister," Bubbles replied unexpectedly, but her gun was still trained on Dad, something that Blossom was deathly afraid of. This way, Dad was just a hair-trigger away from being lost forever. "Things can't go back to how it used to be. I know it. Not when I have to do this."

"But why, Bubbles? Why kill Dad?" Blossom asked. She'd been working her way towards Bubbles, a fraction of an inch at a time, though it was not to say that her questions were distractions or false. "He loves us!"

"T-the fairy godmother..." Bubbles uttered, knowing full well by now how ridiculous it sounded. "She promised me more if I do it."

"What did she promise you?" Blossom asked, getting a little closer to Bubbles with each passing minute. She had no idea who this 'fairy godmother' was. In fact, it sounded as if Bubbles was just losing her mind.

"Her magic," Bubbles admitted tearfully. "She promised me more magic."
"Magic?" Blossom asked, confused. Magic was the stuff of fairy tales, not real life. Yes, Blossom decided. Bubbles was just losing her mind. The blood on her face, covering her nose and mouth, didn't help with that impression. Not only that, she refused to take responsibility for what she had done, what she was doing.

"This is all YOUR fault!" Bubbles exploded once more, her pistol arm shaking. Blossom thought she might never breathe again. She took another subtle step closer to Bubbles. "They gave me the power I need to fight crime - and you needed me to fight crime. I can't stop taking it now. This is YOUR fault! And now Dad's going to DIE because of YOU!"

"The fairy godmother promised, Blossom," Bubbles repeated herself. "I'm going to kill you too after I kill Dad. She'll take care of Mom and Buttercup that way, because Dad never did."

"You're a bad leader, Blossom," Bubbles went on. "You failed everyone. You failed me. The fairy godmother will be a better leader than you. That's what she said."

Blossom squeezed her eyes shut, contemplating, thinking of what she could do, what she had to do. Mullens was killed. Before that, she had severely injured Stanley Talker. Bubbles had attacked Mom and Buttercup - whether they were dead or alive, she didn't know. Almost everyone she knew and cared about was either hurt badly or killed, and Dad was going to join them. She opened her eyes again, her gaze concentrating deeply on Bubbles.

"It doesn't have to be this way, Bubbles," Blossom inched closer, slightly towards her Dad. Bubbles' eyes flitted down to the Duranium sniper rifle in Blossom's hands, before coming back up to meet Blossom's eyes. "We can still work this out - that's what sisters are for. Things could still go back to how they used to be."

"No, Blossom! It can't!" Bubbles exclaimed madly, her finger still a fraction of an inch away from setting off her gun. Then, she burst into tears on the bare mention of things that once were. "I've shot Mister Mullens, and I've hurt Dad… Mom… and Buttercup. I've hurt you. The magic! The magic in ME! IT'S BURNING ME!"

"They'll all forgive you, Bubbles. Dad's going to help you with your… problem," Blossom insisted, still inching her way closer to Bubbles, getting between her and Dad. She was just a few arm's lengths away from her. "What about spring? We talked about it all the time."

"Spring?" Bubbles uttered, as though the word she said was sacred.

"Remember what Dad said about spring? The world will be full of colors and the flowers will bloom. The butterflies will flutter and the bees will buzz around," Blossom described. Bubbles' pistol arm wavered as it shook, but it stayed on Dad. Bubbles couldn't stop crying. Blossom was getting closer and closer to her, and she was none the wiser. "We're going to put down our guns, and we can go back, Bubbles. We can go back to Dad, together."

"Dad…" Bubbles cried.

"Dad and Mom, you, me and Buttercup - we could all go have a picnic in the park. Mom's going to show us her secret sandwich recipe. We'll see the beautiful trees and flowers, Blossom. You've always wanted to pick some Dandelions and give them to us," Blossom continued to describe hopefully as she came within arm's length of Bubbles. Bubbles' mouth was wide open; she herself could see spring, as it was pictured in the books and given in detail by Dad. She was staring into Blossom's eyes with her hellish red eyes, but she wasn't really 'all there'. "We'll take turns riding a pony at a real stable. We'll meet the cowboys. We'll laugh and play together… Put all this behind us… We can be like sisters again, Bubbles, like before."
For the first time in a long time, Bubbles smiled, her eyes full of longing, her mouth wide, as if she could taste it. Blossom motioned for her to take her sniper rifle, as a sign of trust, and while Bubbles took it by the middle as her eyes flitted down, Blossom pulled something out of her back pouch and lunged at her.

Bubbles felt something sharp going through her throat. She knew what it was even without seeing it. There was a sharp pain there, and she couldn't help but squeeze her pistol hand in shock and pain, setting off her pistol - but Blossom had planned all this. She'd grabbed Bubbles' wrist before that, pulled it aside. The shot that went off had gone elsewhere, and not into her Dad's forehead.

A shocking amount of blood splattered onto both Blossom and Bubbles when the former had stabbed the latter's throat, who then proceeded to pull the scalpel sideways, slicing windpipe and arteries all the way through. Bubbles collapsed, and Blossom caught her, lowering her down gently to the floor, at the same time withdrawing the scalpel she had used to mortally wound her own sister.

"YOU MADE ME, BUBBLES!" Blossom hollered and screamed and cried into Bubbles' face as she was coughing and retching up blood, her red eyes staring in shock and betrayal into Blossom's pink eyes. "YOU FORCED ME TO DO THIS! THIS IS YOUR FAULT! YOU DID THIS! NOT ME! NOT ME!"

Anger wasn't the only thing in Bubbles' voice, or mind, or eyes. Tears fell as she did this, as she saw the results of what she was forced to do.

"S-s-spr..." Bubbles tried to say, but with her windpipe sliced, she couldn't do it without coughing up a lot of blood and sputtering. Blossom cradled Bubbles' head, holding her close to her as she lay there, bleeding, wailing in utter misery at what she had to do.

In the meantime, Mister Mullens had dragged himself up to a sitting position, unbuttoning his trenchcoat. His chest felt like an industrial accident. Although the Kevlar there had caught the pistol bullet, the force was still strong enough to knock him flat. Although it was far from the first time he had been shot, it was something he could never get used to. His ribs felt sore. He wouldn't be surprised if his x-ray turned out to be a mess. But the scene before him was worse.

"Jesus..." he uttered when he realized what happened. Meanwhile, his colleagues were racing down the stairs. They stopped descending and stared when they realized that the situation was resolved, albeit in a less-than-ideal fashion.

There was blood all over the place, and a Duranium scalpel was lying in a pool of it. Blossom had done what he'd been trying to avoid all this while, what he'd dedicated his life to prevent.

And now Bubbles was lying in a pool of her own blood. In Blossom's arm.

It was over.
Chapter 51: Death and Life

Chapter Summary

Professor Utonium and Blossom comes to terms with recent events.
Chapter 51: Death and Life

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1419.

When Professor Utonium had come to, what he saw next made going back to unconsciousness preferable. Blossom and Bubbles – two of his darling babies – were covered in blood. Both of them were injured, one more than the other, and Blossom was cradling Bubbles in her arms, and where she was once full of energy and action, she was on the floor, wailing. Bubbles was lifeless in her arms.

Even from where he was, he could tell how grievous the wound was. There was a bloody scalpel on the floor. Where Blossom had gotten it he had no idea, but it was likely the weapon used to slit Bubbles' throat wide open, and blood was pouring out at an alarming rate.

"I'm sorry, Bubbles, I'm so sorry…” Blossom cried as she hugged her mortally wounded sister closely. "I love you… Goodbye…”

After giving Bubbles a kiss on the cheek, Blossom got up, laying her down on the floor gently and respectfully, oblivious of anyone's presence. She couldn't get far, however, before she collapsed to her knees and vomited on the floor, before rolling over and falling unconscious on her back.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1605.

The professor himself was covered in blood. He was sitting outside the front door of his home. He didn't want to get back inside, no matter how freezing it was outside. His hands, bloody from his previous ordeal, were shaking, but it wasn't from the cold. He stared into the distance, into the empty house opposite the street to his own that was bought out by the USDO. PTF soldiers stood aside and far away, speaking in hushed tones as if they knew what kind of turmoil he was suffering from inside.

He looked to his right and saw the only real neighbor he had. Smith, he thought, just turning around and walking back into his own home.

The world seemed different now – the color, the shapes, the feel of it – even though the only thing that had really changed was his family.

When he had to create reinforcement for the Girls, when he created Chemical X2 just for that, he didn't think that he would be introducing reinforcement in the most literal, military sense of the word. Was it destiny all along? Fate? He was never a man of faith; what faith he had, he'd placed them on the people around him, and most recently, on the shoulders of his family. And now, even that was gone. There was only cold, hard facts and data; science. And it wasn't looking good.
He didn't think that when he was about to create reinforcement for the Girls – be he or she a brother or a sister – that he would be-

…Replacing Bubbles.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1614.

Behind him, the front door opened. A fellow intelligentsia in a lab coat stepped out of the entrance. Gingerly skirting around him, he lowered himself down beside him to join him on the concrete before his front door.

He had old, wrinkled skin, white hair. It was Doctor Simmons, the medical director of the USDO.

"It's nasty, what happened," the old doctor said delicately. "We're sorry about what happened."

The professor continued staring into the distance, into the city center of Townsville, that damned city, that city that was constantly threatening to swallow his Girls whole. At long last, it had succeeded in dragging one into its gaping maw like some monster.

He was still shaking after everything.

"Blossom's stable. So is Selicia and Buttercup," the doctor reported. "Bubbles, however…"

"Look, we did the best we can. You did," Doctor Simmons went on when he realized that the professor wasn't going to open up no matter what. He put an arm around the relatively young man.

"Come back inside. It's freezing out here. Come back inside, your family needs you, now more than ever. The last thing they need is for you to join them in the sick bed, fighting hypothermia. I think your concussion is enough; it's a wonder how you could even operate, the way you are."

"I can't," Professor Utonium said.

"Remember the story I told you about my past?" Doctor Simmons said. The professor didn't reply. "I couldn't save those kids. I didn't try. I gave up and I paid the price. You've been strong. I know it's hard, but you need to keep going."

"I can't, okay!?" the professor yelled, but the old doctor didn't seem shocked by it, as if he expected it.

"Why?" he asked, instead.

"I should have known – it was all going to blow and it happened right under my nose!" the professor cried, his face in his hands. "All the signs were there, all the science. Bubbles' 'new power', her symptoms, the drugs – I've seen the data and the effects. A detective all but told me-"

"Don't beat yourself up over it-" the old doctor comforted him, but it didn't stick.

"How can I not!?" the professor said. "I'm a scientist and a doctor. The USDO recruited me because I'm one of the best. I let my personal feelings get in the way and my family paid the price for it!"

"You're a human being, one of the most human I've ever met-" the old doctor tried again, but Professor Utonium went on as if he had said nothing.
"I accused Buttercup of deception when she was telling the truth for once, and now look what happened to her," the professor cried. "And I believed Bubbles when I shouldn't have, just because I thought she was sweet and incapable of deception. And Blossom… she had to- she had to-"

"Enough, Upton," the doctor said finally. "All that is past. You can't undo it, just like how I couldn't bring those Jewish children back… no matter how many times I wished upon a star, all those years while I wandered Europe. But you're in the now, you can change things now!"

The professor nodded. Doctor Simmons helped him up; he was surprisingly strong, given his age and it wasn't all thanks to the health regimen given to all USDO personnel. Together, they went back inside and back down to the lab.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

21 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1420.

Beep… Beep… Beep… a heart monitor chanted in its vigil over its patient. Professor Utonium had been sitting beside her almost on a nightly basis too, despite everything that had happened. He couldn't blame her for it, after all, after thinking about it over the course of three days.

Standing up, he stretched, and he could hear his joints cracking. Bending down, he kissed his little patient in the forehead, before walking around one of the arms of the Duranium table she was fastened to, so he could check the heart rate monitor and adjust it for the umpteenth time for calibration. He knew that the machine was fine and functioning as it should be. Just that with everything in his head, with all the anxiety and nervousness he felt, his hands got busy. He needed problems to solve, even if they weren't there.

"D-dad?" a faint, hoarse voice cried while he was tinkling with the monitor. He whirled around, almost knocking it over, and he rushed over to his little patient.

"Bubbles!" he said as he came up to her, holding her head and kissing her in the forehead again.

"I… can't move…" she said while she began to struggle, but she was held in a spread-eagled position by Duranium restraints on a Duranium bed, the same one that was used to disempower Buttercup. She was covered with a blanket for comfort but naked underneath due to her withdrawal symptoms, which meant endless, profuse sweating. It was also for easy access whenever she needed to be cleaned and maintained or if he needed to inject her or poke and prod her with whatever Duranium implements he needed to perform the many medical examinations he had to undertake to understand her condition better.

He couldn't take the chance. He didn't need a repeat of what happened three days ago. Bubbles was going to stay in the table until he was sure she wasn't going to hurt anyone.

"It's for your own good, honey," he said. "I'm sorry if it's uncomfortable, but I'll be here with you, always."

"I'm sorry for everything, Dad," Bubbles cried. "I didn't mean to."

The professor pulled a couple of napkins from a box beside her and helped her wipe the tears away.

"I know," he said.

"How do you know?" Bubbles asked.
"Because I know you're the sweetest, kindest little girl there is," the professor said, holding her hand even though he knew he was putting himself at risk. "That wasn't you, three days ago."

"Three days?" Bubbles asked, confused.

"Yes, it's been three days, Bubbles," the professor said. Bubbles had been healing for three days too. Thinking back, it hadn't been easy even for her superior biology. It was only by dint of her enhanced oxygen capacity and anaerobic resistance that she had survived having her windpipe severed in two. Normal people would have been lost in five minutes; Bubbles had survived the ten minutes it took for the professor to drain her lungs of blood and hook her up to an artificial respiration machine. "You shouldn't feel as bad as you used to without the drug."

"But what about Blossom? And Buttercup? And Mom?" Bubbles said. "And… I killed Mister Mullens…"

"They're all fine, sweetie," the professor said.

"Promise?" Bubbles asked. She was smart and experienced enough to know that adults wouldn't always tell the truth, even the good ones.

"Promise. Here, I'll even pinkie swear it," the professor reassured her by wrapping his pinkie around hers. He still couldn't believe how tiny her fingers were – next to how much power there were behind them. Power that had killed, and nearly destroyed the family when someone had abused her naïve nature, whoever had supplied her with the drugs.

The professor then walked around to the head of the bed and lifted her head up for her gently. Bubbles winced. The traumatic injury in her neck was mostly healed, but not entirely. The damage was severe enough that even her healing factor couldn't fix it overnight, and neither in three days.

"They've been busy, in fact, see?" the professor said. He'd lifted her head up so she could see the entrance leading into the Duranium table room and the glass wall surrounding it.

The glass wall was filled with drawing blocks depicting the Girls. Though the drawings were basic, it didn't matter, and the intentions and meaning showed through. One of them had the three of them playing with the swings in a playground. Another was a scene in school with Miss Keane. One of them was Blossom and Bubbles playing with toys horses in a toy corral and toy barn.

But the next few ones were even more poignant. It was the park, lushly green and filled with colorful flowers and bees and butterflies buzzing about. Another was all three Girls riding ponies, and the ground was green with tall grasses all sticking out.

"Spring…" Bubbles mumbled. The professor had to wipe her tears away constantly after that.

"The three of you are really looking forward to it, aren't you?" the professor said. "The picnic idea's definitely on the table. So is the zoo trip, and the horse riding. Get better soon, Bubbles, so we can experience your first spring together… At your best."

There was distant chatter from the outside. Giggles. Bubbles could recognize who they were even from afar. They were people she'd been with for most of her waking moment. People she tried to kill. A wave of unbearable shame and misery overwhelmed Bubbles when she realized she was about to meet more people she tried to kill and had wounded badly as a result – and they were her sisters, too.

Outside, Blossom and Buttercup were approaching the Duranium table room. They had to weave past numerous soldiers at their posts to get there. After Bubbles' drug-induced, violent and deadly
outburst, Captain Scott of the PTF and General Blackwater just couldn't take the chance. As such, they had basically stationed an entire company of soldiers in Professor Utonium's lab just in case. There were machinegun nests pointed at the thin corridor leading to the Duranium table room. Behind them were sniper nests, each with several crack-shot snipers, and each team of snipers had their best armed with the modified Duranium XM9 anti-material rifle. Squads more of soldiers were stationed above ground.

The closer Blossom got to Bubbles, the more she doubted herself, and her sisterhood and relationship with her. Each step became harder than the next to put forward. After all, things had changed far too frequently and drastically, like night to day, winter to summer...

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

**19 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1951.**

Concerned about Blossom, Professor Utonium had decided to check on her, bringing along some new dessert for her to try, a strawberry lava cake. It wasn't the first time he had to check on her since… it… happened. Just an hour earlier, after watching Blossom sit through her dinner without taking a nibble, he had to intervene when Blossom decided to shut herself in the washroom and take a bath on her own.

He had to break down the door after hearing her trying to drown herself. She had been trying several times while he was dressing Selicia and Buttercup in fresh bandages.

Thankfully, he didn't need to break another door down this time, but he did hear her grunting and shrieking, tearing things apart. On entering the room, he saw her ripping Bubbles' drawings off the wall and tearing them to shreds.

"Blossom?" the Professor called out to his adopted daughter while he was setting down the strawberry lava cake. Blossom stopped immediately, but she did not turn to face him. Instead, she stood in that corner of the room, shreds of colored drawing block all around her, some still drifting in the air as if infused by Bubbles' powers.

He could tell that she had been weeping from the sniffling. She had fallen silent, likely trying very hard to control her emotions but failing; children her age cried a lot, among other things; it was as much a biological imperative as it was the result of inexperience.

"I'm not mad, you know," the professor reassured her. "You can turn around. Stop standing there like you've broken a vase or something. I've brought something really nice up. I think you'll like it."

"You're just trying to make me feel better. I promised not to hurt her but I did," Blossom cried, wiping tears away. "I broke my promise and I hurt her bad, and her blood was all over me…"

"I lied to her and I tricked her. I hate myself!" she wept.

"You're not being fair to yourself. You were forced to," Professor Utonium reasoned. "You didn't want to."

"I HATE her!" Blossom suddenly shouted and slammed her fists against the wall. The professor could feel a tremor even on the floor. "She did all this! I hate her!"

"No, you don't. This isn't who you are," the professor said. "You're angry and upset. But you don't have to be alone. I'm here, Blossom. Don't push me away."
Blossom flew to him when her self-imposed isolation grew too unbearable. Hugging him around the chest, she wetted the professor's lab coat with her tears so much that it had soaked through down to his shirt. The professor hugged back. Bringing her to her bed, he sat down and let her off, seating her on his lap.

"Bubbles wasn't herself either," the professor continued. "If it makes you feel any better, it wasn't her who did all that. Don't blame her for it, flower blossom."

"But she nearly killed Mom and Buttercup! And Mister Mullens! And she nearly killed you!" Blossom cried. "And Stanley… And those men with the Mayor!"

"You know about her drug problem, right? I told you about it after Bubbles' surgery," the professor reasoned with her. They had gone back to hugging each other. There was no one else; Mom, Buttercup and Bubbles were all unconscious, and as it stood, none of them could hold a candle to the Dad in Blossom's eyes. "She's been using… it. Which means someone's been feeding her the drug. Someone else tricked her first, forcing you to do the same. You need to understand that. Will you try that, Blossom?"

Blossom took an awfully long time to make a decision, which scared the professor. It could mean that she was hesitating, considering alternatives.

"Yes… I guess," she finally said, dispelling any doubts the professor had in her.

"Take your time, honey," Professor Utonium said. "I know it hasn't been easy for you at all. If it helps, General Blackwater promised to give the three of you a few days to rest. Don't worry your little head over Townsville and its crime problem. Take this time to heal, you deserve it."

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

**21 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1421.**

"Hello, Bubbles," Bubbles could hear Blossom greet her from a distance away, sounding like she was still at the door. She could only count herself fortunate that her Daddy had laid her head back down on her pillow when he'd gone to receive Blossom. She didn't want to look Blossom in the eyes. Neither did she reply. She didn't dare to, couldn't work up the courage. All she could focus on was the evil she had done for the entirety of last week; the lives she had taken, the drugs she had taken. The close sisterhood and bond she shared with Blossom and even Buttercup that she sacrificed, just so she could get her next kick. She felt incredibly stupid in the end because she had taken those drugs to preserve her close relationship with her sisters in the first place. She knew that compared to her sisters, she was an idiot, and now she had given them every reason to call her that.

"She's still recovering, Blossom," the professor cautioned her in a hushed tone. Bubbles could hear him; it didn't sound like he was trying to keep it from her. "Take it easy on her."

"I like her better that way. She should stay in that table for the rest of her life," Bubbles could hear Buttercup sneer at her.

"Buttercup, what did I tell you?" Dad was practically growling.

"I know, I know. I was just kidding," Buttercup apologized, sort of. Bubbles couldn't remember the last time she did if she ever did. She wasn't even sure if it was sincere if Buttercup was ever sincere about anything.

"Not funny, Buttercup," Blossom chided her, but it was too late. Even though Buttercup was being
mean, Bubbles knew that she was justified this time. She had, after all, bashed her head against the floor so hard she was KO'ed and bleeding profusely the last time they met. Knowing this, she tried to keep her crying to herself, but a pathetic whimper escaped her lips regardless.

"I'll leave the three of you alone," the professor said. "I'll be right outside if any of you need me." Bubbles could hear him walking away. She wanted to call out to him to make him stay, but she knew she shouldn't make any demands from now on of anyone, as she had no right to do so after what she had done.

"How are you, Bubbles?" Blossom greeted Bubbles again as she came up to her, close enough to be in Bubbles' sight, but she turned her head away and closed her eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Don't look at me…" Bubbles wept as she continued squeezing her eyes shut. Unconsciously, she tried to cover her face with her hands, but they were stuck in their Duranium restraints, and all she could do was strain against them. "Please."

"Bubbles, I'm not mad at you anymore," Blossom said. She caught hold of Bubbles' head with her hands on either side of it so she couldn't look away. However, she was still shutting her eyes.

"I'm ashamed of myself," Bubbles cried. She didn't struggle against Blossom's grip; she couldn't bring herself to disobey Blossom even with such a comparatively minor thing. "Stop looking at me, please. I've hurt everyone who cares about me."

Blossom nodded at Buttercup, who sighed.

"I think you were awesome, Bubbles," Buttercup said with a half-defeated and half-sincere tone. "You were able to beat me over and over. I think you'll be able to do it without the drug."

Buttercup hated this, getting her arm twisted like this. Blossom had threatened to tell Dad about her past misdeeds, and the ammunition Buttercup had against Blossom no longer applied, considering how smeared her image was.

"I know it isn't your fault, Bubbles," Blossom said. "So stop being like this."

Bubbles willed herself to open her eyes, but when she inadvertently made eye contact with Blossom, she squinted her eyes, as if her leader sister was about to hit her. Blossom did have that look after all, what some less-than-subtle people would call that 'demon look'. Her glowing pink eyes had that penetrating stare, and now it was scaring her. Bubbles absolutely dreaded being strapped to the Duranium table, but what she dreaded worse was to be forced to look Blossom in the eyes while she was stuck in it.

"You know about the drugs?" Bubbles said. Something crashed deep down in her. Her secret had finally been exposed. At long last. If she wasn't weeping hard enough just now, she sure was at present.

"Dad told me about it," Blossom said. "He also told me that someone tricked you into using it. Is it true?"

Bubbles squeezed her eyes shut once more. There was so much going on inside her that it was painful - the shame, the fear, the depression. Hopelessness.

"I wanted it because she said it'd help me fight crime," Bubbles admitted. "She said it was the only way I can help you two, and it was the only way I'll ever be loved."

"She? The fairy godmother?" Blossom asked, wondering. It sounded outlandish, coming out of her
own mouth. Bubbles nodded in response, as if afraid of uttering that name. She knew for a fact that it was ridiculous right from the start, and it would just make her look insane.

"Seriously? The fairy godmother?" Buttercup retorted; she couldn't believe a single word coming out of Bubbles' mouth. She knew that Bubbles was the dimmest of the three of them, the most naive of them all, but the idea of a fairy godmother in real-life had taken the cake - she couldn't decide if Bubbles was just stupid for accepting help from someone claiming to be a fairy godmother or extremely naive for doing the same.

Blossom's eyes flitted from one corner of the room to the next as she thought about everything, but ultimately, she couldn't gain much in the way of fresh insights. Her mind was back on Bubbles a moment later.

"Here," she said as she held something she had been working on up for Bubbles to see form her restrained position. It was a paper Dandelion, folded and glued together, a project she'd been working on since school. "I thought you'd like it." Blossom gave Buttercup a nudge after that, and Buttercup did the same.

"Yeah, I've got one for you too," she said. Her paper Dandelion, however, was discolored, being shades of orange and green. The only thing more wrong than the color was the shape of the flower. Severely misshapen, it barely qualified as flora.

"They're beautiful," Bubbles said tearfully. She smiled, but her happiness was short-lived. "People are going to hate me, aren't they?"

"You sure, Bubbles?" Blossom said. "Look around you."

Bubbles did. There were tables around her, and those tables held numerous gifts. 'Get well soon' cards, balloons, both of the normal types and the shimmering, reflective types. There were boxes of chocolate, blankets, scarves, embroidery, just to name some of them.

"They understand what you were going through, and they've already forgiven you," Blossom explained. "Even those who, well, weren't really our friends. What do we even call them? Other than our friends' friends, I mean..."

"I'm still afraid to see them…" Bubbles confessed.

"It'll be fine. I'll be there with you if it helps. Our classmates at Pokey Oaks really misses you, you know. They couldn't come see you even though they were screaming for a field trip to visit you - only Miss Keane was here. I've never seen her that upset before," Blossom said, but on realizing that she was rambling, stopped herself. "Get well soon, Bubbles, so you can pick some real Dandelions in exchange for our fake ones."

Blossom and Buttercup laughed. It managed to coax a tearful smile from Bubbles. The professor had been sneaking peeks at them, and smiled, too. Things were returning to normal. Things were finally looking up, and it was something they really needed because the past three days had been hell for the family, not the mention the tense week before that when Bubbles' increasing drug-fueled madness had loomed over them, whether they knew it or not.

And with him finalizing the procedures for creating reinforcement for the Girls, perhaps, just perhaps, the Girls would finally be able to live in peace.
Chapter 52: B-50

Chapter Summary

Professor Utonium and the Powerpuff Girls find new hope in the future.

Chapter 52: B-50

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

22 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 1248.

Taking in a deep breath, Bubbles stepped out of her room, nervously straightening her shiny blue sequin dress. Blossom was beside her, holding her hand, leading her out. Buttercup, on the other hand, was following up behind. She found the whole situation annoying - she just wanted to get to the food because she was starving! Why the whole ritual?

Together, the Girls went down the corridor on the second floor to the stairs. Below, a whole group of people was looking up at them. For security, Agent Blake and his men were 'guarding' the House, though, in reality, all they were really doing was to attend a party. Dad and Mom were there, too, of course. After all, it was the Powerpuff Girls' third month's birthday. Alice was there - she had to be. She had decided to double their sessions, starting with today, after the party. Miss Keane was in the group, too - and she, too, was worried about the Girls, since they were absent from class most of the time. Mister Morbucks and the Princess, Elodie Morbucks, were given special civilian clearance to attend the party. Similarly, the TPD was represented by Mister Mullens and Olivia. Stanley Talker sat beside then, his tongue hanging out. Like Buttercup, he couldn't wait to get to the food. General Blackwater was there, too - he had his own reasons.

As the Girls descended, the entire group - well, most of them, anyway - began singing them a birthday song. A huge cake was unveiled, and they were led into the kitchen. The House was still under repair, but with the Chief of Logistics' impressive ability to expedite anything, it was already mostly pristine, though there were still some bullet holes that needed to be filled.

While they were in the kitchen, numerous photos were taken. Everyone - well, almost everyone - wanted a shot with the Girls.

"Time to make a wish!" Professor Utonium exclaimed with excitement as the Girls sat in front of their cake, each of them smiling for their own reasons. One after another, the Girls closed their eyes and made their wishes. They blew out the candles on the cake after that.

'What did you wish for?' Blossom would ask her sisters after the party.

'I just… want it all to go away. The crime, the pain, the sadness. What I did,' Bubbles would say, flashing a smile, though it was a shallow, bitter one, one mired by muck that had been piling up and needed a way to be unloaded.

'Don't be sad, Bubbles. They will. They always did. That's what Daddy said,' Blossom comforted her sister.
'I wanted my own motorbike,' Buttercup admitted. Both Blossom and even a depressed Bubbles gave her a puzzled look. What use would a motorcycle be if they could fly? 'Hey, it'd be cool, admit it!'

'I guess it is,' Blossom admitted, managing to dig a smile out of Buttercup. Blossom smiled back. 'We should all get one.'

'Told you so,' Buttercup said with a burst of mean laughter.

'What about you, Blossom?' Bubbles would ask in return, hoping for some kind of enlightenment from her. 'What did you wish for?'

Blossom said nothing. She communicated the content of her wish by putting an arm around each other her sisters and pulling them into a group hug.

'Oh brother,' Buttercup would say, hating that the very same person who'd been undermining her was hugging her, somehow still attached to her.

'This,' Blossom simply said.

Lab Report 02221989

DOC: 22 FEB (Wednesday) 1989.

TOC: 0830

By: Professor Utonium

Title: Concerning Bubbles (B-49) and Creation of B-50

As of this date, Bubbles has made full recovery from the wounds she had sustained on 19 FEB 1989. However, it is merely physical. The implications of the incident that caused her to attack everyone around her, without discrimination, is severe and disturbing.

Even as we speak, as you know, investigations have turned up nothing as to who might have supplied Bubbles with the drugs known as 'His Secret 2.0'. My sources, Lieutenant Blake of the Powerpuff Task Force and Lieutenant Mullens of the TPD, have no real news to share. I have spoken to her at length about this, but she has revealed little about what she experienced. She claims that a 'fairy godmother' had provided her with the drugs, a being capable of even greater enhanced abilities and powers than her, but I have consulted with security as to the possible identity of this enhanced individual and turned up nothing. It's possible that she was hallucinating this 'fairy godmother' into existence, and it was little more than a drug pusher who tricked her into using it. I will turn my attention to that which is in my area of expertise, rather than speculating.

The toll on Bubbles is enormous, and whether it is surmountable is hard to say. The Chemical-Y assisted drug had accumulated in her, and even with time and the experimental treatment I have devised with my Anti-X, it will be months, perhaps even years, before the drug could be fully eliminated from her system. Needless to say, the staying power of the drug is unprecedented; mundane drugs do not accumulate this way in the human body. It does not help that Bubbles will need to inject herself with the less harmful 'His Secret' from now on to manage the withdrawal effects of 'His Secret 2.0'. I guess there is a hidden benefit to Buttercup's trophy hoarding after all. Her secret stash should last Bubbles a few months, by which time, I hope Bubbles will no longer need the damn chemicals.
While 'His Secret' will not cause Bubbles to backslide in any way, it will slow down the detoxification process. I can't imagine how she's been taking it either. Even as I write this, I have been keeping her close to me; I have no choice but to get her to play on the lab floor. Her depressed, vacant look can only be a symptom of the psychological aspect of all this. Alice will have a full report on that.

I would like to emphasize again that the trio you have named 'The Powerpuff Girls' should no longer be deployed the way they are. I believe you have received my report on Buttercup's behavioral deviancy on 21 FEB 1989 and my write-up on the implications of her mental difficulties. I think it is clear by now that they have to be substituted with something better. A new Powerpuff Girl, if you will.

This leads me to the next topic of this report.

I believe I am now ready to begin the production of subject B-50. Over the past 4 days, I have been able to work my way up towards creating an enhanced human being by going through the usual gauntlet of organism modifications: the testing of Chemical X2 on plants, and animals. All test subjects are stable, but all but one guinea pigs used for the experiments had to be destroyed due to their enhancements. The last guinea pig will be kept in a Duranium cage for observation.

There will still be numerous unknown factors, however. Due to the short time frame given, I have been unable to eliminate them all, only minimize them. That said, it is not helpful that more of them have been introduced for the sake of confidentiality.

The unknown nature of the DNA source, for instance. I would rather that I personally select the DNA to be used, to eliminate any chance for congenital diseases. We have already seen the effects of poor genetics on Buttercup and we do not need a repeat of that again.

Furthermore, the sample provided is questionable. I required stem cells, not a human zygote produced by in-vitro fertilization. That the sample provided is a zygote raises many questions. Why must we create an entirely new DNA strain (albeit with the DNA of two donors - unknown donors, I might add) rather than use an existing one which will be more predictable? There is no telling what the results will be. Therefore, I would like to state for the record that I claim no responsibility for the failure of B-50's production arising from the use of the sample provided.

Only time will tell now how B-50 will turn out. I can only hope that I can use it as a surprise for Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup's 3rd month birthday. I had promised them that I had a way out for them - Bubbles, especially, needed some kind of hope that she could live a normal life as a normal little girl. Judging by how she had just been tricked into drug abuse, I believe her fears are justified. B-50 will likely uplift their moods.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

22 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 0845.

"Are you ready, Professor Utonium?" Doctor Vanum asked his esteemed colleague as he and several others crowded around a table, which had been designated the workspace for the creation of B-50, the next stage in the evolution of Project Powerpuff.

The professor nodded. He tried to maintain a calm demeanor on the outside, but he was a flaming pile of wreck on the inside. Three months ago, he had opened Pandora's box, and while he had found a new family to love because of it, there were problems. Although much of the uncertainties had been eliminated with their present experiments, there were new ones that had been introduced.
For example, he knew of one that was in himself. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were created by accident, but he had taken them in as his own. It was love at first sight. B-50, on the other hand…

He wanted to create B-50 to protect his adopted daughters, and he knew what that entailed. He wanted B-50 to take the pain and suffering and abuse away from them, to fight crime so they didn't have to. If he was honest with himself, he wouldn't want to adopt B-50 if he had a choice; instead, he'd decided that he would distance himself from it. That was all 'it' was to him, a tool to protect his family.

"Are you sure, professor?" one of the research assistants asked - an old hand, an intellectual in her own right, just one who wasn't as accomplished to rise through the ranks yet.

"Yes, let's begin," the professor said, trying to sound as professional as possible, both for the record and for himself.

"Wouldn't the Girls see what we're doing?" the other research assistant wondered aloud.

"Selicia's been keeping them busy. There's going to be a party later, one that I hope would distract them as much as lift their spirits and lighten them up," the professor said, his eyes a little blank, focusing on the task at hand, a task which he knew that was motivated but intentions that were less than moral. "Thank God that Wiggums was able to repair the airlock last afternoon. I've sealed it up and told them I have a surprise in the lab tonight."

"Alright, let's get to work, people," Doctor Vanum said, and so they started the production of B-50. One of the research assistants began positioning a microscope over the sample for observation. Another began setting up a station for managing the rapid growth of the zygote into what the professor hoped would be the Girls' crime-fighting replacement. The professor and the doctor began setting up equipment for preparing Chemical X2 and dispensing it.

---

File 79: Production of Subject B-50

DOC: 22 FEB (Wednesday) 1989.

Created by: Senior Clerk Quixote (Codename)

Background: Due to the underperformance of subjects B-47, B-48 and B-49 and problems posed by the accidentally-created prototypes, losses suffered and an increase in crime in Townsville, a new organic weapons platform, or bioweapon, has been commissioned by Director Cliff. Unlike the prototypes B-47, B-48 and B-49, which were created by accident using an incomplete version of Chemical X2, known as Chemical X, B-50's creation was premeditated and done so through the use of Chemical X2.

Note on Chemical X2: The substance to be used for enhancement of the individual is known as Chemical X2. According to its creator, Professor Utonium, it will offer enhancements to the bioweapon that are superior to the prototypes. Projections based on plant and animal experiments predict up to a 50% improvement in all areas. Experiments also yielded the foresight that the bioweapon B-50 will be able to gain access to enhancements and abilities faster, though the improvement in this regard hasn't been quantified. It is also likely that B-50 will be able to gain abilities B-47, B-48 and B-49 are incapable of.

Timeline of events.
Time 0915: B-50 Zygote has grown rapidly to become visible.

Time 0949: B-50 is now a week 6 fetus. Professor Utonium notes that B-50 is growing faster than B-47, B-48, and B-49.

Time 1009: Week 8 equivalent fetus. The subject is healthy thus far.

Time 1026: Week 10 equivalent fetus.

Time 1048: Week 12 equivalent fetus. A genetic sample was taken for testing.

Time 1112: Week 16 equivalent fetus. Growth appears to be accelerating as expected based on data from B-47, B-48, and B-49 growth pattern.

Time 1125: Week 20 equivalent fetus.

Time 1140: Week 24 equivalent fetus.

Time 1156: Week 36 equivalent fetus. Growth of B-50 exponentially increasing.

Time 1210: Subject B-50 is now a fully grown baby equivalent to at birth. Blood, cell and hair samples were taken for testing. The subject is observed to have brown hair, purple glowing eyes, and crooked teeth, but is otherwise healthy. Subject has begun crying, likely requiring sustenance and natal care.

Time 1211: After much convincing (and coercion from General Blackwater, who had taken leave from B-47, B-48 and B-49's welfare event and arrived to witness the creation of the fourth bioweapon), Sergeant Selicia Goodwin, assigned secondary handler of Project Powerpuff subjects, has agreed to breastfeed subject B-50. Selicia and subject B-50 closely monitored for aberrations in life signs.

Time 1239: Subject B-50 observed to be growing in size rapidly whilst obtaining sustenance from Sergeant Selicia Goodwin.

Time 1245: Subject B-50 ceases feeding and appears to have fallen asleep. Due to B-47, B-48 and B-49's welfare event approaching its main segment, Professor Utonium, and Sergeant Selicia Goodwin have to temporarily stop work on B-50 to attend it. Subject B-50 has been put under the care of the professor's associates and under guard by the security sergeant's colleagues.

Time 1259: Subject B-50 equivalent of a 6-month-old baby.

Time 1314: Subject B-50 equivalent of a 1-year-old baby.

Time 1327: Subject B-50 equivalent of a 2-year-old baby.

Time 1340: Professor Utonium and Sergeant Selicia Goodwin were able to extricate themselves from B-47, B-48 and B-49's demand for attention. Their work on B-50 resumes.

Time 1342: Subject B-50 equivalent of a 3-year-old baby.

Time 1357: Subject B-50 equivalent of a 4-year-old. Accelerated growth expected to slow down and cease within the next half-hour.

Time 1413: Subject B-50 equivalent of 5-year-old.

Time 1427: Subject B-50 did not stop growing as predicted by growth models drawn up by B-47,
B-48 and B-49's data. B-50 equivalent of a 6-year-old.

Time 1442: Subject B-50 equivalent of 7-year-old.

Time 1453: Subject B-50 equivalent of 8-year-old. Accelerated aging appears to be slowing down.

Time 1458. B-50's growth appears to have stopped. The subject has discharged some energy, purple in appearance, resulting in a temporary power outage.

Time 1459: Subject B-50 has stopped breathing. This was anticipated by Professor Utonium. The professor opts to observe the subject first; he will only intervene at the 3-minute mark. ECG reading erratic.

Time 1501: B-50 has resumed breathing. Brainwave pattern normalizing, but minimal and resembling sleep. ECG readings nominal. The experiment to create B-50 has been deemed a success.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

22 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 1902.

It was almost time; the party was long over and the last of the guests, including those closest to the Girls, had left.

But there was never enough time for him, Professor Utonium. Or more specifically, there wasn't enough time for him to think things through; to think about how he should treat B-50, or how his family should.

Sitting beside B-50, who was lying on a table, a cushion beneath her newly-created head, he was racking his brains over it, and yet, even after hours, he still couldn't resolve the bloody conflict within him.

And for the hours he'd spent thinking about it, he had to resist holding B-50's hand, or to stroke her cheek in affection. It couldn't be this way, he had decided at the beginning of the experiment to produce her, the organic weapon platform, or bioweapon, that was meant to deliver his daughters from the soul-crushing struggles and demands of crime-fighting. He was supposed to maintain a distance from her. His family was supposed to maintain a distance from her.

And yet… Yes, B-50 was female too. She was created a brunette, somehow physically an 8-year-old – the Girls would surely be jealous, and perhaps that would be good – though she wasn't as beautiful as Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, with her overly-square jaws, crooked teeth and plain look. Her eyes were the only features on her face that stood out as beautiful – that said, he couldn't help but notice it when he saw it when B-50 was conscious as a baby on Selicia's bosom. Their eyes met. Her beautiful, glowing purple eyes stood out with intelligence and curiosity in them, perhaps rivaling or even surpassing Blossom – and that could be a good thing as it could foment resentment between them. But... Oh, how she looked at him until she fell unconscious again as if awaiting his decision! But it couldn't be that way. He couldn't allow himself to love her and take her in as his own, could he? That would defeat the purpose of creating her in the first place!

And yet… Professor Utonium stood up from a chair next to B-50. Looking around at a guard, he noticed the way he was looking at him.

"I'm just going to examine her," he found himself a pretense before leaning over B-50 and opening her eyelid. An eye with a glowing, purple pupil gleamed back at him. He went through the motions
and shined a penlight into her eye briefly. The guard was none the wiser.

No, he decided. He couldn't do it. He couldn't just leave B-50 be and toss her out in the storm just to save his daughters' skin. How could he even consider that? He hated himself for it for even considering such a heinous and selfish thing. Dooming a kid to a lifetime of child soldiering (an immortal's lifetime at that, if his theory holds true) just so his own didn't have to suffer the same fate… No, it wasn't him. He didn't want to be that person.

He clasped B-50's hand in both his own, before raising it up to his lips and kissing it. Her hand was limp, and even then, it felt strong. It was another thing he noticed - B-50's musculature was already hard and somewhat beefy.

"Is that wise, prof?" the guard said, looking tense. The professor couldn't blame him. After Bubbles' outburst with His Secret, he would be surprised if the guard wasn't afraid.

The professor turned to look at him.

"Yes, yes it is," he said. "Could you call my family down?"

"Yes, sir," the guard said. "My buds here will cover you while I'm away."

"You and your buds are dismissed," the professor simply said. "And before you ask, yes, it's the wise thing to do." But before the guard could run off, the professor added another layer of complexity to his task: "One more thing. I want you to get Bubbles to come down alone first. Hold everyone back until I say otherwise."

With that, the guard and his detail left the professor alone. His associates in the research department were already gone about an hour ago.

It was time.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

22 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 1905.

Bubbles was terrified as if she was struck with yet another visit by the fairy godmother. A PTF soldier had told her to go down to the lab. Alone. The soldier himself, though even-tempered, was a stranger, and he had come into the Girls' room without knocking or greetings.

Blossom, Bubbles and even Buttercup (reluctantly) were pretending to be farmers or ranchers when he entered. Blossom frowned at the man for being rude, while Buttercup was relieved and glad for any pause in the 'playtime' whenever she could get it. Bubbles on the other hand…

She had to fly out of the room and down to the living room with only a rabbit soft toy for company – the soldier explicitly stated that she had to go down alone – but as she crossed the airlock, old memories were resurfacing. Bad memories of her doing unthinkable things.

Why would Dad want her down alone? She knew about Buttercup, how she had lost her powers for a couple of days when Dad got mad at her. Was that what's going to happen to her?

She could almost hear her heartbeat echoing against the walls as she descended the stairs down to the lab. She knew that her entire family had forgiven her, but then Blossom and Buttercup were punished whenever they had erred too seriously. Was it her turn to get punished?
Bubbles was almost reduced to tears by the time she reached the wide-open space of the lab until she was met with a most peculiar sight.

Her Dad was sitting in a chair by a bed, holding the hand of... someone lying in the recovery bed at the medical section of the lab. Flying closer, her previous fears forgotten, she went sideways for a better look.

That someone was a girl, and she looked older than she was. She had brown hair, and she was wearing a patient's garb. She looked like she was asleep. Bubbles didn't have time to study the new girl when her Dad noticed her.

"Bubbles!" he greeted her and beckoned her to come closer, which she did by floating up to him.

"What's happening, Dad?" she said, confused, and still a little frightened partly because of the new development. 'Who is that girl?' Bubbles thought. 'What is she doing here?' At the same time, another awful thought struck her. Something Mom warned her about when they were alone in the Duranium table room, though unbeknownst to her, she was just joking and at the same time, trying to keep her in line.

"Dad, is she replacing me?" Bubbles asked frantically, on the verge of tears again. "Please don't send me away... I'll be good, I promise!"

"Bubbles, I would never!" the Dad reassured her quickly, hugging her to him and she floated into his arms. "Who gave you that idea?"

Bubbles didn't say. It felt like one of those times when she needed to shut her mouth 'or you'll destroy the family', in Mom's words. She had already come too close to destroying the family physically. She didn't want to come anywhere close to that again.

Dad cleared his throat before continuing: "Anyway, today's your lucky day, Bubbles."

"Lucky? Why am I lucky, Dad?" Bubbles asked. His words didn't help with her confusion, though as it always did, it'd calmed her down. At least she knew now that she was wrong to think she would be replaced.

"You get to see your new sister," Professor Utonium announced. It wasn't his original intention to make B-50 Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup's new sister, but he had decided. His initial intention to make B-50 their 'bodyguard' had been rooted in his flawed idea to protect the Girls from further harm, be they physical, emotional or psychological, by sacrificing someone else.

"But why me?" Bubbles asked. She felt like she would be the last person to receive any kind of special treatment. The professor hugged her tighter when he picked up her doubts.

"I've... neglected you," the professor admitted sadly. "It's all my fault, what happened to you."

"But it's not..." Bubbles said. She, in turn, noticed that Dad was upset and she didn't like that.

The professor sighed.

"It doesn't matter, as Doctor Simmons said," he swiftly redirected the conversation; it was supposed to be a moment of joy. He turned around to let Bubbles see her new sister, and the enhanced little girl studied her.

And even Bubbles could tell that B-50 wasn't exactly good-looking, though she wasn't ugly either, but somewhere in between.
"How… did she get here?" Bubbles asked. She remembered being in the living room all day. What she didn't remember was an 8-year-old girl sneaking into the lab because she would have to go through the living room.

"Remember when I said that there will be a surprise? She's it," the professor said, though he was also stalling for time to think. He hadn't thought about it, explaining B-50 away. Had it been Blossom in Bubbles' place, she would have asked how B-50 was born. It was a mystery that needed to be nipped in the bud in order to preserve the beautiful illusion of a family they had here. Pushing away any self-doubt, the professor continued: "Mom gave birth to your new sister this morning. We've been checking her and taking care of her since. But I think she's ready now… For the three of you to meet her."

It wasn't the perfect explanation, but the Girls' naivety and lack of understanding in sexual reproduction would make it good for years to come until they were ready to know the truth – whenever that would be.

"What's her name?" Bubbles asked innocently, partially distracted by B-50. She couldn't take her eyes off her. In her mind, she meant something, symbolized something – she just couldn't tell what it was yet.

"Why don't you decide, Bubbles?" the professor said. It felt like the perfect apology and gift for neglecting her. "There's just one rule."

"What is it?" Bubbles asked, her spirit lifting. She got to name her own sister!

"It has to start with a B, like Blossom and Buttercup… and Bubbles," the professor stated and pressed Bubbles in the nose playfully. She giggled.

"Okay…" Bubbles said before looking around the room, thinking and straining her mind for a name that started with a B, squeezing her soft toy as she did. The professor was actually worried for her as she looked like she might blow her engine that way.

Bubbles' eyes shifted to B-50 herself as if her name was written there. It wasn't. Out of options, she held her rabbit soft toy in both hands as if it could talk to it.

That was when it hit her, like that semi-truck on Highway 13, except in a good way.

"Bunny…" Bubbles spoke B-50's name for the first time.

The professor was stunned. He'd never expected it out of Bubbles. It was like a miracle in and of itself. He thought that it was even better than his own ideas, such as Bernadette or Bess. He'd even thought about naming B-50 after his own late biological daughter, Bloome.

"It's a beautiful name," the professor said, before giving Bubbles a peck on the temple. When Bubbles tried to wriggle out of his arms, he let her go. Floating over to the sleeping Bunny on the table, she placed the rabbit soft toy on her chest and put her arm over it, such that she looked like she was just sleeping…

"Bunny it is," the professor said, and this time around, he believed that things were going to get better…

Now that Bunny had joined the family.

END OF ACT 2: HIS SECRET
A/N: Due to the nature of the works-in-progress of the next cover, there will be no preview of it. However, the cover will still be available as per normal when the next act comes around. Thanks for reading!
Chapter 53: First Day (ACT 3: DOWN THE BUNNY HOLE)

Chapter Summary

On a new day, Bunny is finally up and about. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup get on with their superpowered lives as best as they could even with great change and disruption on the horizon.
ACT 3: DOWN THE BUNNY HOLE

"The duty of youth is to challenge corruption." - Kurt Cobain

Chapter 53: First Day

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

22 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 2024.

"You ready, Bubbles?" Selicia asked one of the Powerpuff Girls. They were in the lab, going for a quick round of training before bedtime. She thought it necessary after the Girls had been deactivated for three days. They would be back to saving the day by next light. "Is your neck okay?"

"I'm fine, Mom. It just feels funny..." Bubbles simply said. She stood before Blossom, putting up a defensive posture.

"Blossom?" Selicia turned to the leader of the Powerpuff Girls.

"I'm ready, Mom," she said.

"Alright, go right ahead, Girls, you know the rules," Selicia flagged off the first match between Blossom and Bubbles.

Blossom charged ahead and went for a sweeping low kick. Bubbles jumped and avoided getting tripped, only to realize that Blossom had followed up with a rising spinning kick aimed at her head, but she leaned back, feeling wind as Blossom's foot passed by within an inch of her face. She fell back a few feet, adjusting her posture.

Blossom found it surprising enough that Bubbles could avoid her strikes so deftly. Previously, before the whole mess with her using His Secret 2.0 that is, Bubbles couldn't even begin to predict where she would attack next.

There was something different about Bubbles now. Something had changed ever since she was detoxified (somewhat), ever since the 'fairy godmother', whoever that was, had tricked her into a cycle of addiction to the chemical.

She was much more focused and less afraid of fighting. Bubbles herself knew it, and she knew very well what she had to do now. She just knew she had to be stronger, and this time, it wasn't hard to be. She was angry. Very angry. She was mad that she had been taken advantage of and tricked into destroying her own family, and she nearly did. Though she was nothing like her drug-fuelled BerXerker self, her anger had given her enough to stave off her cowardly tendencies.

And Blossom felt it becoming manifest when Bubbles began dishing out a flurry of punches at her,
such that she could barely keep up with her blocks and redirections.

Bubbles was fast! And when Blossom tried to break her hold on her with a sidekick, she jumped away, spinning in mid-air before landing a yard or two away gracefully.

"That was good, Bubbles!" Blossom praised her. But something was wrong. It was as if Bubbles didn't hear it. Jumping straight in, she reopened her attack with a flying kick, which Blossom blocked, and Bubbles didn't let up after that, giving her one whump after another with her fists, lightning-quick until-

Blossom stumbled back when she took one in the face, holding it with both her hands. Bubbles froze when she saw what she did, the anger on her face dissipated, replaced by shock.

The professor, who was watching, ran forward to check on Blossom.

"I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry!" Bubbles exclaimed as tears threatened to burst from her eyes.

Blossom removed her hands from her nose. They were red, though there wasn't a lot of blood.

"I'm fine, I'm fine..." Blossom said as her hands had returned to her nose, muffling her voice. Bubbles, however, had sunk to the floor, crying shrilly. The professor had produced a handkerchief to wipe the blood away.

"Your eyes weren't red, Bubbles," the professor said. "That's good. It means you're making steady recovery from the drug."

"But I've hurt Blossom!" Bubbles cried on the floor.

"I'm fine, really," Blossom said. "See?" she removed her hands. Most of the blood was gone. There were no visible wounds. "Besides, you were really awesome!" she turned to Buttercup on the sideline. "Right!?"

"Right!" Buttercup shouted back with a fake smile, and she had to try really hard not to let any bitterness show through. She still didn't like that things had returned to normal, but with her getting the short end of the stick – with all her secrets exposed, whatever bargaining power she had gone, and her every move watched as if she was a maximum-security prisoner. It was unfair – Bubbles didn't get the same level of treatment even though she had done more damage!

"This is just the first time you're fighting in a real match," Selicia explained as she came forward, with a smile on her face, though she was happy for different reasons. With Bubbles miraculously pulling through and getting her attitude fixed to boot, her job was about to get easier. "You just need to hold back now that you're a force to be reckoned with."

Bubbles liked the sound of that. 'A force to be reckoned with'.

"Come on, Bubbles, let's try again," Blossom offered as she extended a hand for Bubbles to take. Smiling up at her, she gladly took it. It was a nice change of tone from before, and it was worth holding onto. For months, she had struggled for acceptance. Now, it seemed she had found it.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

22 FEB (Wednesday) 1989. 22:05.

As Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup returned to their room after a trip to the washroom to keep
their teeth white, they saw Bunny again, still unconscious, still motionless right in the center of their bed, dressed only in flexible diapers and patient garb meant for adults, the rabbit soft toy Bubbles had given her nestling between her arm and side. Dad and Mom were right behind them.

The Girls clambered into bed, with Blossom and Bubbles taking the spots on either side of Bunny, each hugging an arm like a bolster. Buttercup was fine staying far away from Bunny. It was just what she needed - more competition, more eyes to watch her and another mouth to tattle on her.

"Isn't that sweet? They love Bunny already," Dad said as he gave Mom, who was in his arm, a peck on the lips. He thought that the Girls were angels because of this - Bunny had little going for her - she was plain in physical appearance, she was their junior and she knew nothing - she wasn't even awake yet, and she wouldn't be able to take over the Girls until weeks later, assuming that Bunny learn at the same rate as her elder sisters. That Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup would take her in without reservation, without condition, was endearing.

"Such a shame, my dear… I had such high hopes for you," Bubbles heard a ghoulish voice speaking in the dark. She lit up her eyes, but there was nothing to illuminate – just a claustrophobic void that extended to infinity. She couldn't decide if the voice was male or female. But she knew who it was.

"Miss Fairy Godmother?" Bubbles said. Breathing felt difficult then as if one wrong move could result in some dire consequence.

"I think we're past that by now…” the voice said, and it had gotten eerier. It sounded as if it was coming from all around her, but she couldn't determine where.

"Please don't hurt me…” Bubbles murmured, her voice low and hoarse. If there was air in this void, it was incredibly dry – her throat felt like it was on fire.

"Hurt you? Oh no, I don't want to hurt you… yes… yes… well, not really, anyway," the voice said. "You were doing so well, after all… You are one-of-a-kind. After all, you did get past everyone you know and don't. Leaving them… crushed."

All Bubbles knew was that there was a floor. But soon, it became an easy thing to confirm as flames, roaring and aggressive, shot up from all around her, surrounding her. She could see a figure in the distance, though he… or she… or it was too far for most of the light to reach him… or her.

"W-who are you!?” Bubbles screamed. She could make out enough to see that whatever it was in the distance, it had its back turned to her. And it was tall. And the legs – those legs sheathed in leather boots. She thought she had seen them somewhere before.

The figure turned to squint at her sideways - though she could not see its face, she could see that it wasn't human. The chin was too long and pointy, and so were the ears. Eyes shining redder than the hellish red of her BerXerker self stared at her, looking deep into her soul.

"Who am I? Why… I'm the same as you… Yes…” the figure claimed, and though Bubbles didn't know what to make of it, it'd sent a chill down her spine. The thing in leather high-heeled boots raised an arm and clenched a fist - Bubbles didn't notice its arms and hands only because it was camouflaged against the sheer terror the geometry of the thing's body presented. But the figure's arm was just as terrible to behold once she noticed it. Those arms were wiry, but they ended with what appeared to be crab claws, and when it opened up its claws, fingers formed from the otherwise rigid crab claws, each like the steel fingers of an armored knight's gauntlet. "I'm family."
"N-no..." Bubbles uttered. The monster started forward, and as it got closer, Bubbles could see it in greater and greater clarity, clarity that was unwanted. It was wearing some kind of red jacket with a white fur collar. The jacket transitioned seamlessly into some kind of skirt covered in white fuzz similar to the collar, held together by a massive black buckle. It was incredibly muscular, oozing danger from its aura and some kind of black substance from its mouth.

The fire parted to let the monster through. Bubbles worked up a charge in her eyes and fired an ion beam at him - or her, but some kind of red bubbles blocked out the beam, causing it to do nothing. Next, she tried sonic-screaming at him, but the creature didn't seem to mind the kinetic waves and drowning noise from her voice, all while coming towards her, closer.

When she tried to fly away, the 'fairy godmother' snatched her up, its gauntlet-like fingers pressing her throat so strongly that she could barely breathe. Bubbles tried to scream, but she could not. The monster placed a rigid finger-claw on her lips.

"Shh... Don't be afraid... After all, we are family..." it said as it ran its claws down her cheek while she sniveled and wept. "We'll see each other again soon enough... yes... yes... I won't be away for long... But for now, TA-TA!"

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

23 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 0641.

Bubbles' eyes flitted open after her conversation with whatever it was that the fairy godmother had turned into. The last thing she saw in her nightmare was the fiery, hellish red eyes of the thing, and when she woke up, this was replaced by a pair of eyes, glowing purple, staring down at her.

The scream that came out of Bubbles' mouth next woke up the entire family.

Buttercup and Blossom practically flew out of bed the moment they heard it, with Buttercup halfway to their armory in the walk-in closet. Blossom was the first person to notice that the three of them weren't the only ones awake.

"Bunny! You're up!" Blossom exclaimed gleefully while Bubbles was still trying to find her wits. Bunny had been on all fours, pressing her face close to Bubbles when she woke up. She went into a kneeling position and turned to look at Blossom with an innocent smile on her face. Upon seeing that Blossom was flying, she giggled and clapped her hands in an infantile manner as if she had just performed a magic trick, exposing her crooked teeth.

"Should've called her Braces," Buttercup said on noticing it. "Even Katie's teeth didn't look that bad!"

Bunny whirled around to look at Buttercup, none the wiser about the meaning of the sounds coming out of Buttercup's mouth. She flashed a smile at her, exposing her teeth again, and giggled when she saw that Buttercup was floating too.

"Buttercup! Don't be rude! She's our little sister!" Blossom chastised her wayward sister.

"She's huge..." Bubbles commented. Bunny's size was hard to judge when she was unconscious and lying on her back, covered in ill-fitting clothes and a blanket most of the time. Now that she was up and about, her size had shown more clearly. Tall even by eight-year-old standards, she out-sized all of her elder siblings by more than a head, then there was the fact that she was physically older than them.
As it did many times, rapid footsteps grew louder outside, and the door was opened, with both Mom and Dad standing there. Curiously, Mom was holding an XM9 sniper rifle in one hand but hid it quickly on noticing that no one was getting torn limb from limb.

Bunny turned to Professor Utonium and Selicia with saliva dribbling down the side of her lips, squealing in delight when more wonders of the world had come to greet her. She greeted them back with babyish gibberish, her voice deeper than the average little girl.

"Girls, why don't the three of you take a bath while Mom and I take care of Bunny?" the professor said unexpectedly.

"Aren't you going to help us?" Blossom asked. He had never asked the Girls to bathe on their own before.

"I'm sure the three of you will manage on your own as long as you help each other," the professor explained absent-mindedly, without taking his eyes off Bunny. A boyish smile was spreading on his face. Oddly enough, despite everything that had happened, he seemed more energetic than depleted. "I've got to give our little rabbit here a tour of The House… and… and… her first meal too! Oh, what would it be? She's got to learn everything too – words, walking, using the toilet, everything! Just like how the three of you did before!"

"I think Bunny's going to need more help than the three of you," Selicia added. "Don't be selfish. Do you three remember General Blackwater's latest standing order?"

"The Powerpuff Girls are to be combat-ready 24/7 from the 23rd of February onwards," Blossom quoted directly from the source.

"Do you know what that means?" Selicia quizzed the smartest of the three.

"No…" Blossom admitted.

"The three of you are going to wear your uniforms and gear everywhere you go from now on, except when you're in bed. Now go," Selicia explained before pointing to the door.

"Okay…" the three Girls said in unison, before each of them floated into the walk-in closet one after another, then emerging from it with a mountain of stuff to put on - uniforms, boots, armor, and weapons. They left the room, still upset that their morning ritual had been affected.

Bunny could only stare after them, confused to the point where she wasn't sure what to be confused about - with nothing but whatever mother nature had programmed into her, there was so much she couldn't figure out, or at least not yet. She couldn't even understand how her sisters had disappeared through the door.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

23 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 0705.

The Girls took their time bathing. Part of it had something to do with the absence of Dad, and it wasn't just because they couldn't bathe themselves as well as Dad could do it. The morning ritual was important to them - they got to get cleaned up, say hi to Dad and Mom in the morning and enjoy their company right from the get-go.

Even when they were done and out of the bathroom, Dad and Mom were still somewhere else, spirited away by Bunny. They had to actually form a search party to find them, and as it turned out,
they were still in the middle of bathing Bunny back in the washroom of the master bedroom. They could hear laughter all the way from the bedroom door. The parents and the new sister were taking their time, splashing water about, teaching and learning new words respectively at the same time and generally having fun.

All the Girls could do was wait at the dining table. Blossom could hear her stomach growling while Bubbles was getting a little sweaty and jittery from the remnants of her withdrawal symptoms - Dad was supposed to give her the day's 'withdrawal medication'. Buttercup was annoying the both of them by drumming the surface of the table with her fingers as she was leaning on it, letting them know with too much clarity that time was ticking by one slow second at a time, and to children merely three months old and as intelligent as kids many times older, time would pass by very slowly.

Five minutes passed, then ten minutes. It was only way past that, that Dad, Mom, and Bunny emerged out of the master bedroom. As they were descending the stairs, the Girls saw them - Bunny was squealing with delight at descending the stairs, wearing one of Mom's security T-shirts like a dress and a diaper like an underpants, cradled in Dad's arm as he swung her around to coax some giggles out of her.

The Girls, each for their own reasons not dissimilar to one another's, couldn't help but be envious of Bunny. When was the last time Dad had done that with them?

"Whoops, sorry to keep you Girls waiting," Dad said when he finally noticed them. "Bunny's been having lots of fun, as you can see, learning about… everything, really!"

Blossom tried her best to smile genuinely, tried her best to be happy for Bunny.

"It's fine, Dad, I'm glad Bunny's having fun," Blossom said, and meant it - just that it was hard to be virtuous when she was starved not just of food but also of Dad's company.

"Can we eat now? I'm starving to death!" Buttercup yelled, which attracted a glare from Mom, and she backed down quickly.

"Come now, Buttercup, don't be selfish! You won't starve to death until weeks later," she lectured Buttercup when she had just reached the foot of the stairs ahead of Dad and was crossing the living room. It was upsetting to the tomboy. Before her trophies were discovered, she was would never be cross with her, much less scold her or lay a finger on her. "Besides, I'm working on it, heaven's sake!"

"Dad, I need my needle now," Bubbles said whilst shaking a little. Though the symptoms she had to bear with weren't as bad as before, it was still unpleasant, and she didn't want to be reminded of her past mistakes.

"Coming, honey," the professor had just reached the living room with Bunny on his shoulder, who stared all around her in awe of the wider world. Professor Utonium laughed. "She's heavy!"

He came up next to Bubbles, and instructed her to reach into his lab coat pocket, which she did. There was nothing in it at first, and she had to reach into another of his pocket to finally find it. It'd worsened her anticipation for relief. Putting down Bunny in her seat, the professor knelt down beside Bubbles to assist her when he noticed how shaky her hands were.

"Just a quarter every half a day, Bubbles, here," he said as he took the syringe of 'His Secret' from her before knocking the vial and pushing the plunger slightly. "Maybe I should repackage the… medication to make it easier for you."
"Dad?" Bubbles said while he was removing a plastic sheath from the needle and aiming to stick it into her forearm.

"Hmm?"

"Will you still spend some time with us?" Bubbles struggled to put her question into words. It wasn't something she thought she could lose until Bunny came along.

"Don't be silly, honey - of course I will," the Dad said. "It's just with the four of you, I can't do it as often for each of you. But I promise I will."

Breakfast, however, was spent with all attention put on Bunny. Not only that, Selicia had cooked in bulk to save time, and so everyone had to eat porridge, just like Bunny. When it came time for the older trio to be driven to school, Professor Utonium had opted to stay behind with Bunny instead, putting Selicia behind the wheels. Only Buttercup seemed especially thrilled that Mom was driving them instead while her sisters… less so.


23 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 0815.

"Thanks, Mom!" Blossom said before opening the car door and jumping out.

"Yeah, thanks, Mom!" Bubbles mimicked, but when she and Buttercup were about to open the door, Selicia pulled Bubbles' hand away from the handle roughly.

"Blossom, why don't you go ahead. I need to have a talk with Buttercup and Bubbles here," Selicia said, sounding too serious for it to just be a conversation she was about to have with her sisters. Blossom knew what it meant. A talk with Mom was just rarely a talk. Come to think of it, it didn't seem like an accident that Mom had put Bubbles on the shotgun seat.

"Can't I stay and talk too?" Blossom said. Despite her pessimism, she hoped – wished – that she was wrong. Mom seemed better the past few days, and it seemed as if she might go back to being her January self again; well, she hoped.

"No. Listen to Mommy will you? Just go," Selicia insisted, and she sounded like she was just a hair's width from blowing her top. Her face was redder than usual, and the cold couldn't be the cause of it. Afraid, Blossom closed the door and walked away, constantly looking back at her sisters.

Selicia gripped the steering wheel of Dad's family saloon tightly, so tight that it creaked, the cloth crinkling and sounding like it could tear.

"Bubbles, if you hurt anyone – anyone at all, I will shoot you down and I won't miss, do you understand?" Selicia threatened without turning to her. Bubbles had inched her way towards the door, but the seatbelt and door prevented her from putting much distance between her and the Mom. "That goes double for your Daddy. You don't know how lucky you are to have him. Take him for granted again, and I'll finish you off like how Blossom should have."

All Bubbles could do was nod curtly, the color from her face drained.

"I don't even need your promise because I know girls like you. You're a born liar, I think it's obvious by now. I tried to be nice to you, but honestly? You don't deserve any of this," Selicia went on berating Bubbles coldly before falling silent; Bubbles was too upset and shocked at the words
hurled at her that she couldn't even cry. "I'm done with you. Get the hell out of my car."

In fact, Bubbles was so shocked that she had forgotten about her seatbelt when she tried to get out as quickly as she could.

"For fuck's sake," Selicia whispered under her breath before helping Bubbles to unbuckle her seatbelt. The meekest of the three nearly fell out and had to hover to prevent that shameful thing. "And close the damn door!" Bubbles did as she was told; she had forgotten about that too after getting threatened by her own Mom.

When Selicia looked up at the rear-view mirror, she caught sight of Buttercup giggling to herself, likely taking pleasure in Bubbles' plight. She knew that Buttercup would - the animosity between her and Bubbles could only grow ever since Bubbles gave her one too many cranial traumas. Unknown to the seductive security officer, that wasn't the only thing. Using one of the few secrets she had left – her enhanced hearing – Buttercup was able to hear her Mom cursing while she was muttering to herself, and she thought it was funny. But after seeing her Mom's stern look in the rearview mirror, she stopped.

"Buttercup," Selicia uttered her name. The psychopathic girl appeared tense to her, and it pleased her, though she didn't let it show. That she could command such fear and respect from an enhanced little girl - one who suffered from clinical psychopathy no less - was an achievement in itself.

"I'm sorry…" Buttercup said quickly before Selicia could say anything else.

"Do you even know what that means?" Selicia sidetracked, unable to resist it.

"It means that… I'm sorry?" Buttercup repeated herself and was barely able to hide the confusion in her voice. She'd changed, and it was little wonder why. She'd basically had her ass handed to her over and over, and not just when it came to physical fights too.

"Anyway, I just want you to know that I've never stopped loving you," Selicia said.

"T-then why have you-" Buttercup was about to ask, but Selicia interrupted her.

"I- just… It's about your… 'Hobbies', Buttercup," Selicia confessed. "You have to know that that's not normal."

"I know," Buttercup paid for the confession with another, a smaller one. It felt like an opportunity - a way to get into her Mom's good books again and reap the rewards. "It's why I hid my stuff in the first place."

"Remember what I told you when we first met?" Selicia reminded her 'daughter'.

"That I don't have to hide who I am?" Buttercup recalled. "But you're still mad, aren't you?"

"Only because you hid something from me," Selicia claimed. "Buttercup, I'm your mother. Have you forgotten that? You can tell me everything. Is there anything else you've hidden from me?"

"What else could she possibly be hiding anyway?" Selicia was thinking. Having a jar of human teeth and nails had got to be the worst of it. There was a pause as Buttercup considered her options. But there were no options - she had to rebuild. She had to - after everything she lost.

"I killed a cat and buried it near the front door," Buttercup. "I talk to it sometimes, but it said it's no longer my friend, so I stopped talking to it."
"Well, that's…" Selicia was at a loss for words.

"And I killed the neighbor's dog too. I buried it in his backyard. I don't think he knows," Buttercup divulged further, like cashing in some chips at a casino. "I didn't talk to the dog though. It bit me, so I didn't want to be friends with it."

Selicia gave a sigh before rubbing her head.

"You're not going to tell Dad, are you?" Buttercup asked.

"When did you kill those animals?" Selicia asked when she'd recovered enough.

"Two months ago, I think," Buttercup admitted. "You're not going to tell Dad, right?"

Selicia looked out the windshield of the car at Blossom and Bubbles, who were standing at the entrance of the kindergarten complex. Bubbles, that liar, had collapsed in Blossom's arms, probably crying to her about how unfair everything was, even though she had it coming. She was probably telling more lies again, Selicia just knew it. She gave the matter some thought, but there was no way in hell she would create an even bigger rift between her and Buttercup over nothing.

"They're just some dumb animals. It's not like you've killed anyone," Selicia finally said. "Your Dad doesn't need to know."

Buttercup couldn't believe it at first. Her luck had been bad for as long as she could remember. It was more likely for her to lose out than to gain something. She smiled when she'd finally caught a break.

"Just don't do it again," Selicia said. "Like I said, it might feel good but… it's just not normal. Now get going, I'll see you when school's over, okay?"

"Yes, Mom!" Buttercup said jubilantly before opening the door and flying out, even though she was supposed to go easy with her powers in the school zone.


23 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 0934.

Even though the class had made every effort to make Bubbles feel welcome, she couldn't help but feel some kind of dissonance in the air between herself and the class. It was only when things returned to normal that Bubbles could feel a little at ease.

It didn't help, however, that she had to wear her uniform and gear in class. Her sisters, Blossom and Buttercup, were feeling similar things because of it. They didn't feel like kindergarten students that way.

"Miss Keane, Mac's been touching my gun! He's trying to take it!" Blossom reported to the teacher. Miss Keane had been busy at another table, and when she heard it, turned around quickly before
marching up to Mac.

"Mac, how many times must I tell you? No touching or stealing guns in class! Especially when they don't belong to you!" Miss Keane lectured the little boy, pronouncing her every word loud and carefully to make sure the boy couldn't miss it.

"But Miss Keane, my dad doesn't ever let me touch his!" Mac complained. "And Blossom's look cool too! It's all big and sick looking! I was just trying to borrow it!"

"I think your dad probably has a very good reason," Miss Keane said, before taking him by the arm gently and pulling him towards a table - his own. "Why don't you draw yourself one instead of trying to 'borrow' one?"

The rest of the day had been relatively mundane, but the Girls, even Buttercup, found it appealing as it meant nothing bad was happening. Blossom and Bubbles enjoyed the peace, while Buttercup simply enjoyed the lack of consequences - it wasn't as if she could do what she wished while she was fighting criminals anyway – Dad and Blossom had made sure of that.

Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz! Speak of the devil. Crime never sleeps. It never did even when the Powerpuff Girls were convalescing after their internal conflict, just that someone else had to answer the call when they were not available. People who were far more fragile, some who would die without the Girls knowing it. But now, they were back in business - for better or worse. They could only hope that Bunny grow up quickly so that they could have help.
Chapter 54: Beasts

Chapter Summary

Professor Utonium gets a surprise visit while The Powerpuff Girls embarks on a mission with surprising elements.

Chapter 54: Beasts

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

23 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1453.

It was astounding, simply astounding. Phenomenal. While Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were at school, or fighting crime, Professor Utonium had been tending to Bunny all day long, but most importantly, teaching her everything - little by little. And she was simply astounding, phenomenal. The rate at which she was learning... anything really, was far beyond what Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were capable of. While Bunny was unable to really run yet, she was already walking within hours of awakening for the first time. Her first word came mere minutes after that.

'Dadda,' she had said, and when Selicia had joined after she returned from sending the Girls to school, she would follow it up with 'Momma'. Hygienic practices-wise, she understood very quickly how to use the toilet. Like the Girls, she disliked the stink of feces and urine and cried when she peed in her diapers, and so that was incentive enough for her to climb aboard the porcelain train.

The professor, thus, had resolved to teach Bunny everything as fast as he could, to fulfill her potential - her destiny. To be someone who would outperform Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup in every respect. Grudgingly, he had to accept that at the end of the day, it was for her to supersede them as enhanced operatives of the USDO. It still felt like he was using her, but he'd decided that what mattered was that Bunny was going to be treated like family so that, like her trio of elder sisters, her job would be made as comfortable as it could be.

Playtime was spent on a naming game, when the professor would flash cards at Bunny, naming the content of the cards at the same time, beckoning for the newly-born eight-year-old to repeat it.

Bunny never ceased to amaze him.

Within a few hours, breaks included, Bunny was able to learn, with increasing accuracy, the names of over a hundred objects from balls to cars to police officers, and how to pronounce them. She was able to remember them too, with memory and linguistic flair rivaling that of Blossom's.

Time seemed to fly in this voyage of discovery with Bunny the professor had embarked upon, but soon, the spell was broken when Bunny was finally exhausted by all the new things she had learned. The only limiting factor to her mental capacity, it seemed, was mental exhaustion.

But even while Bunny was asleep, all the professor could do was to sit beside her, or lie down in the Girls' bed beside her, mulling, waiting for the next time he could teach and observe the miracle that was Bunny at work. That was, at least until the doorbell rang.
It'd snapped the professor out of what felt like a dream. Rising from the Girls' tri-colored bed, he gingerly left the room to avoid waking Bunny and headed to the door.

'Who could it be at this hour?' the professor thought. It couldn't have been Selicia – she was taking a beauty nap way before Bunny. The Girls would have gone through the second-floor windows and let him know.

He didn't need to take long to find out. On opening the door, he found a gigantic beast of a man blocking the view. The security officer beside him, a woman of corporal rank with brown hair, was tiny compared to him, and less noticeable.

"General Blackwater?" the professor said, before turning to the female security officer. "And you are…"

"Corporal Nana Weston, sir," the younger security officer actually saluted the professor. "It's an honor to finally meet you."

"She's my… aide," General Blackwater revealed.

The professor, however, was nonplussed that a pair of USDO officers had decided to invade his home while he was busy on Bunny's first day.

"What brings the both of you here?" he asked in a matter-of-fact way. He didn't intend to be as welcoming as he could - General Blackwater was one of those people who saw it fit to make use of Bunny.

"Security review," the general revealed. "You know the drill. We have a new enhanced individual, and so we have to take a peek."

"Er… No, I don't know the drill," the professor said, confused. "Security's outside. It doesn't take a general to inspect a house either."

"It's not just about the house, prof," the corporal beside Blackwater said, with a smile on her face that looked out of place for a serious 'security review'.

"Take us to B-50," General Blackwater simply ordered. "I want to see her- it again."

The professor couldn't help but raise an eyebrow at the couple of security officers, at General Blackwater's self-correction. He was usually much more sure of himself than now.

Not wanting to question the general, he did as he was told, and brought them up to the Girls' room. Bunny was already awake by the time the professor returned, and it hadn't even been an hour yet.

"The furnishing in this room is… adequate," the general said. It'd only raised questions in the professor about him. What did the furnishing have anything to do with security?

The corporal approached Bunny, who was sitting up in bed. Sitting down beside her, the young security officer waved at her, greeting her as any child-conscious woman would. The general appeared to have nothing against it as he stood by one of the port-windows and looked out of it, down at the security convoy parked across the street.

"She's beautiful! Look at her eyes!" the female security officer couldn't help but burst out in praises. Why would a security officer care about the appearances of a bioweapon?

Bunny giggled at what the security officer said. She pointed at her and blubbered out: "Girl! Girl!"
"That's right, I'm a girl just like you," the young female security officer said. She then proceeded to stroke her head affectionately. "I can't believe you're just a day old!"

The general turned around to pin the professor down with his glare before he could question what was going on any further.

"Did you name her?" the general asked. "What's her name?"

"I didn't name her. Bubbles did," the professor said, tense from the general's visit, but not because he was afraid of him. "Her name's Bunny. Bunny Utonium."

General Blackwater seemed to freeze the moment the professor said the name. As if there was something wrong with it. It didn't help that the general seemed to be studying the professor's face.

"It'll serve," he sighed, saying nothing about how he obviously didn't like it. "Have you assessed her capabilities yet?"

"Does learning ability count in your war-addled brain?" the professor said. By what right did the general came into his home and judge him? He hadn't forgotten about the general's part in the Morbucks' masquerade ball, and certainly not his hand in pushing his daughters to their absolute limit when he should have gone easy on them. They were working harder than even most adults and taking far more risks than it was humane! And soon, he would be doing the same thing with Bunny.

"Yes," the general simply said. He probably knew that the professor was contentious and dissatisfied with his decisions, but chose not to bother with it.

"She started walking, eating, using the toilet and speaking about a hundred words today." Professor Utonium bit at his words as if he was about to get into a fight. "Is that good enough for you? Or do you want to traumatize this one too?"

"You've grown attached to Bunny?" the general asked, his eyes still fixed on him as if deciding whether or not to execute him on the spot. "You love her?"

"Children are meant to be loved. More so by those who sired them," the professor said, this time allowing some venom to seep into his words. "Some of us are more human than others."

"At least some of them think so," the general countered surprisingly. After taking a pause whilst glaring at the professor some more, he continued: "I don't care how you feel about Bunny, as long as you provide for her needs, and make her happy."

"Since when do you ever care about the Girls' happiness?" the professor snapped back at him, at the same time keeping an eye on the lower-ranking security officer with brown hair, who appeared to be completely absorbed in interacting with Bunny. Bunny, on the other hand, didn't seem to mind the corporal as she was making funny faces at her. She was laughing instead.

"Sooner than you think, and more than you know," the general replied curtly, before sighing. "But business is business, and war is war. And speaking of warring - you will teach her as much as you can in the next two days because I'm taking her on the fourth for a three-day crash course. Her and Sergeant Selicia."

"Isn't that far too soon!?" the professor retorted fiercely, flinging an arm at the general, causing everyone in the room to look at him. Even Bunny knew what was up. "It took Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup three weeks to get prepared for their first mission and even then, it was one miserable tragedy after another!"
"And guess whose fault is that?" the general said coldly. "You were supposed to raise those brats as soldiers. You knew they were meant to be soldiers. You've spoiled them instead, coddling them too much when you should be toughening them up. You want to talk about being human? Love? That's love - preparing your close ones for what they must face. No, you're just selfish. They're just replacements for your dead wife and kid."

"Don't you dare mention them!" the professor warned the general, but he wasn't making anyone shrink away from him anytime soon. The general knew that he was more than a match for the middle-aged geek even in his sixties.

The general did not reply. Instead, he turned to the door and started walking away.

"You're wrong about me!" Professor Utonium added.

"Let's go, corporal," General Blackwater said to his aide on his way out of the room.

"Awww, but we just got here!" the soldier said.

"Fine, I'm going to have a talk with Selicia, and then we're going," the general said. The professor thought he was being unusually relenting. In fact, he wasn't acting quite like his normal self. That, however, was the end of his thought process. His guts felt like ice, and his legs had gone numb from it. Collapsing in the Girls' bed, he didn't even notice when minutes went by, and Corporal Nana Weston had bid him goodbye and gone away.

He just started crying. He'd never expected this - it was dangerous enough that Bunny's creation was rushed. It was bad enough that he had only three weeks with Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup before they were pressed into service. Now, he had only three days with Bunny before everything would go to shit.

Well, presumably. There was always the chance that Bunny could be the skeleton key to a crime-free future, but even then, she would have to grow up very quickly. She would have far less time to indulge in any kind of childhood. Far less time to be human.

When the professor was crying, Bunny noticed. She knew what it meant - she had been doing that herself sometimes, all day. It meant that her Dad needed something. Attention. Love. Despite knowing only about a hundred words, she didn't need them to understand the vocabulary of human emotions. Standing up from among her toys, she waddled over to the professor, concerned and on the verge of tears herself because her Dad - this pillar of strength, the only pillar of strength she knew - had fallen.

"Dada sad," Bunny uttered the few words she knew. She was able to boost herself up onto the professor lap with her enhanced strength. She then wiped some of her father's tears away with her fingers. "Bunny love Dada…"

Bunny's gestures were the remedy he needed for his crying and shaking. It'd filled him with hope. Perhaps, just perhaps, things might turn out fine. After all, Bunny was already capable of things which Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup needed a week to accomplish, which normal children would take a couple of years at least to even attempt.

"Daddy loves Bunny too," the professor replied, and they hugged.

The City of Townsville. Outskirts. The Flying Tumbleweed (Convenience Store).

23 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1725.
It had been a lousy day for The Powerpuff Girls. Having to leave class within an hour of it notwithstanding, it was another dive into Crimesville, USA, like before Bubbles' final drug-fueled rampage. They were involved in one high-speed chase after another, in quelling multiple random acts of violence perpetrated by mobs of seemingly everyday citizens, but the final topping on the cake was when they had to deal with another incursion by an enhanced individual...

Though the worst had yet to come.

It all started with an erroneously-made call claiming that a man in a furry suit was holding up a convenience store. A USDO patrol unit just so happened to be in the area. Feeling vulnerable over the recent decision by Director Cliff to split up his forces into smaller units to cover a wide number of emergencies, they made the call for an intervention by The Powerpuff Girls after the owner of the store was thrown through a window. They believed the man in the furry suit to be jacked up with His Secret 2.0, but they had him contained with the help of the police.

The truth was worse.

"A man in a bear suit? At least it isn't another gang," Blossom said in her ignorance as she landed next to the fire-team of USDO soldiers attending to the convenience store robbery. While regular criminals weren't much of a danger, they were a nuisance because they usually came in huge numbers. It was like trying to catch some chicks in a wide, open area on a farm.

"Or another chase down the highway," Bubbles added. "I'm tired from all that flying!"

"What's there to be tired about? It was fun, so stop whining!" Buttercup added - though she didn't really believe in her own words, considering that her idea of fun was more than just chasing a car full of criminals around. Bubbles didn't have time to be upset at Buttercup when they were approached by the USDO.

"The Powerpuff Girls, finally!" the officer commanding the fire-team exclaimed.

"What seems to be the problem, mister?" Blossom asked.

"I know it sounds stupid, but-" the officer said, sounding a little too friendly before he stopped himself. He glared at Blossom as if remembering something nasty. "There's a man in there in a black-furred costume. I think he's on drugs, like Bubbles over there, the other day." He pointed at Bubbles with his XM4 Carbine. Bubbles was immediately facing the ground in shame. Blossom knew how it would make her feel, but there was nothing she could do but give the officer a frown.

"The weird eyes gave it away. There are no civilians in the line of fire, so just go in there and knock him out. We'll be right behind you to arrest him. Don't mess this up!"

"Sounds easy enough, let's just hurry up and get this done so we can go home for dinner, Bloss!" Buttercup harried her leader sister, with no joy at all in her voice. In any other circumstances, she would have enjoyed beating the snot out of a criminal, but no, she wasn't allowed to enjoy anything. A warm meal, on the other hand, was just about the pinnacle of enjoyment for her these days.

Blossom, however, was less confident. It sounded too easy, far too easy. But all she had to go on was that the man holding up the convenience store was on the same drugs as Bubbles and that he was wearing a furry suit.

"Fine. Follow behind me, we'll go through the door and make him sleep really quickly!" Blossom said to no one in particular - her sisters, the USDO soldiers, the cops. She then launched herself towards the glass doors of the convenience store, bright pink X-contrail in her wake, followed by
her sisters, who emitted a lime and baby blue X-contrail respectively.

When they entered the convenience store, they found the man opening a refrigeration unit and cracking open a tall can of beer.

With just one glance, Blossom knew that something was wrong, and the operation wasn't exactly what was advertised.

"The shotgun, I've seen it before!" Buttercup uttered before she could. The man in the fur suit's gun was a modified lever-action shotgun with a thick barrel, reinforced by ribs.

"It's…" Bubbles couldn't even bear to finish what she was about to say.

"The Purple Man!" Blossom finished it for her. The Purple Man turned around, having noticed their frightened squeaking. Ghostly-white pupils stared back at them. After taking a big gulp, without warning and without so much as a word of greeting, he grabbed his shotgun and started firing. His black fur, in the meantime, had turned a shade of gray, blending in together with the generally dull coloring of the convenience store. Either way, he was anything but purple.

Shots were fired at the Girls, some of which hit home, and the Girls ducked into hiding behind a shelf full of plastic-packaged pastries and other, less healthy, comestibles.

"What do we do!?!" Bubbles squeaked in fear as she trembled – but half of it was out of the fear of backsliding into cowardice.

"Fight, of course, you bobblehead!" Buttercup insulted the meekest of the three. Blossom glared at her - but there was no time.

"We'll go in three directions. Buttercup, you go straight ahead and use the shelf. I'll go up. You go left, Bubbles!" Blossom ordered.

"But-" Bubbles was about to object only to be ignored:

"Go!" Blossom ordered and launched herself into the air. Buttercup immediately shoved the shelf forward, like a professional footballer pushing another back. The shelf, which spanned a quarter of the store ended up crashing into the Purple Man, even managing to pin him down before he could fire another dreaded shot.

Bubbles did as she was told the best she could, but on seeing the Purple Man so swiftly neutralized, she couldn't think of what to do next.

"You again! Tiny little city pixies!" the Purple Man growled.

"Shut up and eat it, stupid!" Buttercup retorted. She couldn't help but admit inside that Blossom's leadership had paid off this time, and she enjoyed seeing the Purple Man brought so low. He might be dangerous out in the woods, but here, where the city was, the Girls were more in their element.

With Bubbles left indecisive, Blossom flew in for the final blow. It still seemed too easy… until the Purple Man's claws had ripped through the steel shelves, sending a mountain of pastries and packaged candies flying up into the air, blinding Blossom.

Blossom felt herself flying backward across the convenience store, blood-like flower petals flowing before her before she landed in a shelf full of cassette tapes and floppy disks. Looking down at herself, she saw blood seeping through her Kevlar vest and plates.
"B-B-Blossom?" Bubbles cried. It was all coming back to her in one big cascade. Her failure back in the woods of Pokey Oaks, she and her sisters getting grievously wounded then, and Blossom screaming at her and hitting her. Then there was Captain Boomer, and how he was nailed on a tree. To this day, she still didn't know where he was or how he was doing. But most importantly: Blossom! "Stop hurting my sister!"

Bubbles hurled herself at the Purple Man, who had tossed away Buttercup as well, and as she was flanking him and he was busy putting a few blood-enhanced shells into Buttercup, he wasn't able to react quickly enough when she gave him a punch in the face, then another, and another.

Being badly wounded, Blossom could only watch as Bubbles went into a frenzy of destruction, quite unlike her usual self from before her drug addiction problem arose. She was incredibly fast! When the Purple Man tried to seize her with his claws, she would flit away and resume her beating. Once, she landed and swept the Purple Man off his feet, and when he tried to get up, was punched several times across the face before he could.

Like an animal, the Purple Man resorted to pouncing on Bubbles while she was low on the ground, but she was able to get away and on turning around, fired the ion beam she had retained from her drug incident, searing the Purple Man, though doing very little real damage except for burning hair and skin - it was an enhanced ability, as the professor would discover in the future, which was more useful in less offensive matters, such as disrupting electronic equipment, than raw firepower.

All good things must come to an end, however, and as Bubbles swooped in for another flurry of punches, the Purple Man was finally able to grab Bubbles by an arm and a leg. The blonde little girl could only pound at the furry monster's arm uselessly when she realized she couldn't move.

"Gotcha, you brat!" he said. "I'm gonna teach you! Teach you all the way!" He started squeezing Bubbles' arm and legs, and she screamed as alarmingly, the sickening sound of bones snapping could be heard.

"Buttercup, go!" Blossom screamed in panic, her voice breaking when she realized Bubbles was in peril. They both dived into the Purple Man at full speed, knocking him fully across the convenience store, with shelves falling beneath him and knocking down others in a domino effect. He was sent flying all the way into a refrigerator, with the glass door shattering and most of him stuck inside. A mixture of all sorts of alcoholic and bubbly beverage flowed past him like a waterfall and onto the ground.

Bubbles fell out of his arms, rolling on the ground, her head lolling briefly, eyes closed. The Purple Man wasn't moving either after that.

"Bubbles… Oh no…" Blossom uttered as she saw what had become of her sister. Both her left arm and left leg were bending in unnatural ways around the elbow and knee. But there was no time to fret and cry. As Buttercup stood guard, watching the Purple Man, who looked like he was out for the count, Blossom started dragging Bubbles away, and while she was doing this, Bubbles' eyes fluttered open, though the first thing they expressed was pain, along with her gritted teeth.

"Oh, Bubbles, what have you done to yourself?" Blossom said, heartbroken that her sister, in trying to prove herself, had gotten herself hurt badly.

"I'm so sorry… Blossom," Bubbles struggled to speak as pain radiated throughout her entire body. "I… I've done it again. Nothing's changed. I'm still a coward. You were hurt because of me."

"No, Bubbles. Don't say that," Blossom comforted her. She bent down to get closer to her sensitive sibling. "You did really well. You gave us a chance to fight back. But- I wish you hadn't done that.
"I wish you weren't hurt."

"I'd rather be hurt," Bubbles replied.

"He's waking up again!" Buttercup informed the two of them while the Purple Man groaned as he tried to extricate himself from the beverage aisle.

"Purple Man!" Blossom shouted as she forcibly tore herself from Bubbles, more angry than upset now. Turning around, he marched up to the brawny, furry giant, whose fur was returning to its usual shade of purple. "You meanie! Why are you doing this!? Why are you hurting people!? Why hurt my sister!?"

The Purple Man was just straightening up and grabbing his boomstick when he heard Blossom's tirade. He didn't expect to be spoken to, especially not by three little runts who had invaded his neck of the woods a couple of weeks ago, injured him and broke Joe, who he was still trying to repair. Originally, he intended to continue fighting, but after blinking twice and taking in Blossom's question, he lowered his lever-action shotgun and growled - he had his grievances too.

"I came to this here establishment for help, but all I git are these ill-mannered city 'uns screaming my ears off and calling the sheriff and even shooting at me!" the Purple Man rumbled. "I've even brought money, but apparently it's not good enough for them 'posh' folks!"

Buttercup, closest to the Purple Man, was looking back at Blossom, pleading with her eyes to let her take him one, but Blossom shook her head.

"But that doesn't make hurting people right! What do you need help with, anyway?" Blossom asked.

"Winter's keeping on like no other winters. It still feels like December, and it's gettin' harder to find venison and fish. Them deers knew to avoid my neck of the woods, and the river's runnin' outta fish or somewhat, you follow?" the Purple Man explained, but Blossom couldn't understand half of it. The look on her face was obvious, so he went on to simplify himself: "I couldn't find food, so I wanted to buy myself some - but the boys and gals here don't think I'm good enough for 'em!"

Something clicked in Blossom - previously, the Purple Man had attacked a gas station, and it just so happened to have a convenience store in it too. Had he been out for some food back then too?

"If it's food you want, will you leave if we let you take whatever you want?" Blossom proposed. On the inside, she felt proud of herself for thinking of such an ingenious solution. In any case, she didn't think she could handle another bout of fighting. Clutching her chest, she felt like she'd been cut up like a paper with penknives and scissors. Not to mention, Bubbles had literally given an arm and a leg just to equalize the balance of power between furry monster and kindergarten fighters.

The Purple Man couldn't believe his ears. These city girls would let him leave? After everything?

"Yes - if them folks here had been wiser with their words and not forgit what their mama taught them…" the Purple Man mumbled.

"Then take whatever you want and go," Blossom said, still cross with him. She had decided - as much as she hated the Purple Man for hurting her sisters, he wasn't entirely in the wrong, it seemed. Neither was more fighting going to help.

"Fine," the Purple Man growled, before sidestepping them, and backing away, his gun still cautiously held at low port. "Don't you dare try anything." And with that, the Purple Man started gathering his food. Blossom, however, decided to expedite the process as a show of good faith and
to just end it all quickly. While he gathered his selected items - mainly meat products - Blossom threw whatever she could get her hands on into a shopping cart and flew up to the Purple Man while holding it out for him.

"My friends outside are mad though," Blossom said as she handed over the spoils to the Purple Man. "So you'll have to sneak out the back. They're still trying to get there. I think the snow's blocking the way."

"Don't you start fancyin' that we're friends," the Purple Man growled after snatching away the shopping cart full of goods and dumping his own selections in. He stuck his boomstick into the baby seat last. "We're not even either - you broke Joe, and that's unforgivable," With that, he went on his way out.

"Urm- Mister?" Blossom said, and the Purple Man stopped. "What's your name?"

The Purple Man turned around, his whitened pupils searching Blossom's frightened pink.

"I haven't figured it out yet, but I go by Lumpkins," the Purple Man introduced himself, at long last. Blossom found it odd - how could a man not know his own name? Not that it mattered - while the battle was terrible, and Bubbles was hurt badly, with herself not far behind, the worst was yet to come.
Chapter 55: The Black Car

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup grapple with the fact that the professor's attention will be split unevenly between them and Bunny. Their next crime-fighting assignment took a turn for the strange.

Chapter 55: The Black Car

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

23 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1816.

Home sweet home, at long last. The day had been terrible. When there was the Purple Man, whom the Girls now knew to call by Lumpkins, it had to be. He was practically a disaster walking on legs, and even when they were stronger and more seasoned than before, they weren't able to defeat him. They had to make him go away by letting him take whatever food he wanted. Blossom didn't like it - she knew that her sisters wouldn't like it either - but though it was like letting a bully have his way, it was the only way. Lumpkins would have gone on to hurt or even kill them, then move on to hurt or kill everyone else around them.

But that wasn't even the worst part…

'I solved the problem, mister!' Blossom had announced proudly when she met the USDO soldier in charge of the operation, half an hour ago at the outskirts of Townsville. The soldier looked distressed when she said it.

'What did you do?' he'd asked, pale as if he'd seen a ghost. 'B-47, what have you done?'

'The 'man in a bear suit' was actually the Purple Man. His name is Lumpkins,' Blossom had explained, at the same time hoping that the soldier was just tired from the operation and cold from the weather. The alternative would be too much to stomach. 'He was actually just hungry, so we gave him lots of food and he left.'

Blossom had said it proudly, wearing a confident smile and expecting nothing but praises. Her plan had gone on without a hitch, no less. Sure, Lumpkins had to run through a hail of bullets out the back, but there weren't that many cops behind the convenience store, just like how she predicted. She'd seen him run, and he didn't lose anything he was carrying away either. Neither was anyone else hurt, and that was the most important part.

'You what!?' the soldier yelled on hearing Blossom's explanation. 'You weren't supposed to just let him leave! I told you! I told you to knock him out so we can arrest him!'

'But he was too strong- and- and- he would have hurt others!' Blossom tried to justify herself. 'My sisters are hurt really badly!' she pointed at Bubbles and Buttercup, who were behind her. Buttercup had put one of Bubbles' arm around her shoulder to assist her with walking and flying. She had an arm and a leg that were mangled. 'He was just hungry, and he was just trying to buy food and-'
'Shut up! Just shut up!' the soldier screamed at her. As if her slash wounds weren't bad enough, it'd shaken her. 'You mean to tell me that you were scared for your lives - like cowards - and you just let an enhanced individual walk because of that!?'

'But-

'That 'Lumpkins' killed entire squads of soldiers! Some of them were my friends!' the soldier berated Blossom, who shrunk away from the enraged soldier. 'And guess who's going to pay for all those food? It's gonna be the USDO! Guess who's going to have to write a report on this! Me! And guess who isn't going to get any justice! My friends!'

'But we protected the people in the store, and he would have hurt everyone outside!' Blossom stubbornly defended herself.

'You protected yourself! Now get lost! General Blackwater is going to hear about this!' the soldier hollered.

'No! Please! It's not what you think!' Blossom cried, flying up close to him. The USDO soldier took exception to this, however, thinking that the enhanced little girl was rebelling against him. He drew his sidearm quickly and fired a few shots at her.

'Ow!' Blossom had cried in pain, recoiled from it when she felt gunshots on her arms when she shielded herself from the gunshots.

'I said get lost! You're done here! Go home and cry to your daddy about it, because I don't want to hear it!' the soldier had said to end the conversation if it could be called as such.

They had to fly back home carrying Bubbles on their shoulders, as her broken limbs (not that they really knew what was really wrong with her arm and leg) had badly affected her ability to fly. It wasn't a pleasant journey, as their flight packs couldn't be extended while they were huddled together, making it even harder to fly. Bubbles wouldn't stop crying in pain - Buttercup found it annoying while the fact that she was in pain was trampling on the shattered remains of Blossom's heart. Yet, all this wasn't the worst, as it had yet to come.

The Girls flew through their porthole windows and into their room. Blossom and Buttercup deposited Bubbles in their bed, and Blossom flew out the door to look for the professor. As she was traveling at high speeds due to the emergency, she was quick to comb through the entire second floor while shouting desperately for her Dad, and she did the same for the first floor. Where could he be? She wasn't able to find anyone else too - no Mom, not even Bunny.

At least, not until she went through the airlock leading down and into the labs. Her Dad had never done this before. Whenever he knew that the Girls were out fighting crime, he would stay in the living room or somewhere close by, just in case they needed him - and more than once, they did need him.

Instead, Blossom found him in the labs, with Mom and Bunny. He was standing beside a Bunny who was already flexing her Chemical X2-enhanced strength, carrying a 2,000-pound load over her head, and it didn't look too difficult for her at all. And she was showered with praises from both a cheering Mom and a Dad who was recording her progress with a smile on his face, oblivious to what Bunny's elder sisters were going through.

"Dad!" Blossom called out to him. All three of them turned to her.

"Oh hey-" the professor greeted her with a young, boyish smile on his face until he saw the state
she was in. The blood on her vest had dried, but it was still obvious to a caring father. "Blossom!"

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

23 FEB (Thursday) 1989. 1837.

"It's not too bad," the professor said as he was examining Bubbles, who Blossom and Buttercup had transferred down to the labs from their room. Her left arm and leg were still bending the wrong way, and Bubbles hadn't been able to move them since. It was terrifying for her, and in her childish mind, she thought she was going to be a cripple for the rest of her life. "They're just dislocated. Our friend 'Lumpkins' would have to try harder to break your bones, sweetie."

"He's not our friend," Blossom, who was watching from a nearby sickbed, corrected her Dad. "That's what he said."

"I hope he wouldn't try harder…" Bubbles cried, still wiping tears away.

"I'm going to have to reset your joints, Bubbles," the professor said. Thankfully, Bunny was taken away to another corner of the lab by Selicia so she didn't have to see it. It was bad enough that Bubbles' arm and leg were bending in the wrong direction, but when the kevlar plates there were removed, the professor had discovered that the entirety of the affected joints were bruised and swollen, with the black-and-blue spreading across both limbs. There was massive internal bleeding, likely from how serious the dislocations were.

"Is it going to hurt?" Bubbles wept.

"Yes, I'm afraid it will," the professor said. "Be strong, honey. It'll be over quickly."

"I'm here with you, Bubbles," Blossom said from her bed. Buttercup, on the other hand, was just watching and waiting for that satisfying moment when Bubbles would explode in tears.

"I'm going to work on your arm first," the professor said. Taking a baseball, he put it into Bubbles' dislocated arm. "Here, hold onto this tightly."

Bubbles mewled in fear as she gave the ball a tight clench. Despite her dislocation, she was still strong enough to grip it tightly, vice-like such that the baseball was in danger of flattening.

"Now, you're going to feel a little pulling sensation. Be strong…" the professor said, and before Bubbles could speak, he gave her arm a pull and her elbow a squeeze, orientating the limb in a maneuver to reset the joint. Pain exploded in her elbow and there was a popping sound, louder than one a regular elbow would make.

But Bubbles' scream was louder.

The professor was shaken by all of his. It was yet another day that would traumatize his daughters for years to come. But he couldn't stop. He tried to relocate Bubbles' knee immediately after this to make it quick, but despite him informing her about the pain, she was pushing him away with her other leg, using it to fence his hand away.

"Buttercup! Hold Bubbles down!" the professor said to his other daughter. Buttercup had gotten off lightly this time, suffering only bruises and cuts from Lumpkins' shotgun, so she was able to help.

"Gladly," Buttercup said as she flew over to pin Bubbles' arms and single working leg down.
"I'm sorry, Bubbles, but this will hurt much, much worse," the professor said apologetically when he seized Bubbles by her dislocated leg. "But it's going to be... just fine."

The bony snap could be heard even from beyond the curtains of the medical area of the lab, followed by Bubbles' scream.

However, Selicia had prepared Bunny just for that. While Bunny was playing with blocks, she had slipped a headphone on her hooked to a cassette player singing a lullaby into her ears.

Bubbles was barely conscious after her harrowing experience.

"You did it, Bubbles. You made it," the professor comforted her. "It's over now. You'll be fine."

"I'm glad she's okay, Dad," Blossom said from the side.

"You know what would make the three of you feel better?" the professor went on.

"What?" the three Girls asked in unison.

"Bunny! She's learning so fast!" the professor exclaimed, switching gears perhaps a little too fast to make a good impression on his daughters, before gushing at length: "She's already walking, not to mentioning saying her name, and she's mastered about two hundred words too - she called me Daddy not too long ago, and your mother Mommy - she knows your names too. The three of you have got to spend more time with her!"

It wasn't making any of them feel any better, with attention being taken away from them. Only Bubbles, perhaps, was glad that Bunny was doing better than they were.

"Oh..." Blossom said dejectedly, though the professor didn't quite pick up on it. He just thought that she was just in pain and miserable because of it. "That's... great."

"What's wrong?" the professor asked, sensing something else other than joy, though he had no clue what it would be, considering that the subject was Bunny - someone the Girls should be rooting for.

"Nothing..." Blossom said, however.

"Pff, I bet she'll take forever to learn how to fly," Buttercup said. "She's such a klutz!"

"You mean like you, Buttercup?" Bubbles interjected. She didn't like how Buttercup had found a new victim to taunt.

"Hey!" Buttercup exclaimed madly.

"I see the three of you are in high spirits," came Selicia's voice from the entrance of the ward curtains. Bunny was waddling beside her, giggling in that low voice of hers. Buttercup thought she looked like an idiot. Bubbles smiled when she turned to look at her, and though Blossom felt otherwise, she forced herself to smile at Bunny. It was clear by now that the kind of attention her Dad used to lavish on top of her was a thing of the past. In fact, thinking back, she realized in retrospect that it had been slowly slipping away when her Mom came into the picture, and as the days went by, Dad would devote more and more time to her instead. Bunny had merely made it more obvious when she took her slice of Dad's attention (and it was a big one at that), completing the process.

The professor picked up Bunny the moment she walked through, swooping in after her. Bunny
giggled when he did.

"Oof, you're heavy, bunny rabbit!" he said. He could barely handle it when he let her sit in his arms. "Say hi to your sisters - do you remember their names?" He pointed at Bubbles. "Can you remember her name?"

"Bubbles!" Bunny reiterated with a laugh. Bubbles, who was still resting in her patient bed and didn't even dare to get up, smiled at this development. It was a warm, fuzzy feeling, forgetting about everything that had happened in the past and just being in the here and now, enjoying the company of a new sister and her family. Bunny's rapid development was something she could get behind - better that she be talented than useless like her. Bubbles was still unable to shake off the sense of worthlessness and guilt she felt after seeing Lumpkins off in the Tumbling Weed Convenience Store, and especially after her drug abuse episode.

Then the professor turned and pointed at someone else, and Bunny gladly obliged.

"Buttercup!" Bunny read her name as if it was ice-cream to be licked clean off a cone. Buttercup was anything but accepting and celebratory, however. She crossed her arms and frowned instead. She wouldn't even meet Bunny's gaze as the physically eight-years-old looked at her with innocence in her eyes. Another competitor, that's all she was.

The professor then turned to the last elder sister in the room. "What about her?" he asked.

"Blossom!" Bunny recalled effortlessly. Blossom wanted to be happy for Bunny, at having reached milestones she would have taken days, not a day, to stumble onto. But something inside her prevented her from being fully genuine about it, something she had never felt before in her three months of life. She had been the apple in her father's eyes for just as long - and it felt as if Bunny had taken her place, and it was eating away at her.

"Who's the smartest girl there is? You are!" the professor pinched Bunny's cheek playfully and Bunny giggled in her repugnant, low voice. What the professor said had made Blossom feel worse. Here she was, lying in a hospital bed, bandaged up because of her wounds in the chest suffered in the line of fire, while she was away an entire day doing good, and her Dad had hardly paid her any attention! All because Bunny had learned things her elder sisters had mastered months ago! "You're the smartest girl there is, yes you are! You definitely are!"

The feeling was something Dad had rarely talked about. But the one time he named it was all it took for Blossom to remember it.

Jealousy.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

24 FEB (Friday) 1989. 0755.

"Are you sure you'll be fine, Bubbles?" the professor asked. He couldn't help but look down at Bunny, who was standing next to him, perpetually smiling without a care in the world.

"I'll be fine, Dad," Bubbles said as she was walking towards the door. She was already in uniform and gear, in accordance with General Blackwater's instructions, just like her sisters. Her left limbs were still stiff and sore, which made walking and flying awkward, but at least the unsightly bruises were gone. "You fixed me up really well." She flew up to him and gave him a peck on the cheek.

"Bubbles fly!" Bunny exclaimed when she saw Bubbles doing her 'magic trick' again.
"Yes, I am, Bunny! You'll be flying soon too," Bubbles replied. In the meantime, Blossom and Buttercup had already traveled all the way to the door even though they had done it at a snail's pace. Neither of them was laughing, or smiling, or even feeling okay. Blossom could still feel stiffness in the chest, not that Dad seemed to care. Bubbles was puzzling to her - couldn't she see that she had been pushed aside because of Bunny too?

"Not only that, she'll be better than the three of you at it in no time too!" the professor said, with that stupid, boyish grin on his face that Blossom was beginning to find unlikable. What he said grated at him such that she couldn't help but grit her teeth and glare at the sight of a jubilant Bunny, an ignorant Bubbles and a negligent Dad. "And then she'll be fighting-"

Bzzz! Bzzz! Bzzz! The USDO hotline screamed at the conversation. The clown phone was at it again, stating its opinion. Blossom looked at it, unable to decide if it was on her side this time. Nonetheless, she couldn't believe that she was glad it rang, as it meant she didn't have to take Dad's car with Bunny.

"-Crime," the professor finished his sentence anyway. Not that he could finish everything he wanted to say. Blossom flew over to the phone and picked it up.

"Hello?" she greeted the phone.

"Is this the Powerpuff Girls?" a man's voice, grating and seasoned and unfamiliar, said through the otherwise happy-and-sunshine clown phone.

"Y-yes," Blossom said. The voice made her feel uneasy. "How can I help you, mister?"

"I am the chief of Precinct 77. I have a special assignment for the three of you," the grating voice continued and would have done so whether Blossom had asked or not. "Go to Wilkins Street at Downtown. A black car will be there waiting for you by a pawnshop at thirty past eight. Don't be late."

"What is it about, Mister Chief-Of-Precinct-77? Who are we fighting?" Blossom asked. Her answer was the phone hanging up and a monotonous tone suggesting a mystery.

"What is it, Blossom?" the professor asked, as usual, apprehensive about the prospect of the Girls going out there again.

"The man on the tele said it's a 'special assignment'…" Blossom said. The only thing she could equate to was that it could be a surprise. The 'special assignment', after all, had come from the police. A chief, no less. For all she knew, it might not even be an assignment. Could it be the Mayor's surprise? Or even something thrown together by the Townsville Police? If it was, it could be the break she deserved - not just from fighting crime, but from the domestic problems she'd been encountering, the latest one being Bunny.

"Oh… I hate missing school all the time…" Bubbles commented, looking just as upset.

"I guess that means we'll be shopping for Bunny's stuff alone," Selicia, who was just coming out of the kitchen, said. She was wearing a red dress - it was her favorite color, it seemed, with black coming in a close second; her accessories were mostly of that color.

Her smirk betrayed the fact that she would rather be alone with Professor Utonium and Bunny than to have the Girls around. Bunny had gotten an instant glare from Buttercup that way.

---

The City of Townsville. Downtown. Wilkins Street.
"What kind of surprise do you think it will be, Blossom?" Bubbles asked just as they were descending down to the place where they were supposed to be for the 'special assignment'.

"Maybe the rest of the police wants to throw us a birthday party?" Blossom guessed absentmindedly. Dad was still on her mind. "We've done so much for them. I don't mind getting a cake for it."

"I just want an assignment where we get to beat hundreds of people up!" Buttercup said, referring to the times when they had to go on riot control, donning their riot gear and wielding crowd suppression weapons. That was when she had to go medieval on a horde of people, and she loved it.

"Maybe we'll get to play with puppies together with the orphans. Like that time with the mayor?" Bubbles took her own guess.

"I don't think so," Blossom said the moment they touched down. "At least… I won't be at home with Bunny, no matter what it is."

"You too, Blossom?" Buttercup said to her leader sister, and they exchanged looks. "I don't think I like Bunny…"

Blossom did not reply immediately, feeling conflicted inside. Her feelings were strong in this one - Bunny was taking something from them that she did not deserve, and the three of them had fought with teeth and nails, sometimes literally, for love.

"But Bunny's our sister…" Bubbles said but fell silent very quickly. She never thought she would hear such a thing - who could hate Bunny? After all, she was literally born yesterday!

A car rounding the corner, black as promised, made sure that Blossom didn't have to say anything. It was a vintage Mercedes, something a rich man would have. The car came up towards them, parking beside them. The Girls looked on, unsure of what to make of it. There were no markings. Blossom knew to look at the license plate, but it wasn't there. At first, there was no response from whoever was inside - the windows were tinted, so it made it impossible for anyone to see inside. That is, anyone except someone with X-ray vision.

And Blossom would have used it too, had someone inside not wound down his window. It was the driver, on the driver seat. A man in a clean, gray suit. A fedora hat. Late middle age, looking like he might have missed a few night's sleep occasionally. Perhaps binged on some potato chips while he was at it, though to the driver's credit, it wasn't too obvious.

"Powerpuff Girls? Get in," the man simply ordered them to do so, with a voice deep and commanding.

"Who are you?" Blossom questioned the man.

"I'm not supposed to say," he simply said.

"Is this like an undercover mission or something?" Buttercup added.

"Yeah, sure, whatever," the man answered impatiently. "Now get in."

There was something about this that Bubbles didn't like. It reminded her too much of the fairy godmother, even though she knew that this wasn't her doing. The fairy godmother would have gone
to her directly.

Things just kept getting weirder and weirder…

As if the tumultuous changes at home weren't enough.
Chapter 56: Equals

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup meet people they didn't expect to meet.

A/N: I've decided to change big guy's suit from gray to dark blue.

Chapter 56: Equals

The City of Townsville. Downtown. En Route to [Unknown]

24 FEB (Friday) 1989. 0836.

The black car's engine hummed elegantly as it took Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup across Townsville, towards someplace they weren't privy to. The driver was silent, quiet in his defiance of the Powerpuff Girls' initial impressions. His voice was deep and his stature huge, which made them think he was just some dumb muscle, but the look on his face, the aptitude in which he kept information from them, right down to the spartan surroundings in the car, his own person and his expression, told them the only thing they needed to know about him: he wasn't just some mindless muscle. Beside him was a skinnier man, this one in a brown jacket with a brown trilby to match. His hands were gloved. When Blossom had studied the driver's hands, he noticed that they were gloved too.

"Where are we going?" Blossom asked again. Just knowing which street she was on didn't help her to figure it out. They could be making any number of turns, throwing off the straight line she'd drawn in her mind's map.

"You'll soon find out," the skinny man in brown replied evasively, though he was calm.

"I want to know where we're going," Buttercup insisted, the irritation in her voice promising violence. The two men looked at each other as if exchanging wordless messages.

"You'll not be harmed," the big guy on the wheel said. "If you want to find out, don't try anything."

"Our instructions are to escort you. That is all," the other man said, turning to his right to squint at them. "If we fail, we'll be punished… fatally for our ineptitude. Killing us won't do anything for you but curse you with a question you'll never find an answer to for the rest of your lives."

"I'm scared," Bubbles let slip.

"You're right to be," the big guy said, and that just made it worse. Blossom held Bubbles closely as she shivered. "But you're far better off than… well, I'm not going to tell those stories to little kids. If it helps, there are snacks behind my seat. Help yourself if you want to. Just don't leave a mess."

The journey towards the mystery location took a long time, but the Girls didn't help themselves to the snacks. Well, except Buttercup, who took it upon herself to eat some potato chips for the three of them. The car wasn't built for speed, and neither did the traffic and stoplights help. Blossom had been tracking their location all the while, and where they were heading, it didn't help with the
oppressive, ominous atmosphere.

They were heading to the outskirts of Townsville, where terrible things tended to happen. The cityscape, abuzz with people and machines and vehicles, gave way to wilderness both open and enclosed, and more ancient, rustic buildings, a change the Girls weren't used to, being created and raised in an urban environment.

The foreboding atmosphere wasn't helped when a mansion came into view. It was nothing like Princess Morbucks' place, which was sprawling, homely and welcoming, and vibrant with colors. Instead, this mansion was tall, looming in the horizon like a giant, surrounded by jagged fencing on the parameter. It had a dull color theme to it, of gray and brown and vegetation. As the Mercedes passed through its gates, Blossom saw armed guards, all dressed smartly in suits and fedora of various dark colors. She would have thought that it was a dress code had it not been the few men and women who dared to wear brighter colors. There was a multitude of them, and she could only hope that they were police officers in disguise, just like back in The Strip, when Bubbles went undercover and... suffered horrible things.

Swerving into a parking lot, the car finally stopped, and its gentle humming stopped. It'd made Blossom wish she could just stay in the car. Both the driver and his partner got out of the car. As if well rehearsed, they got opened the passenger doors almost in unison.

"Come on out," the big guy said, and the Girls obeyed reluctantly. He then glared widely at Buttercup. Scattered all around her were crumbs of potato chips.

"I said not to leave a mess," the big guy said sternly.

"Sorry," Buttercup shrugged her shoulders.

"We will escort the three of you into the mansion," the thin one said. "There are rules to follow."

Bubbles didn't like where this was going. 'There are rules to follow,' that's what one of the suited men said, and it just so happened to be something the fairy godmother had mentioned before. Those rules were what nearly got her to kill half her family - something that would be a mark of shame for the rest of her life.

"What kind of rules?" Blossom asked.

"I hate rules!" Buttercup spat before folding her arms.

"Just common sense, really," the big guy said. "They are things you'll do for someone you respect, like your pa, for instance."

"Considerin' that the three of you are kids, I think the rules goes double for you," the thin man said.

"The three of you will speak to them when spoken to, and only when spoken to," the thin one began listing the rules. "Do not turn your back to them unnecessarily. Don't be rude in any way. Do not just call them by their given names. Use their well-earned titles. That is all. For now, anyway. I haven't gotten into the rules of the house yet, but that can wait."

"Seems simple enough..." Blossom said.

"Pfff," Buttercup spat before folding her arms.

"But who are they, anyway?" Blossom asked again.
"You'll find out soon enough, like I said," the big guy said.

They were then led to the porch. The courtyard was huge. Just the courtyard alone had ten similarly well-dressed men and women guarding it. The porch had a similar number, well taken cared of with seats and glass jars and cups filled with water, and sandwiches. Everyone turned to stare at them as they walked past them. Past the porch, they went into the grand hall, then up the grand stairs. There were always eyes scrutinizing them, and there was never a moment when there weren't multiple pairs of eyes glaring down on them.

Crossing into a junction corridor beyond the grand stairs, they were led up an ornately-decorated spiral staircase, passing a floor entirely and into the fourth floor. The house had thus far been… voluptuous. Expensive. Richly furnished and designed and way ancient beyond their comprehension. Blossom concluded that who they were meeting must be very important, considering the place and the higher floor they were headed. For some reason, important men loved the upper floors. She had learned that from meeting the mayor, as well as Mister Morbucks back in January when they met over tea in his office at his tower.

Finally, on the fourth floor, they went down a corridor full of finely-carved doors, to one at the end of it, which was oddly similar, blending into the rest of the mansion. The big guy in his dark blue suit knocked on the door and poked his head in. He muttered something in a low tone, to which someone answered back in muffled words. Blossom turned to look at her sisters. Bubbles seemed afraid as usual, but she had changed, and she now felt that she could count on her meek sister to fight. Buttercup looked like she had been put on edge. Blossom remembered that she seemed to be able to hear things she couldn't - perhaps there was something she heard?

The big guy slipped his head out the door before closing it again.

"They want the three of you disarmed and stripped down," the big guy said. Blossom and Buttercup made confused expressions in the last part of the man's request. Bubbles, however, was especially horrified, considering what happened at The Strip. The man appeared confused himself with the look on their faces.

"Stripped down to your uniform, I meant. They want your armor and gear removed," the big guy clarified his request. "I know what we are, girls. You won't find a single pedophile in this building or in our entire organization. That kind of unnatural inclination isn't condoned around here."

"Taking our stuff away isn't going to make it any easier to beat us!" Buttercup exclaimed impulsively as she stepped forward aggressively.

"If we want to ambush you, we would have done it already," the thin guy said. "The three of you are not here to be killed."

"It's in your best interest to cooperate," the big guy boomed. "The men we work for can be generous if opportunity allows it. I suggest you take this chance. Besides, if you act out now, you'll never find out what they have to offer."

"How about if I put my fist in your-" Buttercup was about to curse at him as she stomped towards him when Blossom put her arm out to stop her.

"We should listen to them," Blossom decided. "If there's a way to avoid hurting people, we should do it."

"But this feels… wrong…” Bubbles said, still shaken by the earlier misunderstanding and the strangeness of everything. Blossom turned around to face her, taking her by the shoulders.
"This could be the reason why we're here," Blossom countered. Bubbles couldn't think of anything. "The police chief on the phone told us to get into the car. We have to do this - to help the people of Townsville!"

In the end, The Powerpuff Girls submitted to the big guy's relayed demands. Blossom, in pursuing her mission, Bubbles fearfully, while Buttercup, reluctantly. They laid out their weapons in a cabinet outside. Their two escorts had to pat them down for weapons. Buttercup was the worst offender when it came to hidden pieces of armament. Ever since losing her powers for a couple of days, she had become paranoid about losing them again, and as such had hidden weapons all over her gear to prepare for the day it might happen. The big guy and the thin guy had to pull out backup pistols from her back pouch, out of her belt and even inside her uniform. There was a kitchen knife in her back pouch, too, that she had filched from The House's kitchen. By the end of it, the Girls' weapons had formed one big pile.

After stripping their armor off, the Girls were ushered through the door in their uniforms. If there was anything that could rival the oval office of the White House, it was the room they had just entered, though it was more of a rectangular office, with a rustic, rural-gentlemanly look to it. It had a predominantly brown-colored theme rather than white. Bookshelves, completely filled, lined either side of the room. Couches and tables took the middle. But the first thing the Girls noticed were the people seated behind the triplet desks at the end of the room.

It was the Amoeba Boys. The so-called Bossman, Slim, and Junior.

Bossman, a thickset brawny man with a cigar clenched between his teeth, stood up first. Same as the men who respected him as their boss, he was smartly-dressed, with a gray suit.

"If it isn't the 'Powerpuff Girls'," he said in an Italian accent whilst biting his cigar. "Welcome… to the Lombardi Family Estate."

The Girls had never seen the speaker before, but two of them didn't need long at all to recognize the two other faces on either side of him. Blossom and Buttercup remembered how they met Junior first, how he had beaten them to within an inch of their life. They remembered, too, how Slim had drowned Buttercup and nearly killed her. Bubbles, on the other hand, wasn't present either way, but somehow, just somehow, she knew to fear them - mostly because she feared the fairy godmother.

"It's those two!" Buttercup yelled as she stepped forward in a combat stance.

"Slim! Junior! What are the two of you doing here!?" Blossom questioned the inferior bosses of the Lombardi.

"What did I tell you about the rules, you rude little girls!?" the big guy roared behind them ferociously. When Blossom turned around to look at him - she didn't realize that her escorts had taken positions on either side of the exit - she saw him pulling out the biggest pistol she had ever seen and pulling the slide with the sound of mechanical steel moving making it abundantly clear that she had wronged him severely. He pointed it at him - Blossom saw him squeeze the trigger halfway when-

"Stop," Bossman growled, calmer than any of the Girls would have been, putting up a hand. The big guy blinked at him before hesitantly withdrawing himself. Removing his pistol magazine, he pulled on the slide again and caught an unspent round after it was ejected. After resetting his pistol, he went back to guarding the door. "Shooting her won't do nothing anyway."

"What's going on!?" Bubbles cried in confusion.
"I can see that this ain't gonna be easy," the Bossman growled.

"Hehe, yeah. It's not gonna be easy," Junior repeated in a more high-pitched tone, adding his own twisted meaning to it.

"The two of you may leave," Slim ordered the two escorts, gesturing for them to get out. Without a word, the big guy opened the door and left, followed by the thin guy.

"Bubbles is right - what's going on here?" Blossom asked again, this time lowering her voice to avoid risking a violent confrontation.

"Yeah! We're supposed to be fighting!" Buttercup said, perhaps not unwisely so - the Amoeba Boys and Powerpuff Girls were enemies right from the start.

"You try that!" Slim exploded at Blossom. He remembered how Blossom had burned his face with her infrared beam when she first discovered it. While the Amoeba Boys were largely immune to physical strikes, heat was one of those things that could hurt them. Slim hated Blossom for reminding him of one of his Achilles' Heels. He would prefer to think that he was invincible. "I'll make sure you drown like your tomboy girlfriend over there!"

"We're sisters!" Blossom corrected him, not that she knew what 'girlfriend' meant. She just thought he meant a friend who was a girl.

"I'm going to kill you!" Buttercup took another step towards Slim, then turned around. "Can I kill them, Blossom?"

"Everyone, cool your jets!" Bossman yelled at the room, and when silence was achieved, he stubbed his cigar in his ashtray and returned to his growl. "Shooting off your guns won't do anything. Powerpuff Girls, we're here to talk business."

"Talk? You're criminals! My sister is right. Why should we talk when your friends have been hurting us? And the people in Townsville?" Blossom challenged the Amoeba Boys, pointing fingers at Slim and Junior. "Our policemen friends brought us here to fight you. I think."

Bossman seemed to smile at this. Blossom didn't think he could do that, considering that his peers on either side seemed on edge, which told her that they were probably afraid of them.

"You think? But you know nothing about that, do you?" Bossman said triumphantly. "You see, kids, your 'policemen friends' brought you here to speak to me."

"You're lying," Blossom said. "Why would they?"

"Because they know that I'm a changed man, as you'll soon find out," Bossman said with a smile. "Slim and Junior here are not my friends. They're my brothers. You and me, we ain't so different."

"Your brothers have been hurting Buttercup and me. We're not the same," Blossom denied Bossman's charge.

"They were only looking out for our… friends. You attacked them," Bossman claimed. "You would have done the same thing. I've seen you out there, through the TV. I've heard about you three through my boys' lips. Would've heard more about you if some of them don't end up dead. I've been visiting lotsa graves lately. Never had so many widows and widowers cry on my shoulders before in such a short time."

Blossom was lost for words at the loss of lives. She hated it if anyone had to die, even the
criminals. Some of them weren't just criminals, she knew. It seemed that way with the Amoeba Boys' friends.

"But your friends have been doing bad things!" Blossom argued.

"Only because they were desperate," Bossman said. "They needed food on the table, and they'll get it the only way they know how. Some of them have mouths to feed, and I know how they feel. Do you? I was once there - us three brothers."

"I'm not hearing another word-" Buttercup shouted impatiently, but was cut off.

"Shh! I want to hear their story," Blossom hushed her up, then turned back to the head of the Lombardi.

"We weren't always livin' it large, so to speak. We weren't even from Townsville. We were from Italy - it's a beautiful country, rich with history, but so much of what was good became history, too, capeesh? My mother died in the troubles back then, shot by a terrorist while buying fruits in a market, back in Milan. My father brought us to Townsville, but he died of Pneumonia on the way here," Bossman recalled, his eyes a little distant, as he slumped back into his chair. Blossom couldn't help but empathize with him. She had to fight back tears while she listened, and remind herself every second that she was listening to the words of the biggest criminal in Townsville. Yet, how could she ignore this story? Which person would not want to be with his parents? "We were put in orphanages at first, but the people there… weren't exactly kind and neither were they running the show out of the kindness of their hearts. We ran away, lived on the streets, suffered starvation and sickness every other day and became one of them - those criminals you've been killing out in the streets like dogs. We had to survive somehow, and no one would take us in. But then someone… saw something in us and made us who we are. We became the Amoeba Boys, and took over the Lombardi with our gifts."

"You were forced to do bad things?" Bubbles said, her voice trembling with emotions, her eyes teary.

"We were, and it became the only thing we know after that. Come to think of it, violence and crime was something I've always witnessed ever since I was just a little boy in Italy," Bossman replied, still sounding a little sad despite the permanent growl in his voice. "It's a habit I'd like to break. Perhaps, with your help…” He directed this specifically to Blossom, whom he knew was the leader of The Powerpuff Girls, not just from the TV and various media articles, but from the presence she exuded.

"How do I know you're telling the truth?" Blossom questioned the man.

"You're smart, kid. I'll give you that," Bossman praised the enhanced little girl. "How about if I help you clean up Townsville? There's a small gang on the eastern side of Townsville, in and out of the slums. If you think we're mean, you should take a look at those bozos. They're like us - Italians - but they've abandoned the way. They've forgotten honor and thrown away their code. They will rape, torture and murder and do all sorts of other terrible things at the drop of a hat."

"What's rape?" Bubbles asked, but she was swiftly overshadowed by Buttercup's straightforward question.

"You want us to kill them?" Buttercup guessed with anticipation.

"Not really. Like I said, we're more alike than you think, Buttercup, Blossom, and Bubbles. We're like distant cousins caught on opposite sides of a civil war, see, because of our gifts. And like you,
we don't kill unless we have to," Bossman said. Buttercup scoffed at what he said, as she didn't believe in sparing enemies. Especially when they were so much fun to mangle. Not that she could do any of that nowadays. "I can tell you where their headquarter is and when they will hold their next meeting. All I want the three of you to do is kill their leaders - help me help you."

"You said you didn't want us to kill them," Blossom said, narrowing her eyes as she studied Bossman's face instinctively, though she wasn't quite sure what she was looking for.

"I don't want you to kill off the entire gang - just the heads," Bossman corrected Blossom as he watched her every move in turn. It made Blossom nervous, being stared at that way, that she couldn't help but be a little self-conscious. All of a sudden, she didn't know what to do with her hands, and her entire body, for that matter. "If there's anyone who's to blame, it's their devil don and his evil inner circle. Don Exposito - that's his name. And wouldn't you know it, he runs the Exposito family. Kill him and his evil circle, and the rest of his men will scatter, even take up honest living, you know, and stop... er, terrorizing the common folks, as you'd say. Do we have a deal?"

Blossom could tell that Bossman seemed sincere, from how he told his story, which would have been a hard story to tell, to how he wasn't mincing words like criminals tended to. It was something she noticed about them as if criminals had everything to hide. But Bossman was different. He was laying out his cards in broad daylight, something the usual criminal wouldn't do. It'd led her to the conclusion that he wasn't a usual criminal, enhanced abilities aside. Like what the Lombardi don said, he was forced into becoming a criminal.

And Blossom decided that she would believe him.

"The clock is ticking, Blossom Utonium," Bossman said. Blossom found it odd that he knew her full name, but then again, he was an important person, and important people like Dad and General Blackwater seemed to know about everything. "Their next meeting happens to be today."

Despite her gut feeling, it would be irregular for her to help what her friends considered a criminal. Unnatural even. Yet, Dad had said that the right thing to do was often the hard thing to do. This felt like one of those times.

"The police..." Blossom muttered, unsure of what to say.

"They know about this - at least the ones who really know me as you do now. Think about it - if the police are in on this, then why should you not be?" Bossman said. How he knew what she was thinking, she wasn't sure. "I'll give you the time and address, even photos if you want. How 'bout it?" He circumvented his desk and extended his hand out - they were massive compared to hers, like a gorilla's.

Blossom walked up to him, eyes stuck to his as if with superglue. What had just happened was profound. It felt like a breakthrough, something that would define the future, even change it as she always wanted to do. She had been wishing for this very moment right from the start, when she would be given the opportunity to change things for the better, for good. She came up right next to him - something she never thought she would have done just minutes ago... and smiled.

"What are you doing?" Bossman said, confused.

"Aren't you going to pat me on the head?" Blossom said, and the three dons laughed heartily. Even Buttercup couldn't stifle a giggle, even though she didn't know what was so funny.

Bossman knelt down instead, getting down to her level - even then, he had to hunch his back to do
so. He smiled at her, and he was surprisingly warm for a crime family boss. His eyes had stopped being so glaringly scrutinizing and had instead attained a friendly, 'come-on-and-let's-play' kind of look.

"No. I don't know what your 'friends' been putting in your head, but we're doing this as equals," Bossman said, before extending his hand towards her once again. Blossom finally understood then and took his hand. They shook hands after that. "You may be a kid, kiddo, but you've got what it takes to make some permanent changes around here in this town, more so than most of the adults have. No, you're going to outshine them all, kid - even this self-proclaimed 'general' Blackwater."

He'd said this with a smile.

And Blossom smiled back.
Chapter 57: Past Mistakes

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup raids a crime family on their own.

Chapter 57: Past Mistakes

The City of Townsville. Over Downtown. En Route to the Slums.

24 FEB (Friday) 1989. 0857.

"Blossom, stop," Bubbles said to her leader sister, Blossom. They were flying over the city, towards where Bossman had said the don of the Exposito crime family was located. "Blossom, stop!"

The three of them halted in mid-air, in unison, hovering close to the clouds above.

"What?" Blossom asked. The smile on her face hadn't faded yet. Buttercup's position on this was similar. If there were any mangling and killing to be done, she was definitely in.

"I don't know about this…” Bubbles said meekly as she played with her fingers. Memories of an angry Blossom were still clear on her mind. Despite lacking the genius-level intelligence of her sisters, Bubbles had photographic memory too, even if it was flawed compared to her sisters'. 
"We're not supposed to kill and… I don't know about listening to the Amoeba Boys."

"He sounded like he was telling the truth," Blossom explained. "I believe him, Bubbles. Besides, haven't we all done some bad things?"

"But-" Bubbles wanted to explain herself, only to be overridden by Blossom.

"Buttercup's been killing people, and yet Dad gave her another chance to fight crime with us," Blossom said. Buttercup folded her arms and pouted at the mention of her past 'misdeeds'. She still didn't think she had done anything wrong. In fact, she thought her sisters were stupid for not seeing the simple truth – criminals should be killed, plain and simple. It didn't matter if they died slowly since they were going to die anyway – why not try to have fun with them along the way? "It's how we learn. We make mistakes - that's what Dad's been telling us. Dad gave Buttercup a chance and-"

"But that's different!" Bubbles argued, accidentally interrupting Blossom in her haste, which annoyed her.

"But nothing, Bubbles! We don't have time to argue!" Blossom dismissed her reasoning before continuing to fly. It didn't take long for Bubbles to pull her to a stop once again, and the team stopped as a whole. "What now?"

"Are we really going to kill Mister Exposito? And his friends?" Bubbles asked. Still horrified by her own actions under the influence of His Secret 2.0, Bubbles wanted to avoid doing the same dark, evil deeds all over again, even if it seemed justified now. "We really shouldn't…"

"Didn't you hear what Mister Bossman said? They're the meanest criminals in Townsville,"
Blossom said, though what Bubbles had been pointing to all this while had reminded her of her own rules. It'd made her think second thoughts about killing. Killing would mean going against Dad - but what if they were killing killers? "We'll visit them and see for ourselves what kind of people they are. Maybe we could talk to them. But if they really are what Mister Bossman said they are, we have to kill them."

"But something's wrong - we shouldn't listen to the Amoeba Boys! You're wrong about this!"
Bubbles insisted though she wasn't able to describe what she meant. She herself couldn't understand it. It was a feeling, albeit a strong one at that. Bubbles had, again, ticked Blossom off. She didn't like being told that she was wrong, especially with something she felt strongly about, and deep down, it was worse when it was coming from Bubbles.

"If what you said is right, then why should I listen to you!?" Blossom retorted back at Bubbles, burying her finger in her shoulder. "You were a criminal just a few days ago! Remember how you attacked all of us, just for some injections!?"

Bubbles was shocked. Blossom hadn't blown up on her for a while now, and the things she said had cut her to the core. Something stirred inside Bubbles, a kind of rage not exclusive to His Secret 2.0, but something that it set loose from within her. But she held it back, afraid of what it might do.

"Are you going BerXerk on us again?" Buttercup asked, more out of spite than concern.

Bubbles knew not to blow up – she had seen the extreme result of it. The rage in her blew over, giving way to something else – something more familiar. Bursting into tears, Bubbles flew away. In a blink of an eye, she had disappeared into an apartment building, but Blossom was quick enough to see where she was going.

"Oh come on!" Buttercup exclaimed in frustration. "Not again! We have bad guys to beat up!"

Blossom stared after Bubbles' baby blue X-contrail. As her own anger simmered off, she began to realize, with creeping horror, that what she said might not be the widest words.

"Should we just leave her behind?" Buttercup suggested.

"No!" Blossom balked at such a suggestion. Hadn't Buttercup learned anything yet? "We can't leave each other behind! Let's go."

With that, she sped after Bubbles. After sighing and muttering to herself (something about Blossom and Bubbles being stupid), Buttercup followed.

It wasn't hard to track Bubbles down. The apartment building they had flown into wasn't the cleanest. Boxes and various odds and ends were knocked over in Bubbles' retreat. A door was knocked off its hinges. When Blossom and Buttercup entered the apartment Bubbles had invaded for her hiding spot, they could hear her crying from across the entire living space.

They found her in a closet, squeezed in a corner, crying into the wallpaper for lack of a shoulder.

"Go away!" Bubbles cried when they found her.

"I didn't mean it, Bubbles," Blossom said. "I just want to do good, and I have a good feeling about this and Bossman."

All she got for a reply were snifflies and weeping. Blossom nudged Buttercup for her to say something. They argued silently about what they should do until Buttercup finally relented because she wanted that sweet, sweet release whenever she indulged in violence. But there was something
"Bubbles..." Buttercup started, feeling a strange sensation in her. It wasn't the first time. It was as if unnatural emotions, very strong emotions, were leaking into her from the ether. "We're a team, and we can't do it without you. You're getting good at this, and I want to see you fight crime again."

"I don't want to hurt anyone," Bubbles cried into the wall, still. "I remember last week - I've killed so many, and I don't wanna start again!"

"You don't have to kill them if you don't want to," Blossom negotiated with her. "But we still need you."

Bubbles kept quiet after that, contemplating what they had said. Despite Blossom's promise that she would not need to do any killing, it still felt wrong somehow to aid her sisters in doing the deed.

"Bubbles..." Blossom pleaded with her. "Come on."

"Fine..." Bubbles finally relented. "Just don't make me kill anyone. We should talk to them... Just like how we did it with Mister Lumpkins."

"We're sisters. You can trust me," Blossom said, though she had reservations about using the same tactic as she did with Lumpkins. She was scolded for it, and she didn't want more harsh criticisms again. Before she could say anything further, their radio crackled, and a voice came through.

"This is Flight Control Five to Bravo-Four-Seven, please explain the deviation from the current course," the woman from Flight Control Five questioned them through the radio. Then, as if remembering that the Girls' vocabulary was simple, elaborated further: "Why did you stop? Over."

"Hi Miss Flight Control Five, Bubbles' resting - she's tired from flying," Blossom said, all while exchanging a knowing look with the tearful Bubbles. When she was done, there was radio silence for a time before the woman on the other end resumed their conversation again. Blossom could only wonder what she was thinking - in fact, Blossom had to wonder about everything to do with the Flight Control people. She had never met them in person nor been to their workplace before. She still couldn't understand how they could track them so well.

"Bravo-Four-Seven, please confirm your destination - where you're going, over," the woman in Flight Control Five asked.

"We're going to fight some bad guys in the Slums for the police, Miss Flight Control Five," Blossom said, taking care not to mention the Lombardi as Bossman cautioned her not to. He'd warned her that revealing their meeting would destroy any chance he could help her clean up Townsville, and by extension, make amends for his past. "The Exposito family, miss."

In the midst of it all, Blossom could not understand why the Lombardi and the Exposito refer to themselves as families - it couldn't be that they were all brothers and sisters, were there? Mothers couldn't give birth to dozens of children, could they? She believed that they wouldn't all be able to fit inside the mother, not that she knew exactly how human gestation and giving birth worked exactly.

There was an even longer silence after that. Thirty seconds passed, then a minute. It went over that, and still, nothing but static and the occasional and curt 'please standby' continued to ground them.

"What's taking them!? I want a good fight!" Buttercup exclaimed impatiently. Blossom wasn't as
incredulous about flight control's sluggishness. A nagging feeling in her told her that she was doing something wrong - but it was a feeling common in her, something she felt half the time. Yet, it was stronger now, made worse by the anxiety Flight Control Five was giving her by taking its time.

"Flight Control Five. You are cleared to conduct the raid for the police. Please proceed to your destination without stopping. Over and out," and with that, the invisible lady on the radio waves was gone.

Blossom breathed a sigh a relief. It turned out she wasn't wrong to do this after all. How could she ever be? Especially when she had the backing of the police, and now the USDO?

The following is a document addressed to Director Cliff of USDO administration.

---

Title: The Powerpuff Girls Combat Analysis And The Place of B-50

Created by: General Blackwater

Date Created: 24 FEB (Friday) 1989.

Desc: In order to understand what kind of demands we can and should place on B-50, we must learn from our past experiences with B-47, B-48, and B-49, now known as The Powerpuff Girls. This is so that we may train B-50 appropriately for what lies ahead. To this end, I have gone through all related data sets, including video and audio recordings, documents both physical and electronic and conducted quick phone interviews with personnel involved with B-47, B-48, B-49, and B-50.

Despite B-47, B-48 and B-49 being a mixed success at best and a total failure at worst, the circumstances and their performance leading to this conclusion ought to be explored for the sake of B-50, being that B-47 to B-49 are predecessors to B-50.

From the day of their creation, B-47, 48 and 49 have been tended to by Professor Utonium. Based on USDO common knowledge and data surrounding him, it can safely be said that he had given them a civilian upbringing, and continues to do so, and it is not until the insertion of Sergeant Selicia Goodwin in the 'Utonium family' 17 days after their creation that any meaningful progress has been made towards preparing B-47, B-48, and B-49 for their main purpose.

While Sergeant Selicia's efforts in training B-47, B-48 and B-49 and the tolerance she displays towards them are admirable, especially considering her history with enhanced individuals, her efforts continue to yield limited results. The Powerpuff Girls continue to blunder in every mission. The most telling of their flaws lie in their lack of tactics and cunning. Based on Professor Utonium's notes, this could be due to the 'neurological structure' of their brains, which is the equivalent of five-year-olds, worsened by their inexperience. What is worse is that there is no solution to this as yet.

Furthermore, their inclinations in combat have left them unable to fulfill the USDO's expectations. Project Powerpuff's main objective is to create super-soldiers, and in the USDO, part of that definition includes a mastery of tactics, stealth, subterfuge, and infiltration. None of The Powerpuff Girls are capable of any of that, nor do they display any potential for the more shadowy arts. The best analogy I can come up with is that they seem to act more like common foot soldiers than the special force we need. Below is a rough breakdown of their role, such as it is-

B-47 (Blossom)
Roles: Commander, Multi-Role (Combat)

Description: B-47, or Blossom, appears to be well-suited for command - at least more so than her 'sisters'. She appears to display more initiative and presence than B-48 and B-49. However, her tactical inability, simplicity, and inflexibility leaves her performance as the Powerpuff Girls' ad-hoc commanding officer wanting. Otherwise, she appears to be the most versatile of the three in combat, capable in any field, but thankfully, B-48 and B-49 are not entirely eclipsed. She is reportedly more skilled in unarmed combat than her sister products (though not as strong as B-48), learns faster, and has enhanced abilities that even I wish I have (enhanced eyesight, up to 40x zoom).

B-48 (Buttercup)

Roles: Heavy Support, Conventional Firearms

Description: B-48, or Buttercup, is brutal in nature and reported to be clinically psychopathic, which appears to augment her function as the heavy-hitter of the trio. She is the best of the three in handling firearms and favors heavy weapons such as machine guns, and would rather just charge in and dole out as much damage as she can. It is simple but effective. Unfortunately, her simple-minded bloodlust tends to blind her as well. Her ability to fire deadly laser from her eyes that could cut through even steel further adds to her 'heavy support role'.

B-49 (Bubbles)

Roles: Light Support, Combat Medic

Description: B-49, or Bubbles, remains the least useful of the three. It is only in recent days (read: this week) that she has shown any potential in combat, not counting the previous week in which she injured half the PTF stationed outside The House, as well as caused needless collateral damage. Her niche - however small it is - is in performing functions B-47 and B-48 neither could nor want to. Her more useful skill is in first-aid, though that is not saying much. Her niche in a full support role is further enhanced by her 'ion beam', recently learned, that Professor Utonium has just discovered to be capable of disrupting electronics - teaching them to utilize this feature consistently is another challenge in and of itself. Her sonic scream is useful for its suppression effect. Recent footages of her battles on site seem to suggest that she is faster than her sisters - this can be useful whenever she acts as a distraction, vanguard or scout - not that B-47, B-48, and B-49 knows of such terms.

It is my recommendation that we avoid the obvious pitfalls that might have resulted in B-47, B-48 and B-49's failure to deliver results and secure even basic objectives reliably.

Assuming control of B-40 mere days into her creation is just the first step. But it should not end there. If Professor Utonium's data is to be trusted, we have a bioweapon which is capable of even more and it wouldn't be an efficient use of USDO resources to let it go to waste or be tampered with by a delusional mind who cares only to replace his personal losses years ago.

Where the Powerpuff Girls serve as foot soldiers (poorly, may I reiterate), B-50, which the good professor (or worse, B-49) has so improperly named 'Bunny', will serve as the black ops agent we sorely need.

To this end, we will need to undo whatever damage Professor Utonium has done and will do in the initial 3 days of her existence what he's failed to do in 3 months. We will need to train her intensely. We will need to hold a special conference to decide on the contents of her black ops crash course and how to execute it. However, for now, I believe we will need to dedicate a substantial amount of
time to educate her about her enemies as well as 'correct' her perspective to improve her willingness to kill and carry out her missions. We will also need to teach her about the art of war as much as we can. These are just as important as firearms training – the results of a lack in these areas are evident in The Powerpuff Girls' ineptitude.

The City of Townsville. The Slums. Exposito Family Headquarters

24 FEB (Friday) 1989. 0911.

It was obvious to the Powerpuff Girls when they flew into the Slums. There was a huge gap of no man's land between the Slums and the cleaner side of Townsville. Police officers could be found guarding roads leading into the Slums, though how effective they were in restricting the movement of criminals was another matter entirely.

The buildings in the Slums were run-down, dark and dirty little things, crumbling, blackened and filled with trash. Even whatever apartments that were still standing there were short, with some of them shorter than they used to be. Blossom could spot an apartment with its top floor blasted apart with some explosives. How it happened was a fact lost to time. There were holes everywhere, like a Trypophobe's nightmare.

It wasn't hard to imagine that a criminal gang would operate in such an area.

The Girls flew low to avoid detection, but there were already eyes on them - people on the streets, or in buildings, had already seen them. Whether any of them had any loyalties to the Exposito Family remained to be seen. Heading towards the building - a dilapidated apartment building completely co-opted by the criminals, they flew vertically upwards before touching down on the rooftop.

Important men loved to be on the top floor. It was the same with Don Exposito. Shrugging off her flight pack and putting it down on the floor, Blossom pulled out the photos Don Bossman had given to her from a magazine pouch. There were several of them. The don himself and his lieutenants. He had just a few. The crime family wasn't the biggest one, though they had carved out a sizable turf in the Slums and certain areas near it for themselves. Bossman had gone on to talk at length about them after Blossom had agreed to act on his information.

The Exposito crime family was headquartered in the Slums because the police wouldn't go there, fearing for their lives. While the inhabitants of the Slums were fiercely protective of themselves and tended to lash out at any interlopers, the Expositos had struck fear in them by routinely abducting a few of them at a time for their own purposes. The border police guards between the Slums and the rest of Townsville were paid off by them so that they could export drugs, illegal weapons and prostitutes and bring in whatever necessities they needed, and the cash proceeds from their sales.

Looking at the photos of the criminal masterminds, Blossom crumbled them up before tearing them to pieces and letting the wind take the shreds. Bossman had talked at length, too, about what they would do to their prisoners, especially when they were women and children. Getting sold as slaves was a blessing compared to their fate with the Expositos.

"Let's do this," Blossom said curtly to her sisters before marching towards the stairs leading down.

"Finally." Buttercup said; she could taste it now - the rush of combat and even a chance to start messing some criminals up!
"We're really going to talk to them first, right?" Bubbles asked, even though she knew the answer to that question. Neither of her sisters had answered her. The Girls drew their weapons. Blossom had brought her MP5, while Buttercup had borrowed Bubbles' stockless XM4 carbine. Bubbles was using the Serbu Super Shorty that Blossom had given her.

The stairs led down to a corridor door. The wooden floor was slick in places with mold. They had to kick aside discarded cans, cigarette packets and junk one too many times. It was a wonder that the bare bulbs above could still shine yellow light down on them. They could hear murmuring coming from one of the apartment units on the top floor. There were double doors. Bossman's description was accurate. Don Exposito and his lieutenants were holed up in the penthouse suite. A natural choice. Obvious. And it would be their undoing.

Blossom crossed over to the left side of the doors while Bubbles and Buttercup remained on the right. She raised a hand, putting up three fingers before curling them up one after the other, following the seconds of a clock. Buttercup knew what it meant and braced herself. Bubbles, however, knew it only vaguely.

At zero, Blossom barged through the door, followed by Buttercup and finally Bubbles. They had taken out two guards on either side of the doors this way. Flying to the center of the penthouse living room, they hovered close to Don Exposito and about eight other men. There were a few women, even a couple of children sitting in corner seats. They barely had time to react, with some of them jumping in their seats while others to their feet, though when they realized who they were up against, they didn't draw their weapons immediately.

Blossom stared at one face after another, until she found the one she was looking for. Graying hair combed to near perfection, dark-colored eyes with huge, swollen purple bags underneath, wrinkles way before their time. Blossom thought his appearance fit the profile of a crazed, morally-bankrupt criminal very well.

"Mister Exposito?" Blossom said.

"Who the f-fuck are you?" the man answered. His nerves seemed broken from the way he was staring wildly at them. He should have known who they were by now. "And what gave you the God-damn right to come in here like you own the place!?"

"Language, Mister Expy," Buttercup warned the man, raising her carbine at him. It got him to behave pretty well.

"We would like to talk to you," Bubbles mumbled to her. If it wasn't for the tense silence, no one would have heard her. The crime family don looked around him; sweat pouring down his forehead. Blossom thought he didn't look like much of a leader. Behind him, two women were hugging their children closely, one a boy and one a girl. The rest of them were horrified. The leader of the three couldn't decide if they were prisoners or part of the family. They were dressed well, but what Bossman had said was still on the surface of Blossom's mind.

"What're you waiting for!? Shoot the bitches!" Don Exposito ordered quite suddenly, breaking the tension only for the room to explode as men raised their guns - shotguns, revolvers, and pistols - and peppered the Powerpuff Girls with bullets. Bubbles brought up her baby-blue bubble shield. Blossom and Buttercup returned fire, the former girl shooting one of them in the leg while the latter was less merciful.

"Don't kill them yet!" Blossom ordered before swooping in at the gangsters, punching one across the cheek before swiping at another with the plastic forestock of her MP5, knocking both of them off their feet and unconscious. Buttercup charged into one, who fell on top of the conference table
Bubbles and slide across the length of it, before speeding up to another behind him and giving him a jaw-breaking snap of her fist. Women and children were screaming in the background. It'd upset Bubbles, and in seeking a quick end to this, pounced on top of Don Exposito even while he was shooting off his revolver at her and knocked him down. Tearing his revolver away from him, she threw it aside and held him down by his upper arms.

"Don't, or they'll hurt you!" Bubbles warned the don sincerely. All around her, his men were being taken down one after another. They couldn't even last a minute, and soon enough, silence returned to the room.

When the fight was over, anticlimactic as it was, Blossom and Buttercup stood side-by-side on the Exposito conference table and surveyed their work. Every gangster in the room was on the floor, either knocked out or in too much pain to get up. Only one of them was killed - thanks to Buttercup. Blossom glared at her from a corner of her eyes because of it but decided to let it go since they came here knowing that there was a strong possibility of someone dying.

The women and children were huddled in various corners of the room. Bubbles was helping Don Exposito up just as Blossom turned to look at her.

"Good work, Bubbles," Blossom said to her meekest sister. She thought she needed encouragement. She then turned to her other sister: "Buttercup, put all the bad guys in that corner-" she pointed at the furthest end of the room, where there were no doors and windows for the Exposito men to escape through. Bubbles, put Mister Exposito with them, and move the women and kids out of the way."

The Girls got to work, lining up the gangsters along the breadth of the penthouse living room. One of them tried to escape, so Blossom had to dissuade him with her heat beam, burning up the carpet at his feet before having to put the fire out. Blossom was gentle with Don Exposito - neither of her sisters understood why, as they thought the criminal mastermind did not deserve the treatment. After that, Bubbles would lead the few ladies in attendance by hand away from the men, some of whom declined to be touched by a 'monster', as the bravest of the ladies called her.

"Now… Bubbles is right. I want to talk to you first," Blossom said to Don Exposito as he was kneeling on the ground, before jumping off the conference table. It was strange. She didn't order the criminals to kneel or sit, but as they were coming to, they would do so. Buttercup was still flanking Blossom, XM4 Carbine still in her tiny hands, looking like a heavy machinegun in proportion to her. Some of the men were looking at her as if she was multiple times larger.

"What is there to talk about? We are criminals, and you are here to arrest us. I recognize your gear, even if they're small, and I remember who you are now. You're USDO," the don said.

"Oh no, I'm Blossom," the leader of the Powerpuff Girls said. She then waved a hand at Buttercup. "And this is Buttercup." She then pointed to Bubbles, who came up to her left after ushering the women and children to the other end of the penthouse living room. "And this is Bubbles."

"Well, 'Blossom', nothin's changed. There's nothing to talk about. Just get it over with and throw us into the slammer," Don Exposito said. Jail was the best he could hope for. He'd heard things about The Powerpuff Girls. How ruthless they could be. He heard that they had already killed dozens of cultists and many of his sort. It was ironic that they appeared like perfect little girls.

"Is it true that you're the meanest bad guy of Townsville?" Blossom questioned the man regardless of his willingness.

"That depends on who's asking," the don said. "Is it really just you? Or someone else? I am a
Blossom tilted her head, deep in thought, having difficulty understanding Exposito's poetic reply. Her sisters weren't even trying. To Buttercup, Blossom was talking to a dead man. To Bubbles, this was all a misunderstanding and a mistake right from the start - and she didn't even trust Bossman to begin with.

"Is it true that you'll 'rape, torture and murder and do all sorts of other terrible things at the drop of a hat'?” Blossom quoted Bossman, tightening her grip on her MP5. Don Exposito's eyes seemed to widen at the accusation, as though offended.

"Who said that!?” Don Exposito exploded upon hearing it. "Little girl, who the fuck told you that!?”

"If they're even little girls…” one of his men muttered. Three pairs of glowing eyes stared him down into silence. Blossom considered the don's aggressive questions. She didn't like how he just yelled at her. It was rude. Not to mention his profuse swearing was getting on her nerves. Overall, she thought Bossman was right in every way about Don Exposito.

"The Amoeba Boys told me that," Blossom revealed. The don's eyes grew even wider, his face red with rage.

"Traitors!” the don yelled, though what he meant was lost on the Girls. "It's a fuckin' lie! I don't rape and neither does the rest of my family!”

"I said, LANGUAGE!” Buttercup bellowed at the head of the crime family, pointing her gun at him again. Blossom crossed her arms, huddling her MP5 closely. She really didn't like the man and thought that he was a big, fat liar. The way he spoke just gave it away. It had to. Who would talk like that? Curse that way? Unless he's guilty of something?

"You don't torture or murder, do you? Mister Expy?” Bubbles asked her own questions, feeling a little sorry for the man. Looking at how things had happened, she couldn't help but feel that this time around, she and her sisters were the villains here. It was entirely possible - she had made mistakes in the past too. They had barged into their home, killed a man and injured the rest, all in front of two children and possibly their wives or women who were related to them in other ways. "Please, tell Blossom you don't!”

Don Exposito regarded Bubbles for a moment as he weighed her words, his eyelids drooping a little, as though sensing that all hope was lost.

"Since the three of you are already here, it means I'm marked anyway. Doesn't matter if it's the USDO or Lombardi,” the don said, his voice lowered in volume to a sigh. His change in attitude was stark. "Might as well spill the beans. Murder and torture are part of the business. But we don't do it unless we had to - and we absolutely do not rape. Don Ricci is a fucking liar!”

"I still don't understand what rape is,” Bubbles said, eyes wandering to her sisters.

"Don't look at me,” Buttercup said while shrugging her shoulders. But their attention soon returned to their leader sister, who was glaring intently at Don Exposito.

"How many people did you kill? How many people have you hurt?” Blossom asked. Her hands were tightening around the handle and fore-end of her MP5 that the plastic was creaking.

"I… lost count. I've spilled blood dozens of times. Over a hundred, even,” the don said while straightening his back defiantly, such that he became taller than Blossom even while he was on his
knees. He glared back at Blossom. "Who the fuck are you to judge, little girl!? Look at where we're living in! It's kill or be killed! I kill to defend my turf! My family! My fortune - what tiny bit we eked out! Fuck do you know!?" He spat a glob of saliva at Blossom's feet. She stepped back, but some of it had still gotten onto her boots. She was starting to really hate the man. He was uncouth, and now he had confessed to killing over a hundred. OVER A HUNDRED. She'd decided then, that he was likely lying about the rape part too - while she didn't understand what rape meant, she knew it was something bad, and it was the lying and bad attitude that offended her.

Blossom could feel her heart beating hard. The blood rushing through her veins. All sorts of violent scenes replayed in her head from the past. Her rage returned with a vengeance, and she felt like destroying everyone and anyone on the spot then. She tried her best to control it, letting go of her MP5 and letting it hang on her neck. She tried her best…

And then she drew her pistol and shot Don Exposito cleanly through the forehead, splattering blood and gray matter behind him and onto the wall.
Chapter 58: Lies

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup return home to another challenge.

Chapter 58: Lies

The City of Townsville. The Slums. Exposito Family Headquarters

24 FEB (Friday) 1989. 0923.

Blossom did not stop when Don Exposito had fallen over, dead at an instant from a gunshot to the head. Blossom turned her gun on his lieutenants, falling them the same way she did with their leader. When a few more bodies hit the floor, the others tried to flee, but Buttercup blocked the exit and mowed them down with a combination of her XM4 Carbine and laser eye beams. Some of the men were either beheaded or bisected haphazardly. The wooden floor was awash with blood. The women and children screamed in shock and horror as she did, and didn't stop after all the men were killed. Bubbles, however, did nothing. Taken by surprise, she couldn't stop her sisters.

When it was all over, Blossom holstered her pistol and turned around to look at the women in the room. She had decided that they were part of the crime family. Flying closer to them, she thought about killing them too. But the way they look – with their dresses and faces, pale from shock, suggested that they had little to do with the Exposito atrocities. Still, Blossom contemplated killing them just to be safe, her fingers caressing her pistol as she did.

"Blossom, no!" Bubbles flew between her and the women, putting her arms out while she shielded them. The wives of the Expositos cowered in their corner, the ones with children were still covering their eyes. "You can't kill them too!"

Blossom turned her gaze on Bubbles. There was murder in her eyes. Bubbles had never seen her that way before - she was likely roused from Don Exposito's admission of guilt. But as Blossom processed what she said, and saw who was left to kill, the rage in her face dissipated. Her hand had gone up to the handle of her SMG, but she let go of it.

"I… wasn't going to," Blossom said, even though she knew that she had considered killing the women too.

"Aw, man," Buttercup exclaimed, disappointed. She thought she'd get to kill a few more people. "Then what do we do now?"

"Let's go," Blossom said coldly as she regarded the survivors in the room. "We've killed the meanest bad guys in Townsville and saved the day. There's nothing left to do."

With that, Blossom flew out the doors they barged through. Buttercup sighed before following. Bubbles looked at the remaining population in the penthouse before doing so; the women and children still looked shocked and wretched. Almost all of them were weeping or crying, and she empathized with them.
"I'm sorry about your friends," Bubbles said to them before taking steps forward to give herself a running start in flight.

"They weren't friends! They were family! FAMILY!" one of the women wailed as she was crying. Knowing that there was nothing she could say to comfort the mafia wives and relatives, Bubbles flew off, disturbed severely by what had just transpired. She still found herself wondering who was telling the truth - Bossman or Don Exposito, and which part was the truth. Stuff like that always made her head hurt. Why couldn't people just be honest?

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

24 FEB (Friday) 1989. 1838.

"Bunny on bike!" Bunny squealed excitedly as Professor Utonium was leading her along the pavement outside their home while she was seated on a young girl's bicycle. With the snow thin enough on the sidewalk, the professor thought that it was the perfect time to teach Bunny how to ride a bicycle. Seeing the bicycle in the mall while they were shopping had given him the idea. Considering that Bunny had mastered walking really quickly, and running not too far behind, he believed it time that he introduced her to biking - besides, it might teach her a better sense of balance sooner. She would need it, considering how General Blackwater was very hasty in appropriating her for his own uses… "Bunny loves bike!"

"You're doing great, Bunny!" the professor encouraged his fourth daughter.

"Woo-hoo! You're absolutely flying, Bunny!" Selicia shouted from the lawn. She had been watching Dad and daughter having their moment.

Bunny was a natural. The moment she was introduced to her bicycle and shown how it worked, she knew exactly how to work it. The professor understood why. With normal children, remembering things was a feat on its own, a skill to be mastered. It was not so with Bunny. Furthermore, physical fitness was never a concern, and so all that remained to be trained was muscle coordination.

The bicycle Bunny was pedaling fitted the Girl pretty well. It was purple, with similarly-colored tassels on the ends of the handles. 'Power' was written on the bar just below the seat, in pink. Bunny herself was wearing a purple dress, which was of the same design as her elder siblings', with a black sash at the waist, and like them, she was wearing a matching jacket over it, and winter boots over white pantyhose and black Mary-Janes. She would have blended in very well as a normal 8-year-old, had it not been for her glowing purple eyes and prodigious size and pretty well-toned muscles. She looked like she had been going to the gym twice a day, every day, way before the age a girl should, and she was just two days old.

It was at this time that three lines of pink, baby blue, and lime green streaked across the sky and towards them. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup was finally done with fighting crime for the day. They descended down next to Professor Utonium and their younger sister, hovering in place as they watched the new development with the newest addition to the family.

They couldn't believe their eyes. They simply couldn't, and not in a good way either. They had seen parents teaching their kids how to ride bicycles in the park and were hoping one day for their own Dad to do the same with them. None of them had asked for it, being too busy with everything that had happened ever since jumping down the rabbit hole with fighting crime for Townsville.

And Bunny got to do just that with Dad on her second day with him.
"Hey Dad," Blossom greeted her father as she flew up next to him. Bubbles and Buttercup were speechless on either side of her, their mouth agape at the luxury Bunny was given. Professor Utonium didn't acknowledge her immediately.

"Yeah that's it, keep it in the center," he said to Bunny, still pulling her up behind him by the bicycle handle. The elder Powerpuff Girls had to trail behind them all the while. "My, using your X-thrust already?" By this, he meant the faint purple light emanation, barely visible, coming out of either flank of Bunny whenever she needed to balance herself. She was able to keep herself upright just by doing this, despite the slow speed.

"Oh hey, Blossom, Bubbles, Buttercup," the professor finally deigned to speak to them, but the Girls' feelings were already hurt, not that they let him know, nor did the professor noticed any signs of this while he was busy teaching Bunny how to ride a bike. "Look at the great strides Bunny's been making! She's riding a bike now!"

It was unfair, all of it.

"Bunny loves bike!" Bunny squealed again in her low voice, which Blossom and Buttercup each independently thought was annoying, especially considering the unfairness of it all. Bunny then turned to them. "Bunny loves Blossom, Buttercup, Bubbles!" Despite Bunny meaning well, Blossom and Buttercup each independently thought it was a slap in the face that they were second to a bicycle.

"But Dad! Why didn't you get us all bicycles too?" Blossom objected. The professor's focus, however, had returned to Bunny. He was pulling her forward faster. Blossom was upset, but it was lost on him. "We could have learned how to ride bikes in a day too!"

"Come to think of it, the thought did cross my mind," the professor reminisced about it with a smile plastered on his face, one that Blossom was shocked herself to find that it annoyed her too. "But you know how it was - those were dark times back then, and by the time I decided that I would do just that, why, the three of you started flying all over the place. I don't think you three need bikes when you can fly, right?"

"Can't Bunny run as fast as us?" Bubbles asked, though without the same tone as Blossom.

"Why yes, definitely - but she'll be faster on a bicycle, I believe," Professor Utonium said, his attention, once again, split between Bunny and the original three. "Hmm… wear and tear might be a problem for the bicycle. Ah well, I guess I'll just have to buy loads of spare parts, crates of them! Maybe even a few backup bicycles!"

A few backup bicycles. If the fact that Bunny had her own bicycle hadn't stirred some jealousy in the elder Girls, it had now. Only Bubbles was immune to this.

The professor and the Girls - all four of them - had reached the far end of their only neighbor's house by then. On the porch, Mister Smith, the father, and husband of the neighboring household had been enjoying a bottle of whiskey when he saw them. The man, whom they couldn't really get to know, swiftly disappeared into his house upon seeing them.

From there, the professor helped Bunny make a U-turn on the pavement.

"It's been a long day fighting crime, Dad," Blossom said, painfully aware that the professor hadn't asked about it.

"Now, Bunny, why don't you try cycling on your own from here?" the professor instructed the
fourth Powerpuff Girl instead, and it'd rubbed Blossom the wrong way. Bubbles felt it too - for her, it'd been a long day, but in a different way. It wasn't just long. It was brutal, considering what had happened with Blossom, and what it meant. When Bunny took off, the professor still hadn't turned to his original three creations. "I'm sorry, you were saying something, Blossom?"

Blossom had to repeat herself, while at the same time trying not to shout or break into tears.

"Ah, I see - how is it?" the professor asked generically, something that made Blossom and Buttercup felt like they weren't special anymore. Again, Bubbles felt this one too.

Blossom had to pause. To pile on one flaming wreck on top of another, there was nothing good she could tell her Dad. The only positive thing to come out of it was that it was a distraction from the fact that Bunny had usurped their place in the professor's life.

Buttercup stared at Blossom, afraid that she would tell Dad everything about what they had done to the Exposito family today. They had killed nine men today, all on the word of another criminal on the helm of an even larger crime family.

"It was terrible, Dad. I'm tired of seeing people hurting each other…" Blossom opened herself out as she recounted, with perfect clarity, the day's activities. On top of killing Don Exposito and a few of his underboss, and allowing Buttercup to kill when she shouldn't, they had to stop a skirmish between two gangs in a turf dispute in the Tenements, witnessing wanton collateral damage that resulted in huge casualties. Bystanders were hurt. There was a suicide bombing perpetrated by a disgruntled and depressed national guardsman, and again, many innocents were hurt and killed as a result. When they arrived on the scene, he was already dangerously unstable, and they couldn't talk him down from killing himself and blowing up a grocery store that he alleged was a criminal enterprise, a front for mob activity. "It's bad in the city, Dad. A lot of people died today - and… and they were hurt, and really sad…"

If Buttercup was sitting down, she would have been on the edge of her seat. It sounded as if Blossom might spill everything, and then she would be back on the Duranium table, with all her powers drained. It was terrible, getting disempowered - the lethargy, the sense of powerlessness, the feeling of sickness and the suicidal contemplation weren't things she would look forward to.

Instead, Blossom broke into tears, losing the Duranium-hard exterior and melting quickly into pudding, unable to take it anymore - there were just too many things as if Bunny monopolizing Dad's attention and love - with zero effort on Bunny's part - wasn't bad enough. It was only then that - finally - the Dad took notice.

"Blossom! God, I'm so sorry - I didn't mean to ignore you," Professor Utonium said as he gave Blossom a one-armed hug. "It's just… a lot of things. Come here, the three of you." Bubbles and Buttercup joined in. The professor stared into the distance, where Bunny had just reached. She was learning everything so fast, and he had so little time with her before General Blackwater would spirit her away to be turned into another child soldier.

That was what the professor explained when he brought the Girls inside and sat them down for a family discussion with Selicia and Bunny present too.

"So you see, Girls, that is why I've been spending so much time with her," the professor ended off his explanation, before continuing, with the Girls sitting in the long couch on his right - he was on the one-man easy couch. Bunny was sitting in Selicia's lap, opposite him. He leaned back, but the comfort his top-grade furniture provided did little to ease the burden on his shoulders. "She'll be going away for training the day after tomorrow. In half a week after that, she'll be fighting crime, just like the three of you. But if she does it well enough, the three of you might not need to do that
as often as before. It's what I promised the three of you - your way out." He turned to Bubbles specifically. "Remember what I said, Bubbles? Before the cinema, when you couldn't take it anymore?"

"Yes…” Bubbles admitted sadly, begrudgingly.

"But…” Blossom wanted to say something, only for her voice to trail off.

"Isn't this what you want?" the professor said. "Blossom?"

Blossom was unsure of herself. She was glad to help the people of Townsville fight crime. Whenever she had saved a life, or successfully root out crime at one spot, she would feel proud of herself. Yet she knew what it would mean if Bunny were to go away for training and law enforcement operations after that. She would have Dad all to herself - more so if the burden of fighting crime was lifted off her. Furthermore, she wouldn't have to decide the life and death of anyone anymore, criminal or otherwise. Her killing of Don Exposito and his inner circle had weighed unexpectedly heavy on her.

She was so deep in thought that she didn't realize she was raising an eyebrow, screwing her face up as she zoomed through the neurons of her brain.

"Blossom?" the professor called out to her, snapping her attention back to the material plane. "Is there something you want to tell me? You look preoccupied with something."

Buttercup was back to staring at Blossom again, with those penetrative eyes of hers. Blossom returned the look, before turning back to the professor.

"No, Dad," Blossom lied. "I'm just tired…"

"Well, sorry again," Professor Utonium replied. "I didn't mean to detain you right after your operations. Why don't the three of you go up and peel off those dreadful Kevlar and I'll be right with you. I gotta fire up the dinner with your Mom first."

Without another word, Blossom hovered up to the second floor, with Buttercup following behind her. Bubbles, however, floated up next to Bunny before giving her a peck on the cheek.

"Grow up fast, Bunny," the fourth sister exclaimed, oblivious to the darkness all around her.

"Get going, Bubbles," Selicia said to Bubbles sternly, reminding her that her own Mom hated her now, and with good reason. With that, she hovered up after Blossom and Buttercup.

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

**24 FEB (Friday) 1989. 1852.**

Blossom shook herself like a wet dog getting rid of water in its fur. Bullets tinkled out of her armor and uniform. She then proceeded to remove her gear. More expended rounds for the bullet jar.

"Blossom?" Buttercup said while she was sitting in bed. She had torn off her gear faster while Blossom was still thinking about what had been communicated between her and her Dad (and what hadn't been talked about).
"What?" Blossom answered.

"Why didn't you tell Dad about Mister Exposito and his friends?" Buttercup asked. "Or the Amoeba Boys?"

Blossom took even more time to think about things. But it was fairly straightforward, such that there was little to think about - just that she couldn't accept her own deeds, her own decisions as what they were. If nothing else, Buttercup didn't look as bad as she was before.

"He wouldn't understand," Blossom said. "But it had to be done. We had to kill them. You know that, right? Buttercup?"

Buttercup smiled at Blossom - but it wasn't the kind of satisfying, happy kind of smile. It had a certain vibe to it. The smile was a sly one, a wicked one.

"I know, Blossom," Buttercup said. "I know."

It was a secret victory for Buttercup. She got to kill and maim again, and with Blossom becoming more like her when she least expected it, there might be more opportunities to do so, without the same risk of exposure.

"It's hard," Blossom broke into tears again. She quickly hid her face, but her sniffles and uncontrollable weeping could still be heard, easily. There and then, she knew she had sabotaged her own leadership with her appearing weak and hypocritical. "I can't believe I lied. And to Dad!"

Unexpectedly, Buttercup took her into her arms, patting her on the back.

"There, there, Bloss," she comforted her. "At least you're doing the right thing. The right thing's hard to do, isn't that what Dad said?" Buttercup had said this with a demented smile on her face, hidden from Blossom and Bubbles' sight, of course.

Bubbles couldn't believe her ears. Were Blossom and Buttercup conspiring together to hide the truth? She felt her past coming back to the surface, relived by her sisters instead.

Blossom withdrew herself before smiling at Buttercup. Moments like this with her wayward sister was rare. It was giving her that warm, fuzzy feeling inside here, especially when she could see it in Buttercup's face that the normally tomboyish girl was fine with it too.

"Thanks, Buttercup," Blossom said gratefully. "You're right. It's hard, but I guess I know I'm right."

"There you go," Buttercup said. "Now you know how I feel. Every single day."

"At least my wish is coming true," Blossom added. "I want the three of us together, close. And now I'm getting it."

The door opened soon after that.

"Oh, Girls! It's time for a voyage in the tub!" Professor Utonium exclaimed to them, trying to make it exciting to make up for his neglect of them in favor of Bunny. Just his presence in the room had caused that feeling in the back of Blossom's mind, that feeling that she might be wrong, to flare up again. The blissful, innocent look on the middle-aged man's face was a stark reminder of how it would change should news of her massacre get out. "Look at you, Buttercup - conquering your inner demons already!"
Chapter 59: Impending Changes

Chapter Summary

Bunny stands on the precipice of change.

Chapter 59: Impending Changes

Phone Recording 02241989-1953-TH

DOC: 24 FEB (Friday) 1989.

EXTRACTED: 01 JUN 1989.

-TRANSCRIPT START-

Corporal Nana Weston: General Blackwater's office, how can I assist?


Corporal Nana Weston: Yes sir, but before I do that… Thanks again. (Sincerely)

Professor Utonium: For what?

Corporal Nana Weston: For everything.

Professor Utonium: Can you be more specific?

Corporal Nana Weston: Transferring… now.

Professor Utonium: Nevermind, then.

(General beeping on the phone as the line is being transferred)

General Blackwater: General Blackwater here. What is it?

Professor Utonium: It's about the Girls, all four of them-

General Blackwater: What now, Utonium!? Unlike some people, we here in the security branch of the USDO don't have the luxury of dilly-dallying around playing house like some little schoolgirl!

Professor Utonium: I- (defeated sigh) I would like to request that Project Powerpuff be shut down tomorrow for a day.

General Blackwater: What for!? Did Bubbles go nuts again!? Keep that bitch on a leash! Aren't you supposed to be good at that!?

Professor Utonium: Uh- no. Please don't talk about my… daughter that way. We've been planning a wedding photoshoot. We were going to put it off until next week and then you showed up, asking to take Bunny away. I want the four of them present for the photos.
General Blackwater: Shit, two of you are really tying the knot huh?

Professor Utonium: Yes. It'll also be a bit of a send-off party for Bunny. You're… coming in the morning on Sunday, are you? You military types usually do it early.

General Blackwater: Haven't heard a compliment from you in a long time, Upton. Five in the morning, sharp. I've already sent Selicia a message about it. Get Bunny ready by then.

Professor Utonium: (mumbles discontentedly) Well, at least Bunny didn't need much sleep…

General Blackwater: Can you say again?

Professor Utonium: I discovered last night that she seems to need less sleep compared to baseline human beings. About four hours, more or less. I did this by monitoring the level of Melatonin production in her body when she woke me up at midnight. I suspected it right away - I've also-

General Blackwater: Okay, cut the crap. You got your permission. They're off the hook tomorrow. Just know that you're sacrificing lives - the lives of courageous heroes - for your selfish, inconsequential gains by doing this, Professor Utonium. Congratulations, by the way. (Hangs up loudly)

Professor Utonium: (Barking) Then why are you even agreeing to it!? It's not like I… (Pauses, before hanging up)

-TRANSCRIPT END-

The City of Townsville. Uptown. En route to Polaski’s Bridal Emporium

25 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 1427.

Happiness. By the twenty-fifth of February, 1989, the only person in the family salon heading into Townsville's more reputable district who could still feel pure, unadulterated happiness was Bunny. Professor Utonium couldn't feel it without fearing that he would lose it. Sergeant Selicia, with Bubbles and Blossom in the same car as her, couldn't feel it in its entirety when she had doubts about certain members of her own family. Blossom and Bubbles had acquired one too many demons from their crime-fighting career, and their family life was hardly ideal. Buttercup was still unsure if she could indulge in her… obsessions. Too many times had she been caught and blocked from doing what she wished, just because people had some petty differences with her!

Bunny, on the other hand, was all smiles, and it was only mere hours ago that she could think of a cause to be happy about. The morning was one of those few times when she got to play with her sisters.

Despite jealousy mounting in Blossom and Buttercup, they were still able to put it aside and have fun with her. Bubbles, unlike her fellow elder sisters, couldn't find any reason against treating Bunny like either of her other sisters. Blossom thought that she was wrong to be jealous of Bunny - just that the feeling was nigh-impossible to fight off. The fun had served to distract her from it. Buttercup, on the other hand, needed another body for some play-wrestling - and Bunny provided more than a challenge. In due time, she thought Bunny would make a good punchbag in unarmed combat training, as Bubbles could no longer fill that role owing to her new-found confidence in fighting.

'Bunny loves Blossom!' she had declared while she was playing with blocks together with
Blossom.

'I love you too,' Blossom had replied - and found it surprising that jealousy and love could co-exist side by side.

'Bunny loves Bubbles!' she would go on to declare further. 'Bunny loves Buttercup!'

'Oh brother…' Buttercup had mumbled to herself, as she didn't like mushy stuff like that, much less from someone who took Mom and Dad's attention away from her.

But most importantly, Blossom had tried to teach Bunny about pronouns - such as referring to oneself as 'I' and the other person as 'you'.

'Bunny loves Blossom!' Bunny would erupt in a fit of giggles again, with Blossom's lesson on grammar unheeded.

The rest of the day went by uneventfully - they went to the studio of the bridal emporium, got dressed and took photos. The dressing up bit took the better part of an hour, especially on the part of the girls - adult and children - due to the bridal gown for Selicia and the make-up for all of them. The photography took even longer, as the session wasn't restricted to the backdrop available in the emporium's photography studio. They went all around Townsville for the best locales, much to Buttercup's irritation. Bunny got a little cranky - she was too young to understand what was going on, too young to understand the significance of the traveling and picture snapping. Unlike Buttercup, however, Bunny was easily placated by finger games and learning new words from the professor's educational card set.

---

**Townsville Tribune Extract 25 FEB 1989**

**TOWNSVILLE SLUM MASSACRE**

The Townsville slums is the city's shameful underbelly of civil neglect and crime. It is a dirty place full of drugs and illicit activities, where people go to get murdered, where criminals go to murder. This has been a reality for over a decade, and for over a decade, the police have ceased patrolling the district as their fatality rate and casualties couldn't justify what little effect they have in preserving law and order in the area. Crime has since largely gone unreported in the area.

But when it is, it has to be done in person, and it tends to be big. 24 February, Friday (yesterday) was one of those days when it happened. At approximately 9:50am yesterday, four officers on guard duty by a road leading into the slums were approached by a stranger, who was later identified as one of the Slum's more upstanding denizens (his name is withheld to protect his identity).

Townsville's very own Robin Hood and his merry band are dead. Don Exposito and eight others, which includes his closest lieutenants and advisors, were reported to have been shot dead in their own den, a dilapidated apartment building not too far from one of the roads leading into the shinier parts of Townsville.

While he was the leader of one of over two hundred criminal gangs operating in Townsville, the Exposito Crime Family, Don Exposito, is also known to be unusually divisive a personality where other crime bosses usually inspire hatred and fear from the more law-abiding citizens of Townsville. This is due to his modus operandi - which involves highly complex, intelligent and well-thought-out white-collar crimes, extortion rackets aimed at large corporations and drugs targeting the richer demography in the region. His murder victims consist mainly of people who are said to deserve death - rival gang members, corrupt city and law enforcement officials, and
street criminals with loose morals.

Part of the reason why his death had, and has, inspired an outpouring of sympathy was due to where a significant fraction of his earnings go to - it is by no coincidence that, although his headquarter is situated in the slums, he rarely subjects the inhabitants of the slum to his unlawful activities. Quite the opposite, he is well known for organizing charity buffets, putting up shelters and inviting medical professionals, sometimes pro bono and sometimes paid out of his pockets, into the slums to treat the people there. Even Mayor Wilford, the current incumbent of the city, had shared a few kind words about him, despite their stark differences and positions on the law and order spectrum.

However, Don Exposito is not without his detractors. Numerous experts believe that he is simply a more capable hypocrite than others of his ilk and that his charity work serves merely as smoke and mirrors to his criminal enterprise. By providing for his immediate community, he is bribing Townsville for moral capital, winning supporters among the poor in the Slums, and ensuring that people become dependent on him such that the idea of getting rid of him becomes unthinkable. It is possible that he owes the continued existence of his gang - which still numbers dozens strong - to this tactic.

Whatever the case may be, it didn't last. The police have occupied the Exposito headquarters in force to conduct an investigation. Their spokesperson has revealed that the Exposito top members were killed by gunshots - making it likely that a rival gang has dispatched them. Due to the nature of the Slums, witnesses are not forthcoming, and as far as they know, everyone at the scene has been killed - even the harmless women and children, who were gunned down outside the apartment building where Don Exposito and his top men were killed.

A funeral is currently being organized by relatives of the Exposito family, with hundreds said to have already accepted the invitation.

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

**25 FEB (Saturday) 1989. 2041.**

Bunny was standing next to the railing of the House's balcony, staring out into the vast world, taking in the suburbia. It was all new to her - just a day earlier, she wouldn't even have known that there was a world outside the House. Back then, the world was just the House and her family, and that was more than enough.

And now… Now she knew that the world was a much bigger place, but it wasn't all good, not like the House and her family. Her Dad had told her what was going to happen tomorrow, and she didn't want any part of it. All she ever wanted - all she ever needed, was to stay in the House, with her family.

Ten minutes ago, Professor Utonium had brought her into his office alone to speak to her about this. They were seated around the lounging area where Psychiatrist Alice would usually counsel her elder sisters.

'Bunny, I'll be blunt about this,' he had said to her after making sure she was listening. 'Someone's coming to take you away tomorrow, Bunny.'

'Bunny going out tomorrow?' Bunny had tried her best to explain what she understood - which was little. The only reason she was ever brought out of the House thus far was to get new things or do something with her family.
'No, Bunny, I'm afraid not,' the professor tried again to explain. It was agonizing enough the first time; he didn't know how he could take trying to tell his fourth daughter about something as serious and terrible as this. 'You're leaving this place tomorrow, Bunny.'

'Bunny leave?' she hinted at some level of understanding, but at this rate, she was already what normal people would consider shockingly intelligent for someone born a few days ago. As it slowly dawned on her what the professor meant, her eyes grew wide and her face had screwed up in sadness as she was about to cry.

'Yes, I'm afraid so. But it'll only be for three days… and you'll meet some new people…' the professor tried to make it sound better, even though he knew that there was little good in what was in store for Bunny next.

'Bunny wanna stay…' the physically eight-year-old said anxiously. She could feel it in her guts - an almost painful sensation, drowning her. A sense of helplessness, a perversion of the security she felt with her Dad.

'I'm afraid that's not possible,' the professor had said, shaking his head. He looked upset, and Bunny knew what it meant - if her Dad was so clearly upset, it could only mean there were bad things. He then looked up at her, forcing him to smile, but Bunny had become quite adept at reading human expressions. 'You'll meet new people and learn new things. You're going to become like Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup. You remember them, do you? How cool they look when they're going out to help people? You're going to be as good as they are, and even better.'

'No! Bunny wanna stay!' Bunny had screamed so shrilly, her voice had gone from low to relatively high-pitched. The professor had to cover his ears, and even then, there was ringing in it after Bunny's outburst. And she wasn't stopping: 'Bunny wanna stay! Bunny WANNA STAY!'

Bunny had started crying unrestrained, melting down dangerously and her couch was already feeling it as she was pounding on it.

'Bunny, it's not going to be that bad - you have to trust Dad!' the professor got off his couch and reached out for her only for Bunny to slap his hand away and scramble over her couch and to the door. She'd run, and that was how she ended up at the balcony, winning herself some time to be alone, and imagine that her Dad's plan did not exist.

It took Professor Utonium some time to find her. Five minutes to ten, all the while afraid that she had run off, which would make things a whole lot worse for everyone.

"Bunny, you really shouldn't run off like that," the professor said to her while he was stepping into the balcony, trying to keep his tone as far away from reprimanding as possible. It wasn't something Bunny needed nor deserved. "You know how much slower I am, so I can't hope to catch up with you." The professor laughed briefly after that, remembering that even the industrial treadmill in the lab - meant for testing vehicles - couldn't keep up with her.

Bunny, however, remained stubbornly unresponsive, sulking at the railing of the balcony as she looked out into the horizon. The professor put a hand on her shoulder. At first, she seemed to shrink away from his touch but undid her action shortly after that. The professor took a peek at her from the side; she was crying, predictably but understandably. The impending change would have reduced anyone to tears, part of the reason why forced military service was lifted in most countries, except the ones that cared little for human rights.

"Bunny wants to stay," Bunny uttered with her arms crossed. Everything she knew - her entire life - had been The House and her family, and she knew nothing but joy here. Anything with a big
unknown in it couldn't compare to this. Change was bad if one was in paradise.

"I know, I want you to stay too," the professor said. He understood exactly why she would react this way if her joy earlier today was any indication. They had a farewell dinner for Bunny before this, not that Bunny knew that it was a farewell dinner. They had ordered whatever they wanted, and it didn't matter if there was too much food. For someone who hadn't experienced a wide variety of culinary creations, it was just as much a time for gastronomic exploration.

They had presents for her too. The professor had given her a massive illustrated encyclopedia - it was a good thing weight was not an issue for Bunny. Selicia got her a set of replica guns (no doubt to secretly desensitize her to the real thing, and get her to learn a little about how they function before her training began in earnest). Even her elder sisters were in on it. Blossom gave Bunny her favorite fairy tale picture book, while Buttercup gave up her boxing gloves (with much convincing from Blossom), not that she had been using those anymore. Bubbles had actually reached a new peak in her artistic pursuits for her sake, sewing up a big carrot pillow for her. Though it was crude compared to manufactured pillows, Bunny really liked it, and it'd made the origin of her name a talking point during the farewell party.

"I want you to stay... so much, Bunny," the professor repeated. As much as he disagreed with General Blackwater and the USDO's methods, he remembered his own stakes in the creation of his fourth adopted daughter. It had to be done. "But you need to go. Your sisters need your help, and the people you're going to meet tomorrow will teach you everything you need to know to help them."

"Bunny knows..." the enhanced girl said, her voice cracking. She then hugged her Dad, and Dad hugged her back. "Bunny scared..."

"Mom will be there with you," the professor comforted her. "She'll be there for you."

"But Bunny wants Daddy," she said. The professor thought it disconcerting that she had shown a preference for him over Selicia, but in light of Bunny's crisis in the huge, impending change in her life, he couldn't bear to bring it up.

"Mom will take care of you," he simply said.
Chapter 60: Arrival

Chapter Summary

Bunny is taken away to be trained for law enforcement.

Chapter 60: Arrival

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

26 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 0445.

Bunny hadn't eaten much, even though both Dad and Mom had done their best to whip up the most appetizing waffles they could. Conversely, Blossom and Buttercup were shoving theirs into their mouths like hogs. To the two of them, Bunny leaving was a good thing, and when times were good, their appetite was healthy. Bubbles, on the other hand, wasn't much better off than Bunny. Bubbles knew what was going to happen to her, and although she had become good at crime-fighting, she knew that the process wouldn't be easy nor pleasant. She couldn't bear the thought that Bunny was going to go through the same process, if not worse, at just a few days old where she and her fellow elder sisters had three weeks before they were first put out there to combat Townsville's crime problem.

"Eat up, Bunny, it's really good," the professor said. He was sitting right next to Bunny, much to the chagrin of Blossom and Buttercup, who wanted his attention. They hadn't said a word about it only because they knew they would have his undivided attention very soon. "Your Mom and I worked hard on the waffles. The grape sauce is really something - we've never tried it before…"

"Bunny sad…" the going-away girl said, her head held low and her eyelashes wet with tears that managed to breach her closed eyes. "Bunny knows she must go but…"

"It'll only be for a few days, Bunny. We'll see each other again real soon," the professor comforted her, though there was little he could do, considering that he himself needed some attention from this traumatic event - especially when he knew so much more about this, and some of the facts were downright damnning. He was a part of all this - if anyone deserved to be miserable, it was him. No matter how he rationalized his part in this, he could still perceive that his soul was stained if it wasn't already.

"Bunny likes talking to you…" Bunny said.

"You know, I think I have just the thing for that," the professor said, and after coaxing Bunny with this promise of a surprise to eat just a little more, he brought her down to the lab. After bringing her to his desk, he started rummaging through it, looking for something. "Now where did I put that thing?" He'd muttered as he overturned stationery, paper, and oversized lab instruments in his search. Bunny was peeking past his body left and right, wondering what he was looking for.

"A-ha!" the professor exclaimed when he pulled something out from one of the drawers of the desk. It was an instrument longer than a pen, and thicker, with numerous buttons on it. It was clear that it was an electronic device, with the digital screen on one side and a microphone on one end. "Here, I'll give this to you."
"What is it, Daddy?" Bunny wondered in her usual low voice. She examined the thing, and in the process, saw different symbols on the buttons. Arrows pointing in opposite directions, with two bars in between them. There was a red square too. "Bunny's toy?"

"It's more than a toy, dearest rabbit," the professor said playfully, proud of his resourcefulness. "It's a useful device for talking. This one's state of the art with an Institute solid-state drive, long before it will be introduced to the rest of the world." The professor had to pause himself when he realized he had forgotten that he was talking to a kid who was merely a few days old, and likely couldn't understand what he was saying at all.

"Here, let me show you how to use it," he said before gently taking the gadget from her. The professor then switched it on using a power button, denoted by an incomplete circle with a bar wedged into the middle. He then hit the record button, represented by a huge red square, before bringing the microphone of the device up to his mouth. "It's what you call a voice recorder. It records your voice."

The professor hit the pause button before rewinding it. Bunny observed the device in awe as if it was some kind of magical artifact. With her understanding of technology at an astounding zero, it might as well be. The professor hit the play button after the recorder had gone back to the zero mark of the latest sound clip.

"It's what you call a voice recorder. It records your voice," the sound recorder repeated the professor's words back to them. Bunny giggled in wonderment of the magic at work.

"Bunny likes it!" she said with a laugh. The professor smiled alongside her. He would give anything to see her happy and distracted from the darkness surrounding her, especially at a time like this, but for now, it seemed that all it took was some fatherly love on his part.

"And I want you to have it," he pushed the voice recorder into her hands before closing her fingers around it. "Whenever you feel like you're alone, you can talk to it. When you're back with me, we can listen to your recordings together."

Using whatever time they had together remaining, they spent a brief father-and-daughter moment with the voice recorder. The professor taught her the rest of its functions, and that it required charging at a power terminal. In the meantime, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were left alone upstairs again, exchanging looks with each other and Mom. Selicia glared at Blossom - she knew from how she behaved that she was jealous. She then stared at Bubbles with paranoia in her eyes, suspecting her of the same thing. Buttercup, however, was spared this treatment. While her sisters were sitting on the edge of their seats, afraid that Mom might do something to them while Dad was away, Buttercup was heaping another pile of waffles on her plate and pouring an excessive amount of grape syrup on them.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

26 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 0500.

It was time. As Selicia Goodwin and Bunny Utonium walked out of the front door of The House, hand-in-hand, a convoy of three humvees had pulled over on the street. Selicia saw the huge form of General Blackwater clamber out of the middle humvee, along with a squad of soldiers from every vehicle, battle-ready likely just in case Bunny decided to have an explosive tantrum. But there wasn't going to be another incident, not this time. The professor had made sure of it. In Director Cliff's words, he'd made her 'docile', 'tame' and 'obedient'.
Selicia and Bunny traveled across their lawn, luggage in tow, with Professor Utonium, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup standing at The House's entrance, seeing them off. The two going-away girls didn't have to travel all the way across the lawn to meet General Blackwater, who met them in the middle of it with four soldiers on either side of him, like the wings of an eagle. Selicia gave him a quick salute when they came up close to them.

Bunny held her Mom's hand tightly as she instinctively squeezed closer to her, afraid of the giant standing in front of her. It didn't help that it was still dark out, and shadows were everywhere because of the street lamps. Before her, the giant in SWAT gear was staring down at her, scrutinizing her, judging every bit of her. The giant of a man scowled at her attire: the purple dress and white pantyhose were evident under her jacket. He'd seen pictures of her, some covertly obtained while others 'honestly' taken. She was likely wearing a pair of Mary-Jane shoes under her snow boots. The lack of winter pants and additional layers of insulation suggested that, like her elder sisters, Bunny was resistant to the cold too, like a human tardigrade.

"Hello, Miss Bunny Utonium," the general greeted the latest enhanced little girl stiffly and coldly, the frown on his face still there, as if frozen in place by the winter cold. "You may address me as General Blackwater. I will be administering your training from now on."

Bunny clamped up the moment she was in the general's presence, intimidated not just by his physical size and appearance, but also his demeanor and stern outlook, projected in overwhelming force. There was an awkward silence because of this, while everyone involved was waiting for Bunny to muster up the courage to return the general's greeting, only to be met with nothing.

"Don't be rude, Bunny," Selicia whispered to Bunny as she shook her as stealthily as she could. "Greet your general - the two of you will be seeing each other very often."

"H-hi, Mister General Blackwater," Bunny squeaked pathetically, timid in the face of the bear.

"General Blackwater. No misters, no extra words. Just General Blackwater," the general corrected her, his voice narrowing to something softer, though no one with him could decide if he was trying to seem more sensitive and approachable, or if he was cross with the fourth USDO enhanced individual. "The two of you will follow me into the vehicle back to headquarters. We'll begin immediately after we arrive there."

With that, they were escorted to the general's humvee. Taking one last look behind her, Bunny's eyes met with the professor's one last time. She waved at him and her sisters a final time before she stepped into the humvee.

---

Training Segment: Arrival

**Date:** 26 FEB (Sunday) 1989

**Time:** 0552

**Subject:** B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

**Role:** Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

**Status:** Untrained

The ride to the USDO headquarters was silent. This made Selicia concerned. Bunny was usually spontaneous and full of life, like the Energizer Bunny in the commercials. Now, had it not been for
the rhythmic breathing that she could feel while she was resting on her lap, Selicia wouldn't have known that she was alive. In the meantime, Selicia couldn't decide why General Blackwater would personally want to escort Bunny to the USDO headquarters. It was grunt work, something that any private or corporal could have accomplished. It would remain a mystery even after she had arrived at headquarters.

There, they were escorted to their bunks (the general had requested that they live separately). Selicia had followed Bunny to hers to help her unpack. It was a cold, spartan space underground, with modest and merely functional furnishing. Bunny remained lifeless in this new environment, likely still suffering from separation anxiety, this time sitting in her new cot like a statue while Selicia unpacked the little belongings they had brought along for the 'law enforcement' crash course. Calling it a black ops crash course would have been more accurate.

Before Selicia could try to remedy Bunny's situation or even talk to her, however, a soldier went through their door, informing them that General Blackwater had requested to see Bunny alone. In addition to that, he'd dropped off a few sets of uniforms for Bunny - military fatigues of the same design as Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup's, except larger-sized and purple. The soldier left without a word after that.

Selicia had to help Bunny suit up. While she had already learned how to dress up, the professor hadn't taught her how to wear military fatigues. Neither did she seemed motivated to learn. She didn't seem motivated to do anything. Had breathing required conscious effort, Bunny would have died on the spot.

"Bunny," Selicia shook her, and when she failed to respond, she shook her even harder, and longer, until Bunny looked up at her. "You need to take this seriously! This is what you're made for-" Selicia stopped when she realized she might have let slip the secret behind Bunny's origin, but decided that her new daughter's naivety and lack in vocabulary made it inconsequential. "This is what you're born to do. You're going to help your sisters."

"Bunny miss Dad," Bunny mumbled. Tears started dripping from her eyes when she said this. She then broke out into a sob, which Selicia found inconvenient to the current situation and agenda.

"Hey, Bunny," Selicia tried to catch her attention again, but Bunny was too emotionally affected. The Mom called out to her repeatedly, snapping her fingers in her face. Nothing worked. She went back to desperately gripping her by the shoulders and shaking her, only then did Bunny made eye contact with Selicia once again, her glowing violet eyes ringed with red. "You need to be strong, rabbit! Look, I miss your Dad too, but you don't see me crying like a little girl, do you?"

"Here, you need to put your boots on," Selicia simply moved on, even though Bunny wasn't done crying yet. Taking a pair of child-sized military boots out of their boxes, she loosened the bootstraps before slipping Bunny's foot into it. It was a perfect fit. The general had made sure of it. In fact, he was extremely involved - personally involved - with Bunny's development, much more so than with the first three. With the other boot, she tried to teach Bunny how to put it on and tie the boot strings, but the girl in question was barely even listening, likely because she was still upset. Selicia sighed.

"You need to shape up, Bunny. You're going to see General Blackwater in a few minutes," Selicia said as she sat herself down next to her.

"Bunny don't want to see Blackwater," she simply said, while she wiped another stream of tears off her still-red cheek.

"Why not?" Selicia pulled her into a hug. She sort-of kinda liked Bunny, but not just because she
was going to liberate Buttercup from her crime-fighting duties. Bunny seemed confident and glad to use her enhanced abilities, and though she could see shades of Blossom and Bubbles in her, she thought it was too early to tell.

"He's mean," Bunny simply said and hugged back.

"Oh, I know he looks and talks that way, but once you get to know him... I'm sure you'll like him," Selicia said as she stroked her hair, which she had cut down by a few inches and tied into a ponytail for neatness.

"But why does he have to be like that?" Bunny asked.

"He's suffered. For a very, very long time, he's been sacrificing everything to protect others," Selicia said as she kissed Bunny in the scalp. "He's like your sisters, I guess, but he's endured more pain, more hardship. And like your sisters, he's earned the love of those around him. His soldiers, Bunny... His... knights... will die for him because of that." Selicia thought throwing in some fairy tale elements was a nice touch. No, it was masterful!

"Oh..." Bunny said, still downcast, still dejected. What she was really thinking was a mystery to Selicia, and she wasn't always forthcoming about her thoughts through no fault of her own - with only a vocabulary numbering in the hundreds and still a distance to go from a thousand, there was likely so much that Bunny couldn't express.

There was a knock on the door, though it wasn't interrupting anything. The woman and girl had long fallen into silence, with Bunny just snuggling closely with her Mom, while the latter allowed her a moment of peace and reprieve before the beginning of the end when her innocence would be lost.

"Ma'am, we shouldn't keep the general waiting," the soldier advised Selicia, who stood up immediately after that.

"C'mon, Bunny, I'll walk with you," Selicia offered to her fourth daughter, putting out a helping hand to lift her up. Bunny took it.

Together, they walked hand in hand, with guards who had been waiting outside all along. There were six of them, which was minimal when it came to enhanced individuals. Had it been Blossom, the general would have guarded her with twenty men, and with Bubbles or Buttercup, forty per head.

Resigned to her fate, Bunny followed along, pulled by Selicia, towards what she imagined must be a bear's den. Why else would there be so many men around her?
Chapter 61: Bunny Good

Training Segment: Orientation

Date: 26 FEB (Sunday) 1989

Time: 0558

Subject: B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

Role: Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

Status: In Training

The door closed behind Bunny when she was led into the room. She was kind of pushed into it, in fact, by a somewhat reluctant Selicia when she wouldn't go in on her own. The room was quickly vacated by the few soldiers in it, and one of them was Corporal Nana Weston, the young woman soldier who had played with her on the general's visit, exchanging a look of familiarity with her before leaving. Bunny smiled at the nice young woman, but her smile was as short-lived as Nana's presence.

Bunny stared at the end of the room, where the huge man was. Banging on his keyboard as if it had offended him severely, General Blackwater was typing up something when she came in. She had time to observe the man before he noticed her. He was a gray-haired old man; General Blackwater was the first old man she had ever seen, and she didn't know why he was different from the others. Like her, he was bulky for someone his size - and he was already a colossus.

"Miss Bunny Utonium," the general greeted her in a severe, monotonous voice without looking at her. "Sit down in that chair in front of me."

Bunny stood rooted where she was. She hated this, and she wanted - so much - to throw herself back into the loving arms of her Dad.

"Do not make me repeat myself again," the general growled at her like a bear. Seeing no other choice, Bunny padded cautiously towards the chair while her eyes were still having a staring contest with the carpeted floor. Her feet, clad in the thick leather of her boots, felt clumsy only because she was unused to it. "I'll take it that you know what a chair is."

Bunny slipped into the chair in front of the general, perching on the edge as if getting ready to bolt. The general looked up at her all of a sudden, and she jumped when he did.

"You will speak when you're spoken to, Bunny," the general instructed the enhanced girl. "It's called being polite, or courteous, something your father should have taught you."
"Bunny know what a chair is..." she said half-heartedly. There was silence after that. The general did not appear to appreciate it, not like how Dad would. Every little thing seemed to remind Bunny of what was missing. The general was like the antithesis of her Dad, the God in her eyes who would praise her for even the smallest of achievements. She felt like the odd one out here, in this entire building she found herself in when her elder sisters were not around. She was little and afraid and she knew it.

At first, Bunny was looking at the general expectantly (but not in a good way), wondering what he had in store for her, but when he just continued to bang on his keyboard, her eyes drifted down again.

"Do you know why you're here, Bunny?" the general asked her all of a sudden, still banging on his keyboard at the same time. It sounded ready to just split in two.

"To help Bunny's sisters?" she said. What she said was met with silence for a moment.

"Yes, that's right," the general said and seemed to acknowledge her faster. "Do you know why you need to help them?"

"Bunny..." the enhanced girl wondered about the reasoning behind her statement, only to realize that something was missing. Her Dad and Mom had been repeating to her what she would be doing in the future, and yet... "Bunny don't know why..."

Reasons. Bunny knew that reasons existed. Her Dad had told her everything about reasons the moment she understood enough words to be able to make sense of it. She knew, for example, that learning how to speak was important because it allowed her to communicate with others, sometimes to get them to act in a certain way, or give her something to talk about for fun.

General Blackwater had stopped typing on his computer all of a sudden. If the keyboard could feel, it would likely be relieved. The change seemed significant to Bunny, but she couldn't understand why.

"I know everything about your sisters, Bunny," the general said, his eyes still pinned to her. Even with her limited understanding of the world, Bunny understood the general's newest fact to be of interest. She had never thought that General Blackwater and her elder sisters knew each other. "I've worked with them. Let me tell you the reason why you need to help them, why you're here."

"There are people out there hurting them, do you understand?" the general revealed. Bunny studied the general, now less afraid of him. She shook her head though - she couldn't quite understand what he meant. Although she knew what the word 'hurt' meant, she'd never known that people could hurt each other.

"Bunny don't understand..." she said.

"Is that right? Then let me educate you," the general replied harshly all of a sudden. He'd said it in such a way that made Bunny feel that she had done something wrong. Standing up, rising far above Bunny, he slipped off a glove and unsheathed a combat knife on his belt. Bunny jumped at his reaction.

"No! B-bunny scared!" the enhanced girl said as the general stood over her, with his combat knife held firmly in a gloved hand. He looked as if he was about to stab her, or do any number of nasty things to her.

The general went around his desk, coming closer to her. Bunny squeezed herself deep into her seat,
too panicked to get out of her chair. He pressed the sharp edge of his combat knife against his left hand and slid it across his palm. Bunny could see red on the blade after that. Blood. She had never seen it before. The general didn't even wince when he cut himself, and when he was done, he showed her his bloody, cut palm.

"This is what they're doing to your sisters," he said. "Do you understand better now?"

Bunny nodded with her eyes wide with biologically-programmed fear, unable to tear them away from the bloodied blade in the general's right hand. Her eyes were misting even though she was not the one hurt.

"They're the enemy, and they're trying their best to destroy your sisters, to kill them. Do you know what that means?" the general went on lecturing Bunny. Reluctantly, Bunny shook her head. She didn't want to - all she got for her trouble was a harsh lesson in what 'hurt' truly meant, not to mention the shock of her life.

"When your sisters are killed, you'll never see them again. They will be taken away, forever - that is the enemy's objective." the general explained further. He studied Bunny for a reaction, and would have smiled in triumph had the matter been less morbid. The horrified look on Bunny's face was what he wanted so that she knew what was at stake. "Do you understand?"

"Bunny understands," she said, even as she was still trying to fight off the shock in her. But as it was wearing off, it was replaced with misery instead. "Bunny doesn't want sisters to go…"

"And that is why you're here," the general said while he made a round around his desk, returning to his seat. He turned around briefly to reach for a first-aid kit, opening it and taking out gauze and antiseptic to clean his self-inflicted wound. The gauze was soaked through within seconds. "In a way, we both want the same thing. I would hate to see your sisters go too. They are not good soldiers, but they are my soldiers all the same. You will train with me and my men, and you will protect your sisters from harm. Do you understand?"

"Bunny understands…” she said. General Blackwater took a good, long look at her. It was as if his face was made of stone. He hadn't changed expressions at all and it was making Bunny self-conscious.

"Your sisters. They're weak and flawed. Small. They're spoiled rotten. They're too dumb and trusting," the general continued. Bunny didn't like how the general is talking about her sisters, but she didn't dare to speak out against it. Her face, though, was completely transparent, and for the first time ever, she scowled at someone. "Good. Very good, Bunny."

"Bunny… good?" she said, taken by surprise. It was the first time General Blackwater had praised her, and because it had been hard to get him to say anything positive, it felt good.

"It's better for you to be angry than scared," the general said, with a smile. "Anger can be very useful, but then again, there's a use for everything…"

"You should know that I'm one of the good guys. I would never hurt your sisters – Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup," the general went on. Just the mention of her sisters' names had piqued her interest. "I'm fighting to preserve their lives. And I need your help to do that because they're on the brink."

"Bunny help!" she repeated herself earnestly. Her family was all she knew – and if she could help them in any way, she would go all in, just like how she comforted her Dad when he upset.
"I'm sure you will. I'm just trying to be honest here, Bunny. The reason why they need your help is that they can never be better than you. They can never be as strong, or fast, or more intelligent than you. They can never be as good as you are."

"Bunny good..." she muttered timidly but smiled, won over by the general. With Bunny's resolve and motivation secured, the general then went on a lengthy explanation of what was to come, and what he had in mind for Bunny's training would put her far above her sisters, way beyond their league...

---

**Training Segment: Standard Equipment**

**Date:** 26 FEB (Sunday) 1989

**Time:** 0625

**Subject:** B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

**Role:** Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

**Status:** In Training

Ever since her talk with General Blackwater, Bunny had relaxed a little more around him, though not too much. Despite opening up a little to her, the general remained stern towards her, and as they made their way to the firing range, he would give her the look whenever he suspected that she would begin to misbehave. Of course, this was pre-emptive on the general's part, and Bunny hadn't done anything wrong.

On the way towards the firing range, Bunny saw a squad of men jogging past her, fully equipped for war and armed to the teeth. Some of them were looking at her, some making eye contact before turning away; her glowing purple eyes had caught their attention, but her being in the general's company more so. They had always known him to harbor a hatred towards enhanced individuals ever since the early days when the USDO was just the Organization, small and ill-equipped, unknown despite the great strides it had made towards improving the US military.

They entered the armory after that, and they were greeted by the armory sergeant, who escorted them to a special weapons lock-up area, which contained some of the more exotic of equipment. General Blackwater had already arranged for Bunny's equipment to be laid neatly on a table in the center.

There was a full suit of armor that came in one piece, color-coded to suit Bunny's purple eyes and dress. It was like nothing modern, no, it was downright futuristic, likely cutting-edge stuff. A heavily modified MP5 sat beside it, as well as a pistol. Loads of magazines and grenades and smaller things took up a whole quarter of the huge table.

The general went up to the armor and knocked on the chest piece with his knuckles. Bunny looked on like a birthday girl or someone who was unwrapping presents on Christmas; instinctively, she knew that it was all for her. It was the color that tipped her off.

"Multi-layered composite poly-weave Kevlar, titanium joints and frame, 360 degrees protection - this here is the latest tech ordered on express just for you. This thing will stop even assault rifle bullets," the general introduced Bunny's new toy to her. "And it's all for you. Think of it as a thank-you gift in advance for protecting your sisters. How about we put it on now? Are you up to it?"
"Bunny good!" the enhanced girl simply said, seeing this as no different from that time when Dad bought her some new dresses to replace Mom's stuff, which was oversized on her.

"I'll take that as an affirmative," the general said before pulling the all-encompassing suit of armor off the table with some difficulty. The thing was heavy. A normal 8-year-old child would be completely immobilized by it. The suit of armor was actually the unpowered version of the power armor being produced by Project Klendathu, stripped of unnecessary electronic and electrical components. It could almost stand on its own, as demonstrated by the general when he stood it up and began opening the various parts up for Bunny to slip into; splitting open the chest, pulling the limbs open from the sides…

By herself, Bunny was pretty well-built for a girl who had never been to the gym. With the suit on, she was a pint-sized tank, lacking only a helmet - which the general had - again pre-emptively - decided that she didn't need in anticipation of the fact that she would likely develop some manner of enhanced ability similar to Blossom's infrared beam.

"Try walking around this room," the general ordered not too severely. With his hands on Bunny's armored shoulders like a father teaching a child how to walk, he pushed her gently off, and as if walking for the first time, Bunny started waddling forward, rounding a corner awkwardly. It wasn't exactly heavy for her. In fact, she could hardly feel a thing. She was just unused to it. However, that quickly changed when she rounded another corner, then another. By the time she returned to the general after making a full circle around the room, she was practically skipping towards him, enjoying the feel of her new outfit, as if it was a pair of ballet tights and tutu. She stopped when she realized she was getting carried away, only to find that the general was smiling as he was crossing his arms.

Upon being detected, the general dropped his smile and beckoned for Bunny to stand next to him while he pulled the modified MP5 close to them. "Have you seen your sisters' guns? You do know what a gun is, right?"

"Bunny know," she said as she was still pulling on her protective suit, adjusting it to be more comfortable.

"Yours is better, and it will fit a girl of your natural abilities," the general praised Bunny stealthily. Picking up the MP5, he stared through the scope to check if it was working, before clearing the firearm of any misplaced rounds. It was dry when he triggered it; empty. "Your main firearm has a scope, suppressor, flashlight and laser sight. Your magazines will be extended and doubled for ease of reloading. Your sidearm will have some of the same things. I will teach you how to use each of them personally."

After that, General Blackwater would introduce Bunny to her pistol, which was just as customized as her main weapon. It had a suppressor as well, which, when used with subsonic rounds, would be almost entirely silent save for the sound of its mechanical components working. The pistol's magazine poked out of the receiver; it was extended. She had grenades of all sorts; flashbangs, smoke grenades, and even fragmentary grenades, something which General Blackwater had refused to give Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup for fear of misuse.

She was also provided with a combat knife, a set of garret wires, all sorts of utility tools ranging from ropes to flashlights to night vision goggles, most of which the general would never consider giving to the original trio.

---

**Training Segment: Firearms Training**
General Blackwater was bending low as he was instructing Bunny on the operation of her suppressed Sig Sauer pistol. They were both wearing ear protection and ballistic goggles while they were live at the firing range. Bunny was predictably doing everything wrong at first, having no concept of firearms; she wasn't even aiming down the sights, her elbows were locked and the gun wasn't entirely upright. That, and she was holding her pistol all wrong, with the fingers of her left hand gripping the slide. With her kind of strength, it could jam the pistol.

Standing behind Bunny closely, the general began painstakingly correcting her. His hands enclosed around Bunny's wrists and pulled them closer to her so that her arms were bent and relaxed. He had reasoned that an enhanced individual didn't need to brace for a gun's recoil, as evidenced by Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup's usage of firearms. He then adjusted the way she was holding the pistol, and as he was explaining the theory in fine detail, his hands went over to hers so that he could adjust them for her.

"Now look at the sights," the general explained to Bunny, his voice lowered to an unexpectedly gentle tone, his face just behind Bunny's, his mouth close to her ear. "Keep the beads on the paper bad guy in front of you. See the castle in front of you? The towers should all be the same height."

"Fire when ready."

And Bunny did just that, after a few second's hesitance. The bullet zipped right through the heart of the paper target. The general had earlier conducted a quick lesson on gun operation and safety. She knew to anticipate the recoil, and her grip and arm muscles were so strong that the recoil didn't matter at all.

"Perfect. You're just like me, Bunny," the general commended the enhanced girl. "You have whatever it takes to be a good soldier. Believe me, I know."

"Bunny good!" she would be jumping with joy had she not been in the firing range. She could recall every rule of the range at heart, and she didn't want to disappoint the general. In fact, she had forgotten that she was afraid of him. Mom was right all along - he was nice once she got to know him.

Selicia had been watching from the back. She couldn't help but feel… jealousy, and yet she couldn't believe she was jealous of the general of all people. Watching from her angle, General Blackwater and Bunny looked like father and daughter - and she was supposed to be the one to teach her how to handle firearms, as mother and daughter. Although she knew that she was still in charge of Bunny's subsequent target practice, the general had effectively taken away the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to teach Bunny how to shoot the first time. It was something that could happen only once, and she couldn't understand why the general would want to instruct Bunny personally when he was supposed to delegate like the general he was.

Bunny would then move on to fire quick bursts of pistol rounds, failing to connect all the shots at first, before succeeding in making one close grouping after the next. She was a fast learner as she
didn't need to struggle to remember things, and General Blackwater was an effective teacher - it was part of the reason why he was a great leader. Selicia hated it, but there was nothing she could do.

They would then move on to Bunny's heavily modified MP5. It went a lot quicker than with the pistol as she was getting the hang of it. It was tight grouping after tight grouping, at all ranges. But it didn't end there. Bunny would be trained in the use of many diverse firearms of all sizes, from derringers to heavy machineguns that looked like they belonged in the trenches of World War 1. She would learn to field-strip them and put them together again, and how to maintain them. At this point, at least, Selicia had less to complain about, as General Blackwater had to retire to his office because of exhaustion. A bear with good genetics and futuristic medical treatment though he might be, he was still an old man in his sixties.

"I hope the general wasn't too hard on you, Bunny," Selicia said to her while she was supervising Bunny as she was taking apart a GPMG, an M240, giggling and smiling as though she was playing a game and the machinegun was a puzzle to be solved.

"Bunny like General Blackwater. He's nice to Bunny," the enhanced girl said as she removed the barrel of her machinegun. Selicia would be lying if she were to say she wasn't surprised. She didn't think that it was possible for them to get this close, and in one day too.
Chapter 62: Father Figures

Chapter Summary

Bunny continues her training...

Chapter 62: Father Figures

Training Segment: Communications

Date: 26 FEB (Sunday) 1989

Time: 1141

Subject: B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

Role: Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

Status: In Training

"And X… Y… And Z…" Bunny recited the alphabets to her current instructor. After taking a break from the firing range, Bunny was brought to a small conference room in another part of headquarters by Selicia on orders of General Blackwater, in accordance to her training program.

"Very good! Your father sure did a good job teaching you the basics," Bunny's instructor, Corporal Nana Weston, praised her. When Bunny saw that she was going to take over, she was thrilled. Nana, this young woman from nowhere, had been kind to her right from the moment she met her when she came to visit with General Blackwater. Not to mention, the woman was sort of a spitting image of her, except older. They both had brown hair, though Nana's well-toned muscles were acquired, not inherited.

"Bunny good?" the enhanced girl repeated herself. They were seated next to each other behind a conference table.

"Yes, you're good," Nana cooed at her, pinching her cheek at the same time playfully. "Who's good? You are… you are!" Bunny giggled at the same time.

"Bunny like Nana," she said, and the corporal beamed at her. Those three words, though a small number, had made her day. But she knew she had a job to do. She knew she had to earn her keep in order to keep seeing Bunny.

"That's… Thank you. Nana likes Bunny too. Now how about we start learning something new?" the soldier said, visibly moved, caressing Bunny's hair. She pulled out a chart from a bag, one that appeared to display all twenty-six English alphabets with words below them. She was smiling at the same time as if she was in a TV commercial. "Radio code alphabets. Does Bunny think she can handle that?" She had asked playfully, her smile seemingly permanent. Of course, it went without saying that Bunny would likely be able to handle it. It would be harder for her to forget things than remember them, considering that she was gifted with Chemical X2-induced photographic memory which even the legendary Professor Utonium struggled to explain.
"Bunny good!" Bunny repeated herself while throwing her arms up in excitement. She seemed fixated on those words ever since meeting General Blackwater properly.

"Yes, you are! Great, now how about we run through our radio alphabets? A is for Alpha, B is for Bravo..." Corporal Nana began instructing Bunny, who giggled as if she was learning names to give her dolls and soft toys.

It didn't take Bunny very long to memorize the A to Z of radio codes, from Alpha to Zulu. But there was more in the syllabus Corporal Nana Weston had planned for her. It wasn't before long that she was able to get Bunny to memorize the Greek alphabets that the radio codes were based on, but also the language used on the military radio. Then it was onto the Morse code and military lingo. Beyond that, she began using flashcards to teach Bunny the name of various things, but unlike Professor Utonium's innocent pictures of apples and trees and goldfishes and cats, Nana Weston was using pictures containing numerous weapons, from improvised everyday objects to the most obscure firearms. Pictures of various military equipment came after that, then pictures of how different personnel in the USDO, TPD, and other federal or local agencies looked like, all of which she quickly learned the name of alarmingly fast.

And none of it broke Bunny's perfect memorizing streak. When tested on the names of some of the things she saw, she was able to recall all of them, in random order. For that, Nana gave Bunny a lollipop, and she got to choose the flavor. But really, there was the only choice that Bunny would ever take: Grape. It reminded her of the pancakes Daddy made before she came to the USDO headquarters.

---


26 FEB (Sunday) 1989. 1215.

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup could only be confused at Dad's behavior ever since Bunny's departure for training. With her out of the way, he was supposed to spend more time with them, or at least talk to them more.

Instead, he didn't. Back at home, they had to have a second breakfast because they woke up so early. Dad was silent as he prepared the meal, and so was he at the table. He seemed distant, it seemed, with his mind elsewhere. The three of them were chatterboxes as usual, but when they tried to talk to him, he barely replied or would miss half the stuff they talked about.

Not to mention, he had brought them to the strange warehouse church when he wasn't a believer in their rhetoric. He wasn't himself, that much Blossom knew - as she knew, too, that he thought of things in a different way from the 'religious types'. He was silent when he drove them there, and he was silent when he sat down at the VIP area as the church's service began. Blossom, in particular, knew that he was thinking of something, and she could only guess that he must be thinking of Bunny. Her, and Mom. What else could it be?

But if it was any consolation, the one good that Dad did was to bring them to the church, where the people there who believed them to be angels sent from heaven were fawning over them, indulging in their every need. It was a welcome distraction from having to think about Bunny overshadowing them.

They had a long talk with the priest. It was a refreshing change from the silent treatment Dad had been giving them. He promised! Blossom was especially sour with him – she had cried and begged for his attention and he had realized his error and promised it, and yet here he was, going back on his words.
The priest – or saint, as the people here called him – was adamant that she shouldn't blame him, however. He reasoned with her that the job of raising such perfect beings as three angels capable of saving humanity was likely difficult, and to add one more to his duties would be difficult to the point of biblical proportions. Despite how Blossom felt, she thought it made sense. Bubbles and Buttercup weren't exactly easy to handle. She felt that she alone had made it easy for Dad to take care of her – not that she was rewarded for it.

No matter how outlandish the priest's beliefs were, Blossom couldn't help but think that at least he was talking to her, unlike Dad.

After the church, Dad drove the Girls to Princess Morbucks' mansion, still largely mute all the way, not that Blossom felt like talking to him anymore. Confusion and sadness eventually turned to anger and resentment, and of course, she attributed all of this to Bunny. 'Jealousy' wouldn't even begin to cover it.


26 FEB (Sunday) 1989.1256.

It was as if the world was falling apart right before Blossom's eyes. Come to think of it, it had been falling apart ever since she first stepped out of her house. First, she discovered that crime existed on her first trip to the mall. Then, she discovered that her life as a crime-fighter was going to be just one torment after another when she 'fought' her first battle at Townsville Central Bank. She was abused by Mom multiple times, a parent whom she so loved, and even her sisters proved to be corruptible and untrustworthy at times. It seemed as if Dad didn't care about her anymore… and now this.

Princess Morbucks had taken ill in the past few days - more ill than before, to be precise. Where previously she could at least walk, she had become bedridden now. Where previously she was hopeful or even defiantly cheerful and talkative, she was barely clinging on; at any moment now, she could just slip into a depressive state of misery. When the Girls came up to her room, she had greeted them weakly, anemic, literally, as she promptly coughed up blood, which Annie the servant wiped away swiftly as if it was a shameful thing. The Girls, however, had seen it before Annie could hide the blood away. A doctor attending to her was just leaving, the sight of Townsville's three deadliest Girls was a pretty good motivation for him to disappear.

"Shouldn't you be in the hospital? That's the place Dad said people would go to if they're sick," Blossom asked as she hovered over to her - to her, however, it was purely a theory as she had never fallen sick before, and likely never will. Bubbles immediately flew to her, sitting beside her and taking her hand, giving it a squeeze. Buttercup loomed high above obnoxiously, watching the Princess.

"I… I don't want-" the Princess was about to explain things when she had another hacking cough. There was more blood. Bubbles pulled a piece of tissue out of its jewel-encrusted box and wiped it all away. "I don't want to stay in a hospital. I hate it. Dad said I could stay here. Plus, it's really nice to see the three of you."

"Oh, poor Princess…" Bubbles said, still squeezing her hand, caressing it. "I'm sorry this happened to you."

"Maybe with the three of you around, I'll get better?" Elodie Morbucks said, trying to keep things positive.
"Why did this happen anyway?" Buttercup inquired brusquely. "We were supposed to be having fun!"

"The doctor said that I was 'too upset, too often'," the Princess explained.

"It's our fault..." Bubbles remarked sadly, hanging her head low.

"No, Bubbles," the Princess continued. "He also said something about 'bad genetics' and 'genetic diseases' and it wasn't anyone's fault." Of course, despite the Princess' erudite upbringing, she was simply too young to understand the terms she threw out. It might as well mean the same thing as bad luck and fairy tale fate.

The Girls' time at Elodie Morbucks' place was instead spent on talking and reading from the Princess' vast selection of books. It was a sad affair, as although the Princess' 'genetic disease' was often talked about, the cure wasn't, beyond the bare mention that there could be no cure.

---

**Training Segment: Human Anatomy**

**Date:** 26 FEB (Sunday) 1989

**Time:** 1311

**Subject:** B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

**Role:** Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

**Status:** In Training

"-so if you want to kill a human being as quickly as possible and with no chance of any incidents, you will need to aim for the brain as it is what controls the human body. Both the front and back portions here and... here will yield the same results," Doctor Simmons lectured Bunny in his briefing room, which contained no one but them both. He was pointing out different parts of the brain on an anatomy chart, before walking over to an anatomy mannequin to point it out in a more three-dimensional manner. He didn't look very happy while he was teaching, as he was going through the motions without breaking a smile or doing more than just regurgitating his knowledge of the human body. "The next best spot would be the heart - while it might not stop a person as quickly, it will almost certainly kill. Multiple shots will ensure fatality."

"Mister Simmons?" Bunny said while putting up a hand.

"Yes, Bunny?" the old doctor adjusted his glasses as he acknowledged the purple-eyed girl.

"Does everyone have a brain and a heart?" she asked.

"Yes, of course," the doctor answered, looking like he had just spat out a frog.

"Even my Dad?" she asked a further question, puzzling the doctor as to what she was thinking.

"Yes, even your Dad," Doctor Simmons seemed to lighten up at the mention of Bunny's Dad, a smile slowly spreading on his face. Bunny, however, broke into a sob, shrieking for reasons beyond the man, quickly erasing the smile.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "What's distressing you?"
Bunny didn't answer immediately. She just kept crying, blubbering.

"Daddy has a brain and a heart!" Bunny cried.

"Bunny? What is it?" Doctor Simmons asked. Reluctantly, he grabbed a chair and sat down next to her. Picking out a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his lab coat, he helped Bunny wipe away her tears.

"Daddy- Daddy could die!" Bunny managed to enunciate. The doctor sighed. Bunny was too smart for her own good, reaching conclusions she was too emotionally undeveloped to handle.

"Yes… Yes, he could," the doctor said. "But it's not going to happen. Your Dad's tough. Besides, he's got you to protect him now."

"Does Mister Simmons mean it?" Bunny asked, still tearful and sniffling.

"Yeah, he's not leaving us anytime soon," the doctor added as he leaned on his chair, eyes distant, penetrating the ceiling as he thought about things. "My guess? He's fated for so much more - there's just so much more he's meant to accomplish. That's how it is with a man on a mission. And I think that mission involves your elder sisters - Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup - and now you, Bunny."

"Promise?" Bunny pleaded, feeling a little better.

"I promise," Simmons said.

"Mister Simmons reminds me of Daddy," Bunny said, her tearful eyes flitting down briefly to regard his lab coat and office wear, and before the doctor was ready for it, the enhanced girl hugged him. "I miss him!"

Doctor Simmons laughed, his voice rough from age, but kindly despite being weighted down by decades of tragedy. "You'll see him in a few days. I know him well, and he'll always be there, waiting for you."

The door leading into the briefing room slammed open while they were still in their embrace, making the old doctor jump. Bunny got away from him and turned on her seat to see who it was.

"Doctor Simmons! Get out here! Now!" it was General Blackwater, booming like his newly acquired tanks firing a full volley.

"I was just-" Doctor Simmons sounded weak and sheepish compared to him.

"Get out here before I throw you in a cell!" the general gave him no quarter. Resigned, the doctor stood up, exchanged a look with Bunny before stepping out of the door, which the general slammed shut when he did. Bunny sat where she was, knowing that, although she was growing on the general, going against him in any way was a bad idea.

She could hear loud, angry murmurs after that, interspersed with barely audible mumbles, weak and anemic. Bunny tried to listen harder, tears breaking the dams in her eyes, dams that were barely built with mere hours of military training. The voices grew louder and louder the harder she concentrated until she could make out what they were trying to say, to her surprise.

"-Weakening her, when we need to toughen her up!" she heard General Blackwater say.

"That was not weakness I saw. Love is not a weakness," the doctor resisted feebly. She could hear
something slamming against the wall after that, and the doctor shouting in pain.

"The professor made her weak. I think he's doing a good job at that. I don't need you to start," the general went on. Bunny didn't know who 'the professor' was. Her best guess was that it could be a term of endearment or someone's second name as everyone seemed to have one. "We are supposed to undo his mistakes - his shortsightedness. He's endangering our operations at every turn, and Bunny is supposed to be a fresh start!"

"You're calling her Bunny too?" the doctor said, a curious diversion from the topic at hand. "Shouldn't she be B-50 with you?"

Silence ruled the conversation for a pregnant pause.

"And so what if I am? Are you accusing me of something, doc?" the general growled aggressively.

"I've seen the biological sample used to create Bunny. I was helping Doctor Vanum with it. There's… nothing wrong with feeling… that way, general," Doctor Simmons was speaking deliberately, treading carefully with his words. Bunny couldn't figure out why. She couldn't even begin to understand what they meant with the kind of language they were using.

"Get back in there," the general deflected the doctor's insinuations. "I don't want to hear anything about the professor on the monitoring device again."

Then there were footsteps, growing louder. Someone - one of them - was coming back. Bunny shook in fright as she didn't feel like seeing General Blackwater when he sounded really mad outside. The door flew open, but gently. She stared at the doorway. Doctor Simmons. The fright in her, however, clung onto her stubbornly.

Looking at Bunny, Doctor Simmons knew exactly what she was feeling. Walking feebly towards her, looking dejected, he stroked her hair affectionately and exchanged another look with her, doing very well at holding back sadness. But Bunny knew how he felt.

"Let's… move on with our lesson," he said, even though he didn't feel like conducting it. "We'll talk about the different parts of the human body in order of attack priority…"

---

**Training Segment: Unarmed Combat**

**Date:** 26 FEB (Sunday) 1989

**Time:** 1424

**Subject:** B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

**Role:** Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

**Status:** In Training

"Good! Very good!" Bunny's martial arts instructor praised the rising star of the USDO after she was able to execute an excellent karate chop which managed to split a steel rod before her into two. That wasn't her only achievement, however, as she went on, as instructed, to put a deep dent in a steel plating next to it with a straight fist, and give another plate a kick so hard that it'd flown across the underground courtyard they were training in. A dull thud could be heard a second or two later when it landed. All this was done while Bunny was dressed in Karate uniform. It would be easy to imagine that she would be deadlier in her combat armor. "Good!"
"Bunny good!" the enhanced girl exclaimed excitedly when she had earned her stern instructor's approval. His martial arts instructor was a strict, unyielding man (more so than even General Blackwater), a black belt collector of martial art styles imported from Japan not too long ago. He had been rough with Bunny at the beginning of his training regimen, but when she proved to be the student of his dreams, he melted quickly into another sort of fatherly figure to Bunny, though that position was held by Professor Utonium first and General Blackwater second.

Speaking of the general, he had been watching from a bench, alongside Corporal Nana Weston and Sergeant Selicia Goodwin. All of them had been watching, their focus unbroken all the while, all of them with their own vested interest in the new kid around the block.

They continued watching, as Bunny began sparring with her instructor, going slow at first, then speeding up, with the black belt targeting strikes at her and Bunny parrying, redirecting or dodging. Even at his fullest speed, Bunny was untouchable, and even as the minutes passed, she showed no signs of exhaustion. Her instructor, on the other hand, could feel the heat building up in him, his limbs growing heavier, and he began winding down, then stopped.

"Did Bunny do good?" she asked, expecting the same praise she had grown addicted to.

"Yes, you did really well," the Japanese man praised the enhanced being, his accent thick. "Now attack, start slow like before. Ganbatte!"

It was far beyond what Selicia was capable of teaching Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup. Her skills in unarmed combat was either learned on the streets, underhanded techniques with no regulation and theory, or in Organization training, which was a mishmash of many different styles (in less polite terms, a bastardization of many different styles of martial arts pillaged from their respective countries), designed for the modern battlefield as a last resort, emphasizing the killing stroke. Sure, she had picked up one or two other things along the way as a matter of curiosity, but she would never be able to take on a black belt.

Bunny was already outshining her elder sisters, and it had only been a day, with only the basics covered. Selicia couldn't even begin to imagine what she would resemble by the end of the crash course.

As if to prove Selicia's point, Bunny would quickly sail through her master's lessons, absorbing not only the basics of Karate, but that of several other styles of Japanese martial arts, such as Jujutsu, Aikido, and Judo then moving on to devour the Korean systems of Taekwondo and Hapkido. While her technique needed polishing all around, she had gone far above and beyond that which was expected of a first-day student. In the end, her prodigious Chemical X2 enhanced physical performance could easily make up for the deficit in skill - and more.

In fact, she would have gone on to master what she was taught. The only reason why she stopped learning was that they had run out of time.
Chapter 63: Recreation

Chapter Summary

Bunny's training continues...

Chapter 63: Recreation

Training Segment: Close Quarters Combat (Melee)

Date: 26 FEB (Sunday) 1989

Time: 1605

Subject: B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

Role: Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

Status: In Training

"Never expose your body!" Bunny's martial arts instructor shouted when he was able to strike her in the side with his shinai multiple times within the space of seconds, despite her enhanced reflexes. "Not unless you can sacrifice defense for a clear advantage!"

Bunny was impressed by the man, who had introduced himself during the previous lesson as someone from Japan, a land far away and separated by an unimaginably vast stretch of water. Normal people were slow, but not him. Although, in reality, he could never beat Bunny in terms of raw physical performance, he was able to gain an advantage through misdirection, cunning, and experienced anticipation. Bunny had tried to block his attacks, but her moves, bumbling and lacking in concentration, would always come out short or misplaced.

He had been teaching her the fundamentals of kendo. But that wouldn't be all. She would soon be privy to other kinds of techniques belonging to other schools involving archaic weapons, something which her elder sisters were hardly exposed to, beyond a few stray common-sense lessons conducted by Selicia. General Blackwater had never thought it necessary, at least until recently, when Bunny came into the picture.

Things took a Sinocentric turn when the instructor had some men bring in a rack of weapons, filled with medieval implements of death of all shapes and sizes. From the Chinese straight sword known as the Jian to the Chinese spear known as the Qiang, from the Dao, a huge, machete-like weapon, to the intimidating Da Dao, which was similar to the aforementioned thing but mounted on a pole, Bunny would be drilled in their use, through both dance-like routines to practical 'fights' with wooden dummies. Through this exercise, she gained a much better understanding of footwork and its importance, as well as the theory of hand-to-hand weapons in general.

The lesson didn't end there, however. General Blackwater dismissed the Japanese instructor before taking over the class on his own. His lesson was much more humble in outlook - he simply handed Bunny a modern combat knife and brought her over to a dummy made of ballistic gel and filled with blood sacs and organs harvested from a dead pig, arranged to be roughly anatomically correct.
"Imagine that this is your enemy, Bunny," General Blackwater told the enhanced girl as she was staring at the grisly sight of animal organs stuffed into a human-shaped jelly-like substance made to simulate flesh. It even had a pig brain where the skull was, and pig eyes in front of it. "I want you to kill it."

Bunny stepped forward timidly, intimidated by the grotesque features of the organs-filled gel mannequin. Remembering her lessons, she stepped forward, then lunged at the artificial corpse, stabbing it in the heart with her combat knife by thrusting the weapon upwards with a frightened shout. She didn't put much energy into it, but the blade of her combat knife was able to sink all the way into the swine heart in one motion. She withdrew the blade after that, letting blood spurt out from one of the blood sacs she punctured. Some of it had gotten onto her, startling her and causing her to recoil.

Bunny stared at the result of her handiwork, eyes wide and jaws hanging as she forgot herself in the horror of the gore. It took her some time for her to remember what she was doing: impressing General Blackwater, or at least trying to. She turned to him with a bitter smile. She thought she could taste some of the blood on her lips.

"D-did Bunny do good?" she asked the general, almost pleading for some validation from him. The lack of a proud smile and his eyes, which projected unimpressed apathy and even boredom. He crossed his arms and Bunny's eyes drifted to the ground when she realized that she had somehow disappointed the general. It didn't matter why - she just did.

"That was weak, Bunny," the general growled, back to his usual self again, something which she was afraid to see after knowing how good he could be. "Do you know why you were weak?"

"Bunny don't know…" she said, both hands playing nervously with the combat knife. She was sliding the sharp edge of the blade on her fingers. It couldn't cut her, so she didn't know that it was improper.

"You were afraid, that's why," the general said. "You were afraid, and you still don't get it."

"Look at it, Bunny!" General Blackwater bellowed. "Stop closing your eyes and look!"

Bunny did as he was told, wishing that he would stop, afraid that he would do worse if she didn't.

"It's just blood and a bloody dummy!" the general yelled into her ear. "Are you going to be afraid when you have to save Blossom or Bubbles? Or Buttercup? Because if that's so, you're useless! And everything we've been doing today would have been for nothing!"

The general let go of Bunny, and she turned around to face him, shocked that he had made a one-eighty turn and called her useless when he had praised her for being good before.

"I want you to take it on, attack the dummy like it's an enemy!" the general bellowed roughly, pushing Bunny back towards the organ-filled lump of ballistic gel. "Destroy it like it's going to kill your sisters! Go!"

Bunny whirled around, sending her combat knife singing past the mannequin's throat, slicing half the neck away - had it been a human being, it would have dropped dead then. With a shout, she then followed her first strike up with a stab to the head, then further repeated stabs in the heart, just like how she was thought. But she was still doing it wrong, she knew. She was afraid, and her
attacks weren't the sharpest as a result. She had seen, clearly, one of her knife strikes missing the heart by half an inch, her blow to the brain didn't sink all the way to the knife's guard. Her shout was just advertising her fear; she sounded more like the victim of an attack than the attacker.

Looking back at General Blackwater, she could only hope that she had done enough. His crossed arms and glower told her otherwise. Without a word, the general walked away, leaving Bunny behind with the mutilated fake human being.

But then the general stopped after he was a distance away from Bunny, far enough to tell her that he held her with less regard.

"I think you must be exhausted. We'll take five before we continue," he said, before continuing on his way.

"But Bunny's not exhausted…" she mumbled to herself, her eyes closed while she was still facing the ground, trying extremely hard not to let the tears spill for fear that the general might become even more disappointed in her.

---

Training Segment: Strategy and Tactics

Date: 26 FEB (Sunday) 1989

Time: 1924

Subject: B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

Role: Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

Status: In Training

"You need to watch your flanks, Bunny," General Blackwater warned his protege as he pushed a knight on a game board up towards her in an L-shape, worryingly closer to her king. He had opted to start the next training segment with something he thought would capture Bunny's attention. A game of chess, the undefeated classic, the game of choice of kings and generals, and now, it would be the game of choice for the queen of all enhanced individuals. The lesson was held in a lounge, with dimmer lights that were easy on the eyes. The only bright light was a table lamp aimed at the chessboard.

Thus far, he was able to massacre Bunny's army in short order, with most of her pawns KIA and half her special pieces out for the count. Bunny was only able to inflict minor losses on General Blackwater's plastic division, with just a few pawns, a knight and a bishop dead - targets of opportunity that he gave her in order to secure footholds in her territory, as well as to set up kill zones to devastate her army.

"Bunny watch flanks…" she said obediently. In the next few turns, she followed his tip, and with the remnants of her army, attempted to reinforce her flanks, pushing them to the breaking point and sacrificing the few center kill zones she had left going for her.

The general then proceeded to wipe the floor with her - or at least the floor of the chessboard, with her inanimate minions. Bunny looked on in both awe and sadness. It wasn't even the first game they were playing. It was the third game, and she had improved little.

"You know what's your problem, Bunny?" the general growled at her, though this time, he wasn't
as mad as before.

"Bunny bad…" she muttered as she continued to stare at the chessboard, and what was left of her white-donning medieval warriors. She stared at her hapless king, surrounded by intimidating enemies wearing black surcoats.

"That's not very specific," the general said. "You're still in the dark, huh? I told you to watch the flanks, and you did. And before that, I told you to beware the center, which you did. In our first game, you did everything as I asked, even after I told you I've held your hand long enough, just to teach you the game. Do you understand what I'm getting at?"

"No…" Bunny said. Her eyes flitted up to meet the general's, only to go back down again.

"You're too naive, Bunny. I told you all those things to bring your defenses down, and you listened without thinking," the general revealed. "You are not your sisters, Bunny, but you're acting like them. As in dumb and naive. You're better than that, Bunny."

"Bunny try again…" she offered meekly. It took all her courage to do it, as she knew early on that it was the general who tended to initiate things, and it would be rude for her to do so. "Bunny's not dumb and naive."

And so they had another game, only for General Blackwater to beat her in a couple of moves. Bunny had moved a couple of pawns forward, only to inadvertently open up her king to an attack. The general had seen the opportunity from a mile away and moved his queen across the board to give her a line of sight against Bunny's king. With no place to move and no expendable soldiers to block the queen's sniper shot, it was all over before the match had really begun.

"Checkmate, Bunny," the general said simply, before leaning back. "Game over."

Bunny gave a sigh, though unexpected, a question floated to the surface of her mind.

"But why is it over? Bunny has many soldiers…" she asked, waving a hand at her army, which was completely intact and arrayed in formation against the general.

"Well…" the general started, but paused quickly, as he had to rack his brain to think of a simple way to explain things to the days-old Bunny. "In an army, there's always one man who gave all the orders. In your family's case, it's your Dad. In the Powerpuff Girls' case, it's Blossom."

Bunny smiled briefly when she remembered about Daddy. General Blackwater was really good at distracting her, making her forget about missing him. In some twisted way, Bunny liked the general for it, as it'd made missing Dad a little more bearable.

"In the USDO's case, it's me, and in your army's case, it's your king," the general went on. "Imagine what would happen if your Dad were to die, taken out by some sniper. What would happen to your family?"

"Bunny doesn't want Dad to die…" Bunny said, downcast upon the bare mention of Daddy going away forever.

"And that is why we have the queen," the general went on, picking up his black queen piece and handing it over to Bunny. "The pawns could only do so much - ordinary soldiers are numerous for a reason. Even the bishops, knights and rooks can't handle everything, that much is true whenever your sisters fail time and again. But the queen - the queen will make amends, turn the battle around… Will she?" He'd said this with eyes pinned on Bunny as if penetrating deep into her soul. Bunny held the general's black queen piece even tighter. It was precious in her eyes, considering
the feat it had performed - basically defeating an entire army in just two moves.

Bunny thought about Dad. She really didn't want to see the day when he wouldn't be there anymore.

She nodded to the general after that.

The general would see to it that she got to apply her new-found sense of logic and strategy to a more realistic and less abstract setting. At first, they swapped out the chessboard for what amounted to a highly realistic tabletop war game, complete with hundreds of soldier pieces - but the key difference was that realism was the only rule. The pieces could do anything as long as it was deemed realistic, logical or believable.

Instead of having black pieces go up against white pieces in a medieval setting, the war game was built to emulate the different factions of Townsville, with law enforcement agencies going up against the various forces of evil; the Foundation, criminal enterprises, and cults in the local area. There were even pieces representing the Powerpuff Girls and Bunny.

The first scenario was the easiest - a hundred USDO soldiers and police officers, the Powerpuff Girls and Bunny had put an army of gangsters, cultists and Foundation agents under siege in the town hall. Bunny was given control of the 'good guys' while General Blackwater was moving the 'bad guys'.

She would send all USDO soldiers and police officers rushing headlong towards the town hall, most hurtling towards the front, while the excess manpower was sent into the sides. This, despite sending them into a hail of bullets and grenades. Bunny would keep her sisters in reserve, far behind and idle, her reasoning being that she wanted them safe. She would then send herself through an opening that was available when an entire squad of USDO soldiers was cut down by machinegun fire. The soldiers and police officers had done little damage and killed few of the enemies, and when Bunny was inside the town hall, was only able to take down ten or so bad guys before she herself was rendered unconscious by too much pain from too many gunshots, before being dragged off and abducted to be interrogated and experimented upon by the Foundation. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup wouldn't be far behind in the near future - at least, that was General Blackwater's narration of the events that transpired in the tabletop scenario.

Bunny would hone her tactics after that, using what the general had taught her in chess. Rather than applying pressure at a single spot, she would form a line around the town hall and prod at the enemy's defenses, losing few men in the process, and when there was a gap in their defense - the general had introduced one in the form of a gaping hole in the side of the town hall - she would flood it with troops.

"I know how you feel about your sisters," the general had said in the middle of this. "But you can't hold on to them so tightly when they're powerful in their own ways. They are assets you must use."

"But what if they get hurt?" she asked while the war game was frozen in time like a diorama produced by an obsessed hobbyist. "Bunny love sisters…"

"Sometimes, when you love someone, you have to let them go…” the general said, with surprising warmth, eyes softened as he stared down at Bunny. "You just have to watch over them and make sure they're safe, like the good leader you are."

"Okay…” Bunny said, once again won over by the general's way with words, as direct and gruff as he was. In the war game, she would direct her sisters to drop down on the enemy when it was fully encircled by the combined USDO-TPD task force, and she herself would go in to add chaos to the
misery of the besieged criminals. A fair number of soldiers and police officers died, but Bunny and her sisters survived without being abducted.

"Did Bunny do good?" she would ask again as she was looking down on the town hall map filled with figurines that were knocked over, representing their 'dead' status.

"You did great, cadet," the general praised the enhanced girl, with a barely-suppressed smile on his face. "But that's just the warm-up…"

Bunny would next be treated to a scenario where the only piece she was in control of was herself, the purple-black ops figurine. Set in a rural plantation, the USDO-TPD task force numbers were reduced to half the size. Because of this, all they could do was hide behind vehicles or other barriers to trade gunshots with the larger Foundation-Criminal-Cult coalition. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were directed by General Blackwater, the game master, to smash through the roof of the plantation house and begin slaughtering criminals. Bunny decided that speed was key here to protect her sisters, so she moved her piece through the front entrance of the town hall, fighting through the numerous enemy guards there. Bogged down by the overwhelming numbers, she was taken down by the sheer firepower directed at her. Her sisters eventually succumbed without reinforcement.

"Oh..." Bunny said sadly as she watched General Blackwater knocking down the Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup figurines, which symbolized their defeat. Instead of waiting for him to do the same to her, she lay her piece face-down as well.

"You can't let your feelings get in the way of your objectives, Bunny, whatever that may be," the general lectured her. But Bunny wasn't listening. Disappointed with herself, she was close to tears. It was all the worst, as she was supposed to be better than this, as the general had mentioned countless times. The general sighed and thought about the best tactical maneuver to approach the Bunny situation. In the end, he put a beefy hand on her shoulder and squeezed. "This is a simulation, Bunny. While I want you to get it right, don't take it too hard. If you want to help your sisters, you need to be stronger than this. We'll take five before continuing."

Bunny turned to the general in surprise as he went on his way to the break room. He had never spoken to her that way before, and she liked it so much that she was tearing up anyway.

"Come on," the general beckoned for her to follow him after opening the door, and a bright light shone in. Smiling, she trailed behind him, Professor Utonium, once again, forgotten in her distraction.
Chapter 64: Rabbits

Chapter Summary

Day 2 of Bunny's training begins on a bad footing.

Chapter 64: Rabbits

'It's been fun, Dad. Daddy is right about this place. Bunny gets to learn new things and meet new people. General Blackwater was really mean and not nice to me, but h-he was nice after that. He taught me a lot of cool stuff, gave me a lot of presents, like a new dress that looks really pretty and lots of toys, and he talks to me like Dad does… sometimes. Bunny met Mister Simmons too, and he's a lot like Daddy. Bunny don't think Mister Simmons and General Blackwater are friends though. What's… that word? T-they were shouting at each other, and I don't think friends shout at each other.

Bunny still miss you, Daddy… I miss you so much (sobbing). It's nice to make friends but… Friends are not the same as Daddy. Bunny wants Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup too. Bunny never got to play with sisters (sobbing). Mommy's been staying away from me. I don't know why (sobbing). Did Bunny do something bad? When I asked General Blackwater about it, General Blackwater said that we are just busy, and Mommy's been busy too, and it's just how it is when people are doing work and trying to help people like Bunny's sisters.

Bunny can't wait to come back. Bunny finally get to see Mommy again soon. Mister Simmons said that Mom's going to teach me some things like you did. Goodbye Daddy, and goodnight, sound recorder.' - Bunny Utonium, 02/26/89, 2053. Sound Record File 1.

Training Segment: Rest and Recreation

Date: 26 FEB (Sunday) 1989

Time: 2155

Subject: B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

Role: Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

Status: In Training

The last hour had been less eventful for Bunny, but it was hardly boring by any definition. After taking a quick shower (a sergeant assigned to watch over her made sure that it was a really quick shower) and after a similarly quick meal, she got to really be with her Mom again. With Dad absent, it was her turn to teach her new words, and by General Blackwater's orders, simple mathematics; adding and subtracting numbers up to a hundred and the times table.

When that painful affair was over, Bunny was called to the general's office again. After knocking on his door, she entered the room and was met with a most interesting sight. Sitting on General Blackwater's desk was a cage. There was a white, fluffy rabbit in it. The general was bending over
it, caressing the rabbit, which did not seem afraid of him. He looked up when he noticed that Bunny was staring at him.

"Evenin', Bunny," the general greeted. He was finally out of his tactical gear. This time, he was wearing a standard-issue USDO shirt with the trousers of his uniform and boots still on. His ID tags were hanging loosely on his neck. "Don't just stand there, cadet. Come over here and meet your new friend."

Bunny scooted over to the general eagerly, pressing her face close to the cage as she watch the rabbit twitch its whiskers, flexing its nose and turning to look at her with its dark, beady eyes.

"This here specimen is what you call a rabbit," the general introduced the creature to her. "Her name is Rabbit. Here-" Picking up the rabbit by the skin of its nape, the general plopped it into Bunny's arms. The rabbit did not resist - it was entirely obedient and submissive.

"Dad told me about rabbits!" Bunny exclaimed in excitement as she wasted no time to stroke the creature's luscious fur.

"Do you like it?" the general asked, a triumphant smile spreading across his face.

"Rabbit's beautiful!" Bunny said.

"I knew you'd say that. How about you keep it?" the general proposed. Bunny's eyes went up to meet the general's, all happy and starry and grateful. "Let's go to your bunk. I'll teach you how to take care of it. It's a heavy responsibility I believe you'll be able to handle…"

But that wasn't the only thing the general did. After teaching Bunny how to care for Rabbit the rabbit (an odd name choice that Bunny did little but laugh at), the general ordered Selicia to leave the room.

It was bedtime, and General Blackwater had a very different idea of what would make a really good bedtime story. He would tell her about his very own exploits, turning the period before she fell asleep into a stealthy lesson with the most pragmatic moral ever. He told her about his participation in World War II as a young enlistee, how he had become involved in the war long before other Americans did. He told her about him aiding in the hunt for Rommel until he and his squad was called away to a very special mission where he would find an ancient tomb. He would go on to battle a monster found deep inside it, which had likely been wandering its massive halls and catacomb-like corridors for millenniums, or been woken up by the Nazis and Imperial Italian legionaries who disturbed the underground necropolis. He would describe the battle in agonizing detail, and that he had, in the end, triumphed.

"And that is why there's nothing wrong with retreating - as long as you're doing it to survive and find another way to defeat your enemies," General Blackwater pretty much spelt out the moral of the story, referencing how he and other surviving soldiers had retreated into a room filled with black water, only for him to find a Duranium spear that helped him defeat the monster in the tomb. The monster was the very first enhanced creature he had ever faced - some kind of an arthropod, though not entirely, that wouldn't have looked out of place in a primordial age - and its death had been his crowning achievement for a very long time. In a way, it still was. "And when you survive, you'll go on to do more."

"What happened to General Blackwater's friends?" Bunny asked timidly as she gazed up at her general, completely enraptured by the story he told, by the stories he would tell.

"Call me Carver. Douglas Carver. I'll leave the middle name out for now. I'm off-duty," the general
introduced himself for real this time. "Just don't do it in front of anyone."

"What happened to Mister Douglas Carver's friends?" Bunny repeated her question as she turned a little in bed so as to better face the general. She felt a certain connection to him, despite the man pushing her away from him at times.

"They… died one after the other over the years. Of all the men who went into that tomb, I was the only one left," the general said. He leaned back on his chair, his face out of the light from the table lamp beside Bunny's cot.

"Mister Douglas must be lonely…" Bunny surmised, feeling sad for the old man. "Does Mister Douglas have his own family? Like a Dad? And Mom? And sisters?"

"My parents are long dead. I have two brothers and a sister - families were huge back in the day. I think I have about nine or so nephews and nieces running around, with their own children. Wife's dead, and my children - John and Eleanor, either doesn't know I'm still alive or doesn't care," the general went on. From the glint of his eyes still visible in the dark, Bunny thought she could make out that the general was upset, though she couldn't be sure. "Last I heard, John's some officer in the army while Eleanor ran a chain of restaurant, got married and had several children. I haven't seen them in more than a decade. But I'm proud of them - they are their father's children…"

"Mister Douglas must be really lonely…" Bunny added to her previous speculation.

"Lonely? Hardly. I have hundreds of soldiers here at headquarters and more around the country and the world," the general said. He sounded like he wanted to say more, add some things to his list, but hesitated and sighed. "You should sleep, Bunny. Training will get harder tomorrow. Make me proud."

"Yes, Mister Douglas…" Bunny obeyed and yawned before closing her eyes.

An hour passed, then two. While Bunny slept, the door to her bunk opened. Bunny did not notice, of course, as she was asleep and snoring loudly like Buttercup. A shadow crept into the room, watched only by Rabbit the rabbit, and it stood over Bunny as if contemplating over a range of things it could do to her while she was helpless as a baby. The shadow watched Bunny as she breathed in and out in her sleep, a bolster and a rabbit soft toy in her arms. Carefully, the shadow wrapped its hand around the neck of the rabbit toy, a gift from Bubbles, and tugged at it. Bunny's arm fell away, unconsciously relinquishing control over the soft toy. Soon, the shadow was able to possess it. Shaking with silent laughter, it retreated out the door and away, the door closing by itself with all evidence of it ever being there gone.

A further three hours passed, and Bunny stirred awake, having slept her fill. Five hours was considered excessive to Bunny, as she usually needed just four. However, it was still early, as the next training session wasn't until ten minutes later.

Sitting up from her bed, Bunny stretched her arms and her back, yawning heartily. Putting her bolster aside, she searched her bed for her precious rabbit soft toy, but couldn't find it. It'd concerned her, as it was precious to her because of its origin. Swinging down from her bed, Bunny looked underneath it for the elusive soft toy, only to find nothing, again. Panic began welling up in her when she realized that it was missing, and quite seemingly of its own accord too as if it were alive.

Selicia walked in on Bunny while she was still searching for Bubbles' gift. She was supposed to be ready and waiting outside her bunk a few minutes ago.
"Bunny, what on Earth are you doing!?” Selicia scolded the enhanced girl. The room was being turned upside down in Bunny's frenzied quest for her missing rabbit soft toy.

"Bunny's doll gone!” the enhanced girl wailed as she upturned her cot to search the floor below it. But there was no such luck. "BUNNY'S DOLL GONE!"

"You're supposed to be ready for training, Bunny!” Selicia shouted in disbelief. Bunny had never acted this way before. Even her new rabbit (the living one) seemed to realize what was going on and was hiding futilely in a corner of its cage.

"But Bunny's doll gone!” Bunny repeated herself - she had gone through the length and breadth of her bunk, turning it into a warzone, and yet her rabbit soft toy was still missing. She sunk to the floor and cried inconsolably.

"Look, we'll search for it after training-" Selicia tried to reason with her, only for Bunny to blow up:

"Bunny doll gone!” she repeated herself as she cried. "Bubbles gave Bunny doll and it's gone!"

The door opened once again, and another sergeant, a third party in charge of Bunny's discipline, walked in as well.

"What in the hell is goin' on here!?” the sergeant barked at Bunny. "You were supposed to be out five minutes ago! We have to wait for you now like a row of maids, princess!?”

"She's just been having trouble finding her favorite toy, that's all," Selicia explained apologetically to the drill sergeant, whose face turned from one of utter rage to one of disbelief.

"Just get her a new one! We need to move, now, now, now! Move it, soldier!” the sergeant barked regardless. Marching over to Bunny, he grabbed her by the upper arm and tried to drag her to her feet. Bunny screamed like an animal and wrenched herself away from him however, collapsing to the floor chest first. She wouldn't get up after that and instead kept on crying there, beating the floor with her hands and feet in a childish tantrum. The drill sergeant, in the meantime, was thrown into the upturned cot. He groaned in pain there and didn't get up immediately.

The training program was falling apart - all because of a missing soft toy.

And Selicia wouldn't have it. It was making her mad - Bunny had reminded her of Bubbles; how weak she was, how she couldn't live up to the potential she had in her. But now, Bunny was making Bubbles look good. Gritting her teeth, it was Selicia's turn to march up to Bunny. Just like the sergeant before her, she picked her up by the arm, dragging her to her knees, and before she could get away, Selicia delivered a slap across her cheek, letting the enhanced girl drop to her elbow, clutching her cheek as she looked up at her Mom in shock.

"Knock it off, Bunny Utonium!” Selicia bellowed at Bunny. "You're ruining everything over a stupid toy! So get up, get dressed and get out!"

Bunny, however, became too shocked to move instead, after getting that slap in the face. Selicia had to do everything for her in the end, and it took much longer than before. She had to skip a shower to make up for the lost time.

"What am I supposed to do with you?” Selicia remarked while she was helping Bunny to put her uniform on, softening up her voice when Bunny finally calmed down - at least on the outside. "I'd rather risk my life and limb going on a hunt for Blisstina again than do this at this rate…”
"General Blackwater's going to kill us all," the drill sergeant said while he was watching Bunny get ready - it was all he could do at the moment.

---

**Training Segment: Day 2 Revision**

**Date:** 27 FEB (Monday) 1989

**Time:** 0517

**Subject:** B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

**Role:** Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

**Status:** In Training

There was a knock on the door. General Blackwater swiveled around in his chair to face it. He was already dressed in tactical gear - one could never be too careful these days. He had faced numerous assassination attempts before, whether it was perpetrated by the Foundation spies or Organization dissidents, it mattered little. In fact, he was surprised that no one had tried to assassinate him in his time in Townsville yet. He took a suck out of his cigar and puffed out the smoke. Normally, he wouldn't smoke, but times were changing, dragging him along for the ride, and even he was feeling a little nervous. As well as a whole lot of other things.

Whoever it was on the other side of the door knocked again on the glass pane of his office door. He hadn't seen who it was yet, not even on the CCTV monitor on his desk linked to the camera outside, but he had a pretty good idea who it was.

Training was supposed to commence at o-five-hundred hours. If he was pissed, he wasn't showing it.

"Get in here!" he called out to the person on the other side of the door after blowing out another lungful of smoke. The door opened. It was Selicia, holding a visibly upset Bunny by the hand, leading her in. Her cheeks and eyes were reddened, stained with tears. There was no subtlety to it.

"What is this?" the general questioned mother and daughter, unsmiling. It was that side of the general the both of them were afraid of. He turned to Bunny, specifically, who shrank away from his gaze as if it could shred Kevlar. She'd done it so hard that she had accidentally pushed her Mom back, who winced and egged her forward again. "Are you aware that you're late?"

"Bunny lost her soft toy is all, general. She was trying to find it," Selicia explained, but the general didn't even look up at her.

"I was talking to Miss Bunny Utonium, not you," he merely said, again without looking up at the sergeant. "Why don't you leave me and the kid be, Selicia Goodwin."

The Mom knew better than to object, despite her instincts telling her otherwise. The best she could do was to caress Bunny in the head one last time before walking out of the room. The best she could hope for was punishment for Bunny.

"Explain yourself, Bunny," the general demanded. Taking the cigar out of his mouth, he snuffed it out on an ashtray. Bunny thought it was for the better. The smell was horrible. Leaning back on his high-backed leather chair, he stared at Bunny, awaiting her explanation.

"Bunny lost toy…" the enhanced girl mumbled, unable to bring herself to look at the man she had
just recently befriended - yet, the general felt like something more than just a friend. It made the moment all the harder to take. She forced herself to face him eye-to-eye. She knew he liked that. "Bunny's favorite toy…"

"So you wasted time - time dedicated to training so you may help your sisters - because of a toy?" the general said. For some reason, he seemed to be disconnected from this, beyond a wave of slight, seething anger churning beneath him. "Is your precious toy more valuable than your sisters?"

"No…” Bunny said. Her eyes searched the floor as she processed what the general had said, connecting the dots. She remembered why she was here - to train to be like her crime-fighting sisters and even exceed their capabilities so that she could protect them who were weaker - and it hit her that she had messed up. "Bunny's sorry…"

"It was a test, Bunny, and you have failed your test," the general added. "Had this been on the field, the consequences would have been dire. You would have jeopardized one mission or another." He pressed the buzzer on his desk after that. The door flung open shortly, and in walked Bunny's drill sergeant and in his hands was her rabbit soft toy, her treasured gift from Bubbles.

At this point, Bunny wasn't sure whether to be happy or upset - too many emotions were running through her, more than she could handle. Being raised in a simpler and more doting environment, she would tend to feel one thing at a time.

The drill sergeant saluted and went around General Blackwater's desk, dumping the white rabbit soft toy beside the general after that and promptly leaving. The general grabbed the toy by the artificial ears.

"Do you know how you lost your toy in the first place?" the general pressed Bunny. Bunny shook her head, face pale from shock at the turn of events, from the fear that things might get worse. "You let your guard down. YOU let your guard down and you lost your toy. And that wasn't even the worst consequence. Sergeant McKinsey was able to sneak up on you. If he were an enemy, he would have killed you. If there were anyone around you, relying on you, he would have killed them too."

"Bunny's sorry…” she cried, tears on the verge of spilling again, but she tried her best to hold it in, knowing that the general hated it. Surprisingly, it was harder than walking around in a 100-pounds-something protective suit, or firing a Browning heavy machinegun from the hip, or beating a multidisciplinary black belt at his own game.

"I don't need you to be sorry," General Blackwater growled. "I need you to be on your guard and be careful. If you like your toy so much, you'd better hold onto it tighter, just like how I want you to hold onto your friends and family tighter from now on, because one mistake and you could lose them all, do you understand?"

"Yes…” Bunny said.

"Don't lose it again, and I don't just mean the doll," the general said, handing the soft toy over. After studying the general's posture and the rabbit toy for a moment, aware that he could be trying to trick her, she swiped for it. No, there were no tricks this time, and she was able to get it back. Bunny cried as she hugged it closely, remembering how sweet Bubbles was to her.

The next hour was spent on revision, though with her, revision and examinations were one and the same. She was tested on everything she had learned the previous day. The general played a huge part in her revisions and was secretly delighted when she was far more serious than she was the
previous day. After being woken up by her planned tragedy in the morning.

She was able to remember every radio alphabets from Alpha to Zulu, translate codes to their actual contents, and run through multiple entire radio scenarios without pausing or making mistakes. When given three random weapons, one after the other, she was able to name them, strip them, put them back together again and finally, fire them with near-perfect accuracy, with any deviation the fault of the weapons she was given, not hers. Whether attacked by an unarmed USDO operative or one who was armed with a sword or spear, she was able to come out unscathed and victorious. Finally, she was able to hold out against General Blackwater for numerous turns, whether it was in chess or his realistic Townsville tabletop game…

And in the latter, all she had to do was sacrifice one of her three sisters, thinking to herself that it was something that would never happen in real life.
Chapter 65: Games

Chapter Summary

General Blackwater gives Bunny a surprise, and she was taught how to give surprises on her own.

Chapter 65: Games

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

27 FEB (Monday) 1989. 0655.

Selicia was finally able to sit in her own bed after a day of absence in her own home. But it didn't bring her any joy or relief. She wasn't supposed to be home, not for another two days, but here she was.

Bunny wasn't with her. The general had dismissed Selicia and sent her packing with no reasons given. Selicia, however, knew the reason. It didn't need to be said between them and she understood when the general would just stare her down in her debriefing. She'd seen the way the general was looking at Bunny, and it scared her. She had never seen General Blackwater that way before. But it couldn't be. Why would the general ever become attached to her? Enhanced beings had killed most of the friends and comrades he knew intimately in the USDO - he hated them with a passion. Hated them for decades. Even with Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, who were clearly on his side and obedient to his command (for the most part), he was barely able to stop himself from acting out in anger towards them.

Why the change now?

She thought that she was either getting in the general's way or that she had failed him this morning, by allowing Bunny's discipline to slacken. But it didn't matter. Either way, she was no longer with Bunny any longer; she had failed, and now she was afraid of what the general would put her through in her absence.

It was still early, and Selicia had returned home much earlier after Bunny had reported to the general. The first thing she did was to check up on her sweetie - Thomas Upton. She was sitting close to him, stroking his hair affectionately. He seemed to have responded, turning for a moment before putting a hand over hers, but she knew he wasn't awake.

After a few minutes of watching him, she went to the Girls' room and sat on Buttercup's side of the queen-sized bed, caressing her back. She, too, responded subconsciously, hugging her thigh where she sat.

When the family came down to the kitchen and living room, they would be surprised to see her…

Training Segment: Vehicular Operations

Date: 27 FEB (Monday) 1989
Time: 0738

Subject: B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

Role: Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

Status: In Training

"And this, right here, is where you load the tank's cannon shell," General Blackwater pointed out the loading station of the tank he and Bunny were in. It was cramped inside, but Bunny's smaller size and having fewer soldiers in the turret made it less claustrophobic. The general was sitting in the commander's seat, and Bunny was in the gunner's. They were previously in the driver's cockpit, and Bunny actually got to drive the tank, which was an old M60 Patton tank that the USDO had purchased off the army.

After the revisions, the general and his motorcade had driven Bunny to the closest US army base to conduct a lesson in vehicular operations. The parking complex of the USDO headquarters was too small, too enclosed and too exposed to the public eye, and even Townsville's national guard depot would have compromised the secretive nature of Bunny's training. The nearby US army base, Fort Crassusvale, thus, became the ideal training ground.

Bunny liked it very much, being this close to General Blackwater. The limited space of the tank felt cozy to her, and it gave her an excuse to get even closer to him than before. In the driver's cockpit, she was even sitting on his lap, though he was clearly grunting and wincing from her weight - she was wearing her protective suit, which made her weight the equivalent of a heavy adult.

The training was more than just about piloting a tank, however, much to Bunny's delight. She got to do the same with the USDO's (admittedly antiquated) APCs, the more modern IFVs, Humvees, old Jeeps, all the way down to common civilian trucks, vans, and cars. An entire fleet of vehicles had been assembled for her training. If it hadn't been top-secret, it would have attracted a huge crowd of onlookers, but since it was, just a small gathering of high-ranking officers was observing.

"You see this joystick-looking thing here?" General Blackwater patted the top of a stick beside him while he was sitting in the shotgun seat of an old Toyota car. Bunny was in the driver's seat, turning the steering wheel gently while she was running laps around the army base. "That's the gear. You shift it while you are speeding up or slowing down."

It would have been a funny sight, seeing an 8-year-old driving a car, right next to the fact that Bunny wasn't even a week old yet. Her eyes were barely high enough to be able to look over the dashboard of the car, but thankfully, the general thought, she was created to be physically eight, and a tall one at that. Had it been Blossom, the car seat would have needed several encyclopedias for a boost and the pedals, bricks.

Mastering the use of a car, however, didn't spell the end of the lesson.

"Did your father teach you how to ride a bike?" the general asked Bunny while she was concentrating on making a three-point turn so that she could reverse the car and park it next to a Jeep she had done the same with not too long ago.

"Yes… it was the funnest day ever," Bunny said. She couldn't help but reminisce on it, and it distracted her, causing her to scrape the back of her training car against the Jeep, likely damaging the paint. The impact jolted her, and she quickly corrected her error. "Oops…"
"Good to know that Utonium took my suggestion," the general mumbled to himself, before turning to Bunny. "I'm about to do the same."

They got out of the car, and the general led Bunny to a warehouse. One would have expected it to be filled with spare hardware, but it was empty except for a solitary cargo truck, which the general and Bunny approached. A man in USDO uniform who was standing beside it saluted quickly before opening the shutter at the back of the truck. With the help of an assistant disembarking from the cab of the truck, they dropped a ramp built into the truck. Before they entered the cargo compartment, however, the general stopped them and did it himself, disappearing into the darkness while Bunny waited in anticipation of another surprise.

There was a clunk emanating from inside the truck. It didn't take long after that for Bunny to see Douglas Carver emerge from the darkness with his hands on the handles of a... bike.

It wasn't the kind that Daddy bought her. It looked bulkier, and heavier, with machinery attached to it.

It was a motorcycle, and it was clearly for her because of its purple color theme. The general was wheeling it out with a smile on his face, which soon spread to Bunny.

"Is it..." she was so surprised that she couldn't complete her sentence. "Is it for- for..."

"Yes, Bunny, it's for you. As in, you get to ride it and take it home," the general answered nonetheless, pleased that the enhanced girl liked the bike. He wheeled it over to her, and she picked it up effortlessly to inspect the mid-section of the bike and the engine. "Gentle, Bunny."

"It's different from the bike Dad gave Bunny..." she said before putting it down again. The numerous controls confused her, though she was beginning to put together what some of the parts were for. The bike had its own dashboard, though it was smaller, and there were pedals, too, like the other vehicles she drove.

"It's not just any kind of motorcycle, either," the general said. "It's custom-made. Bigger engines, bulletproof armor and some compartments for weapons."

"I can teach you how to ride it, but it's similar to riding a bicycle," the general went on and offered, an offer that Bunny took up immediately. Pretty soon, she was riding the bike around the army base at high speeds. The general had turned it into the game to see how fast she could circumnavigate the base while he smoked a cigar and sat on the hood of a humvee, timing her.

And that was when he discovered something. He thought he could see trails of light emanating from behind Bunny while she was zooming around the base, analogous to Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup's whenever they flew or ran at high speeds. Professor Utonium would call it an X-energy contrail, an effect produced by the consumption of Chemical X when light and used Chemical X were released as waste energy and matter. It meant that Bunny was already drawing on the Chemical X2 in her body, and for more than just lifting weights or running.

He would later find out the rough perimeter of the army base, and when he did the calculations, realize that she had somehow pushed the motorcycle beyond its top speed. He would later get Doctor Vanum to verify his findings as he couldn't find it within himself to trust his antiquated high school education, but his math would be found to be accurate, and Doctor Vanum would also put his stamp of approval on his findings. With what the doctor knew, he was able to explain it either: Bunny had harnessed her Chemical X2 to build up some X-thrust, propelling her and the bike beyond the top speed of the vehicle. A biological, built-in Nitro system, in other words.
Training Segment: Stealth and Subterfuge

Date: 27 FEB (Monday) 1989

Time: 1045

Subject: B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

Role: Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

Status: In Training

After learning how to drive way before her time, Bunny was driven away from the rural country back into the city. She was brought to the outskirts of the city where an abandoned mall sat, the same one where Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were given their one-day crash course.

General Blackwater did not tell her immediately what the next activity was, however. The first thing they did was a 'treasure hunt', when the general would lead Bunny from room to room in search of weapons and items that would be advantageous to her in any given mission. The first room she went to was a summer wear shop, with the shelves nearly empty - surprisingly, there were still a few odd pairs of shirts and pants still lying around. Bunny would take from this room what her training had prepared her to recognize - a fire extinguisher served as a nasty bludgeon or mist machine, a pair of scissors in the drawer of an old cashier counter for blinding or killing and a measuring tape that could double as a garrote wire for strangling.

"The point of improvising and scavenging, Bunny, is not always about the offensive," General Blackwater lectured Bunny after she laid out everything she had found in front of him. He walked over to a shelf containing some old and dusty shirts and pants and an odd cap. He picked them up. "These, for instance."

"But what can Bunny do with those?" the enhanced girl laughed.

"Reminds me of that one time during the Vietnam War. I pulled the uniform off a dead soldier and set it up as a distraction. Two communists fell for it, and it was their last mistake," the general explained, before simplifying it when he realized he had been reminiscing too much selfishly, using words that Bunny would never understand. He walked over to the cashier counter and put the cap on its surface. "You can make it look like you are there."

"Oh…" Bunny said upon realizing the endless possibilities that came with picking up various odds and ends.

"It doesn't have to be a discarded cap. If you have a helmet or a headphone, those could work too, if you set them upright," the general said, then moved on to hold the shirt he salvaged from the store shelf in front of her. "Rags like these could be burned as a distraction, or even thrown right into your enemy's face to disorientate him. With your mighty strength, it might even hurt him."

They would go from room to room, picking up odds and ends for use in an imaginary mission. It wasn't just a treasure hunt anymore - Bunny would have fun imagining how she could use all the junk she had salvaged from her surroundings to defeat the hypothetical evil enemies who would hurt her sisters.

Going through the backdoor of the summer wear shop, Bunny would pick up a fire ax and a loose pipe with obvious applications, then a first-aid kit and a flashlight as utilities. She would also move on to pick up a rat to either serve as emergency rations or as a distraction especially when forced
into a pail she found that would rattle and cause a commotion as the rat tried to get out of it. The pail was also good for hiding a grenade, claymore or any other kinds of explosive charges.

In an employee washroom, she wasn't able to procure much... Until the general taught her that, sometimes, she would have to break things to use them. Bunny proceeded to beak a mirror to obtain multiple shards of glass, useful for looking around corners, or stabbing men in the neck while they were rounding said corners.

After the treasure hunt and guessing game, Bunny was taught how to sneak around quietly. General Blackwater had done it with both practical instructions and a game of hide-and-seek. She was set loose on a squad of USDO soldiers after that.

The scenario used had been the same one as what her predecessors had been put through. A group of renegade USDO soldiers had deserted and holed themselves up in a clothes shop within the mall. The only thing that was different was the objective - Bunny was tasked with assassinating the leader without alerting the rest of the defectors.

Bunny was deployed outside the abandoned mall, the same as her sisters. Unlike her sisters, however, she was alone and armed only with a suppressed pistol and several flashbangs and smoke grenades.

Jogging towards the mall, Bunny hid behind a derelict car and spied on the roof of the mall. When she spotted no one, she ran as fast as she could towards a side door, rivaling the running speed of her sisters. Passing through an employees-only corridor, she got into the mall and hid among some boxes. There were numerous boxes and other obstacles between her and the shop containing her target. Peeking over her hiding spot, she saw four USDO soldiers guarding the side facing her. She strained her eyes to try to look through the unclean display windows of the shop. Something odd happened to her vision - it was as though things got bigger and clearer when she strained her eyes hard enough. Sure enough, she could see moving shapes in the shop. She had found the place where her target was hiding.

Her thought process had been similar to Blossom's, though her approach was different - superior, even, because of her training. The way to the shop was treacherous, and it was tougher for Bunny since her detection would end the scenario. Looking up, she saw that there were corridors stretching out across the mall on the next floor, and one such sky corridor was close enough to the shop that she could use it to get above the USDO soldiers without them noticing.

She waited, took occasional peeks from the shadows to see if the guards were looking, and when they had gone back into the shop, she ran up a flight of stairs, her steps lighter than her armor would indicate. Running across bridges and corridors, she got to the one directly overlooking the clothes shop, and after taking a deep, quivering breath, climbed over the railing and hung by her hands before letting herself drop down to the roof of the shop. The impact of her fall was much lighter than she anticipated. She was actually worried that she might even crash through the roof, but it was as if she was slowing down the closer she fell to the ground - it was exactly the same thing her elder sisters experienced when they had to let themselves fall a great height.

Her ideas weren't original. General Blackwater had given her breadcrumbs to follow in the form of his lesson in stealth - how to hide when to observe the enemy, how to run quietly, how to drop down from a great height without making lots of noise and...

Scurrying into a ventilation duct, she crawled through it by sliding across its metal surface to reduce the warping in the flimsy metal. Being small helped - despite being larger than her elder siblings and weighted down by her heavy armor, she was still in a better position to sneak around in the vents than a regular soldier.
She could hear the 'defectors' in the shop talking. General Blackwater instructed her to keep her ears peeled for information she might use, and she did. The men simulating the enemy had made sure to spill all kinds of useful information in between pointless banter.

'We'll be patrolling the mall, the eight of us,' one of the soldiers said, before leaving, and Bunny heard her on the way through the vents, unsure of where it would take her. Bunny mentally patted herself on the back when she heard it. It was good information. It meant fewer enemies who could spot her while she was trying to get to their leader.

'I bet she's out there among the boxes, like last time,' one of them mentioned. It confused Bunny at first, as there was no last time, but it was a relief as it meant that she had made the right choice, staying out of the field of boxes. Had she tried to take her time inching closer to the shop through the sea of boxes on the boulevard, she would have been caught and the game would be over.

There was one thing that made the rest of the information she gathered just by being in the vents pale in comparison, in terms of importance.

'Where's Lieutenant Burke?' one of the men had asked, unaware that Bunny had sneaked into the vents, listening.

'He's looking over some maps in the back, the employee room, I think - the place is old, I don't even know what that room is for, really,' the other soldier replied. Bunny wasn't able to understand everything, but she understood enough.

'In the back', that was where the leader of the deserters was. Crawling through the vents towards the back, it didn't take long for Bunny to find the man; she recognized him as General Blackwater had shown her a picture of him. With his helmet off, replaced with a cap, it was easy for her to see his face. The stripe on his shoulder gave his officer rank away.

Clutching the ventilation grill, she gave it a gentle, quiet push and drew her suppressed pistol. There was a loud, metallic thunk when the grill fell, but before the defecting officer could even turn to look at the vents, Bunny had already shot him in the skull.

Had it all been real, the bullet would have scrambled the officer's brain. Instead, it had merely activated a laser sensor on his cap and signaled that he had been shot.

"You got me, Bunny," the officer merely said instead with a smile and acted as if the 'bullet' had a real impact in an exaggerated fashion after that. Bunny laughed, and it was good fun. The soldiers had been instructed by the general, on pain of jail time if they failed to adhere to his orders, to treat her well - as a real kid, preferably - not that Bunny was told about this general order.
Chapter 66: Big Deal

Chapter Summary

Selicia Goodwin goes back home while Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup go back out to fight crime.

Chapter 66: Big Deal

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

27 FEB (Monday) 1989. 0745.

While waiting for Thomas Upton, Blossom, Bubbles, Buttercup to wake up, Selicia had taken it upon herself to prepare breakfast for them. Smiley-face hashbrowns, bacon, scrambled eggs and sandwiches with orange juice to wash them down. She figured that they would make for a good reunion meal.

When Professor Utonium and the original Three were coming down the stairs together, the first sign of Selicia's presence had been the sound of kitchenware and cooking. Then it was the smell of something scrumptious. It'd enticed all four of them to investigate, only to find, to their surprise, that it was Mom. Selicia.

"Morning, dears," she greeted them just in time to set the table.

"Selicia!" Thomas uttered in surprise. "I thought you were-"

"Mom!" Buttercup cried and flew into her arms, hugging her possessively. Blossom and Bubbles, however, kept their distance warily.

"Aren't the two of you glad to see me? C'mere..." Selicia said to the Girls. Not wanting to contradict or disobey her in front of Dad, they floated over to her for a reluctant group hug.

"It's General Blackwater, Tom," Selicia finally explained to the professor. "He... just told me to leave. He didn't tell me why."

The professor knew what it meant.

"But- what about Bunny?" he asked. The previous day had been dreadful for him. Unproductive. Unbearable. He couldn't stop wondering what the general was making her do, what he was doing to her. And he knew that it was affecting the entire family, that surely, Bunny's elder sisters were concerned about her as well. What he did not know, however, was that he had retreated into himself, isolated himself, more than what he was aware of, and he was affecting his older adopted daughters just as much, if not much more so than Bunny when it came to Blossom and Buttercup.

Selicia shook her head. She was quiet at first, but she expected the worst. She was Bunny's assigned mother, and it wasn't just a professional position to her. She would like to believe that she wasn't just some dog handler. Despite her history, Bunny was growing on her. The general knew that too. What he was planning needed her out of the way.
"She's not worse off even if you put her next to our other Girls..." Selicia said though the pauses in her voice had betrayed her lacking confidence. "The general's actually taking good care of her. He knows that Bunny is an 'asset'."

It was all subjective, of course, as to what 'taking good care' of someone constituted. Selicia knew this, and so did the professor.

"Ugh, can we stop talking about Bunny now!?” Buttercup interrupted impatiently while eyeing both Mom and the breakfast she made, making it known with just her eyes that she needed both. Bubbles shot her an accusing look, but Blossom didn't.

"When is it our turn, Dad?" Blossom said cryptically, and though it had caught both her Dad and Mom's attention, neither of them knew what she meant. Neither did Professor Utonium had the time to wonder. Worried sick about Bunny, he marched over to his phone.

Selicia was there in the USDO headquarters to protect and nurture Bunny where he couldn't, and now even she was separated from her too. The professor knew he had to do something, anything, to ensure Bunny's safety.

---

**Phone Recording 02271989-0754-TH**

**DOC: 27 FEB (Monday) 1989.**

**Extracted: 27 FEB 1989.**

**-TRANSCRIPT START-**

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: Uh-yyyello?

Professor Utonium: Wiggums, hey, I really need your help right now.

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: It's been a while since I last heard from you. Anything you want - what is it?

Professor Utonium: Do you know about Bunny?

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: Only everything there is to know. Never underestimate the logistician! I know about the kind of hardware she's been loaded with, the kind of training she's been put through... all through the requests I've been handed.

Professor Utonium: Has she been... abused in any way, Wiggums?

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: Besides the technicality that child soldiers are illegal and any kind of military training pushed onto Bunny is illegal? Not really.

Professor Utonium: What do you mean 'not really'?

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: It's only been a day, Upton. The serious stuff tends to happen much later, maybe later today, or tonight. It's just basically orientation for now. But...

Professor Utonium: Please, Wiggums, but what?

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: I'm sure it's nothing - besides, General Blackwater seems to have taken a liking to Bunny, believe it or not, so I don't think he's going to do anything drastic.
Professor Utonium: You need to tell me! I'm her father!

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: Alright, man. Calm down a little! Look, it might just be nothing, but General Blackwater ordered in the same things you did for your labs a while ago. That expensive Duranium table you commissioned a few weeks ago? He's got that too. That, and Duranium surgical tools. But I don't think that's the thing you should be worried about. I heard people talk, and my clearance is high enough for me to listen.

Professor Utonium: What is it?

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: They're training her to be the perfect killer, prof. No qualms, no remorse, just shoot to kill. They're screwing with her mind to do it.

Professor Utonium: …

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: Professor? Thomas?

Professor Utonium: Please, Wiggums. I need someone there, anyone there to help my Bunny. I'm asking you for help because I know General Blackwater. He'd expect someone from the research department or the medical wing to hinder him.

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: What do you want me to do, Thomas? I don't think there's anything we can do. It's the general we're talking about here.

Professor Utonium: Whatever it takes. Please. I'm supposed to be responsible for her - I wish I could be there for her, and now Selicia's no longer there-

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: She's gone? I don't even know-

Professor Utonium: Yes, she is. General Blackwater kicked her out.

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: Look, Tom. We've been friends for a long time, but as much as I wanted to help, I can't. And for Bunny's own sake and yours, don't cross the general. It could only end one way.

Professor Utonium: You're a worm, you know that? A cowardly worm who's afraid of the light! And that's an insult to worms because you're an even lower order of life form! I thought I can trust you!

Chief of Logistics Wiggums: So trust me. Don't do anything stupid, and I won't. I gotta go, got papers to fill and all that. Don't be rash. (Hangs up)

Professor Utonium: Don't- Wiggums! Damn it… (Hangs up)

---


27 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1124.

As usual, during Townsville's renewed crime wave, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup had to attend school in their uniforms and gear.

"Stop touching my flashbang!" Blossom pushed Mac away for the umpteenth time again while she was trying to solve the math question Miss Keane had written on the blackboard. Mac, undeterred, like a moth attracted to a light bulb, came up to her again in an attempt to pull Blossom's flashbang
off her vest while she tried to resume her mental exercise. His finger had come close to remove the safety pin this time. Frustrated, Blossom seized Mac by the arm and gave it a twist one-handed, restraining Mac.

"Ow! Bloss! Miss Keane! Blossom's hurting me!" Mac cried out in pain.

"Mac's been trying to set off my flashbang!" Blossom defended herself. "I don't like flashbangs when they blow up in my face!" It'd happened before, after all, so Blossom was speaking from experience. Miss Keane, who'd been writing more math questions on the blackboard with her chalk, turned around, seemingly nonchalant but a little exasperated. She knew right away who was at fault from the beginning:

"Mac, you know you're not supposed to touch things that don't belong to you," Miss Keane lectured the boy, moving forward while she did after putting down her chalk. "Or detonate someone else's flashbang for that matter!"

"But-" Mac tried to say, only for Miss Keane to interrupt him.

"Sit behind the table next to me, Mac," the school teacher ordered. Knowing better than to go against an authority figure, Mac did as she was told. "Now, does anyone know the answer to five plus seven?"

The USDO hotline rang before Blossom could volunteer her answer, much to her frustration. Things hadn't been going well at all for her, ever since Mom came back. Bunny was all her Dad could talk about when she did, not that he was involved in the trio's activities since the younger enhanced girl's departure.

Blossom flew to the phone and picked it up before its horrid buzzing could annoy her any further, her grenades, guns, and gear clattering as she did.

To add to the list of things going wrong ever since Bunny was that she had to attend to a crime in the middle of class - for the millionth time. The last time she had one good, uninterrupted class at school felt like a lifetime ago, and it probably was, as she had only just celebrated her third month's birthday - it was a pain to the enhanced little girl that even Bubbles, her sweetest sister, couldn't fully understand. Buttercup, on the other hand, couldn't care less about class, and Blossom knew exactly what she wanted.

The reason for the call had made things worse, drilled into Blossom's head that she was cursed the moment she was no longer the apple in her Daddy's eyes, though such expressive language was still lost on her. There was a school shootout in a high school downtown, and the Powerpuff Girls were needed to break the siege that ensued. A teenage boy was the perpetrator, and by the time they had gotten to him, he had already killed several students and a staff member. Multiple times the number were wounded. As he was armed with assault weapons, explosives, and hostages, the police needed an alternate solution to sending in vulnerable police officers and SWAT team, and risk the school blowing up in their faces.

The teenager was young and suicidal, so emotionally affected that he'd given away the fact that he had rigged multiple tiers of doors to explode. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup had crashed through the window. They couldn't talk him out of it. Buttercup had asked several times to kill him, but Blossom was able to knock him out. The teenage boy had actually fired upon them, perhaps hoping to commit suicide by Powerpuff Girls. When Blossom asked him why he'd killed after handcuffing him, he mumbled that it was because no one cared about him, even when he'd suffered neglect and bullying for years.
It'd hit Blossom really hard.

But the world didn't stop for her even then. The police had directed her to another situation that required the Three's intervention. Detective Mullens, Olivia and Stanley Talker were nowhere to be seen. Even Detective Wednesday was out there, somewhere, but not with her.

By the time Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup had reached their second assignment, there was nothing to be done. They were directed to the outskirts of the city, the edge of the wilderness where their experiences had almost always been bad. That had remained true, still.

There were reports of cultist activities of the hardcore, illegal kind. By the time they got there, all they found was a ritual circle drawn in the dirt, marked by candles and blood. A little girl, five years old, was sacrificed in the center of it, a knife to the heart. The cultists did not know decency - only the idol of their worship - and the girl's corpse was left naked and splayed out in the middle of the circle, with what appeared to be a symbol resembling a devil's head carved into her forehead.

The cultists were never eradicated despite their best efforts. If anything, they were emboldened. That had struck Blossom really hard, too.

It was no coincidence that the sacrificed child resembled her, even if superficially. She had a similar hair color, about the same length of hair, perhaps shorter by a couple of inches. Freckles were forming, and would, now, never form. She was intelligent-looking, with an air of so much potential - but no longer.

Bubbles was reduced to a hunched, blubbering and crying mess kneeling on the floor after seeing it. But it wasn't just because of the brutality of the cultist's deed that struck her down. It'd reminded her of her own shameful deeds.

Buttercup, though, remained Buttercup. She tried her best to appear uncaring, even disgusted and nonplussed, but the scene fascinated her that she dropped the act the moment she thought her sisters weren't looking. She remembered the cultist who sacrificed himself for her depraved pleasure back in the Silver Age Cinema, and she wondered again, as she did many nights, if she would be offered the same sacrifice again someday.

The day, however, was far from over. Shortly after discovering the ritualistic cult murder and reporting what they experienced (anticlimactic as it was) to the police, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were called up on the way home, and they hadn't even eaten lunch yet.

"This is the chief of Precinct 77. Same arrangement as before, except on Umbridge Street around the Apartments," the caller went right to business without warning and without pause. He didn't even try to be friendly. "The black car will be there by the alley between 55 and 56 at thirty past three. Keep a low profile and don't be late."

As quickly as the 'chief of Precinct 77' called, he hung up. Blossom wasn't even able to say a word to him.

"What is it, Blossom?" Bubbles asked.

"It's the Amoeba Boys," Blossom said, and although she didn't know about it, it'd made Bubbles nervous. "The man on the tele said it'd be the same as before."

"At least we'll get some action this way!" Buttercup was practically whooping with joy.

At Umbridge Street, they stood in the alley, waiting. The man did say to keep a low profile, a term
Blossom understood from her months of law enforcement. Bubbles mewedled with nervous anticipation while Buttercup was excited, doing air punches as if warming up for another slugfest.

When the time came, a black car pulled over in front of them. Though the car was black, it was of a different make and brand as the previous one. The shotgun seat door opened, and the slim gangster popped out from behind the door.

"Hey, Powerpuff Girls, your chariot awaits. Hop in!" the thin man said. The Girls exchanged looks before piling into the backseat, which was more spacious than the previous one.

"Welcome back, Miss Blossom, Miss Bubbles and Miss Buttercup," the driver, the thickset man who was still wearing his dark blue suit, said as he began driving them towards... somewhere (Blossom knew they would be visiting the Lombardi Mansion). They were both wearing shades, but all three Girls knew that they were the same people who picked them up as before. The voice was the same, and so was the mannerism. Still, Blossom knew that they had deliberately hidden their features just enough to be both anonymous and innocuous at the same time, in equal measure.

The car ride was silent for a time, and they crossed a couple of junctions without a word spoken.

"The name's Fedele Palladino, by the way," the big man introduced himself belatedly, out of the blue. The slim gangster didn't. "I'm not sure if you noticed, but I'm the three dons'… what shall I call it? I'm their executor, you understand, no?"

"It's nice to know your name, Mister Fedele Palladino," Blossom tried to defuse the tense atmosphere by saying. "It's a really pretty name."

"What's an executor?" Bubbles asked before Blossom could, for once.

"I thought you like fairy tales, Bubbles?" Buttercup interceded before anyone else could speak. "He kills people, duh!"

What Buttercup said managed to coax raucous, broken laughter from both of the men in the car, as though she was some stand-up comedian who'd just performed a routine.

"What?" she asked brashly and aggressively, confused as to why she had attracted their ridicule. "What did I say wrong?"

"I'm an executor, not an executioner, capiche? You know, like the man who presses the button men. People don't die around me. Well, not usually. That's the kind of business other men around me attend to, see," Palladino explained, as though he was talking to a bunch of new blood joining the family.

"It's good that you don't kill, Mister Fedele Palladino," Blossom added.

"Look, kid, it's really awkward for you to call me by my full name all the time," the executor said. "Just call me Palladino, Mister Palladino will do."

"Why aren't there any snacks here, Mister Palladino?" Buttercup demanded after digging through the pouches behind the front seats and finding nothing to chew on. She'd had potato chips the last time and wanted more. "I'm hungry! And you're supposed to put snacks in here for us to eat!"

"Not after you made a mess the last time, girlie!" Fedele accused the tomboy. With his eyes still on the road, he opened the glove compartment and pulled out something in a package. With a softer tone, he continued: "Here's something less crunchy and crumbly - I heard girls like this sort of thing."
The high-ranking gangster stuck the package behind him, and Buttercup took it. It turned out to be a packaged box of chocolate, something she would love to have. It reminded her of that time more than two months ago when Wiggums, her Dad's friend, visited with chocolates only for her Dad to throw the confectionery away. Buttercup had to pick them out of the trash and eat them at midnight because of it. Thankfully, Buttercup was rendered immune to disease by her Chemical X enhancements, or she might have risked food poisoning there and then.

---

**The City of Townsville. Outskirts. Lombardi Family Estate.**

27 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1418.

When Fedele Palladino parked the black car within the compound of the Lombardi Mansion, it was business as usual. The big man scolded Buttercup for creating a mess in the back seat. He and the thin man would then escort the Powerpuff Girls through the mansion towards the Amoeba Boys, except somewhere along the journey, Mister Palladino would take the Girls down a different path, veering towards the back of the mansion on the second floor, rather than rising to the top.

Doors after doors were opened, crossing room after room until they reached another set of open doors, which they knew would reveal the Amoeba Boys when opened. They knew it because they were stripped of their armor and weapons again.

True enough, when Palladino and his partner opened the doors, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup could see the trio of Lombardi dons sitting around one small end of a grand dining table, with white napkins tucked into their collars. A huge array of food was piled up close to them.

The Girls, now in just their field uniforms, exchanged looks before looking behind. Blossom was hoping for the now more familiar Palladino to tell them what to do next, but the big man had merely disappeared behind the double doors after glancing at them for just a moment. In unison, the Girls went back to staring at the Amoeba Boys, unsure of what was going on, confused by what they should do.

"Ah, if it isn't the Powerpuff Girls!" Bossman exclaimed in seeming jubilation from across the room. His voice had carried really well across the massive dining hall. "Please, come, join us!"

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup looked at each other again before Blossom floated towards them at a slow speed, hoping that showing some manners and etiquette would lead to a more peaceful discussion compared to the last time. Bubbles and Buttercup followed her lead, hovering at the same speed and height as her.

"We've been waiting, haha," Junior, the smallest of the three, said with his usual impish demeanor. After landing closer to the Amoeba Boys, the Girls padded towards them, rounding a corner of the grand dining table, but stood where they were when they got close. Blossom studied them while Bubbles' gaze had drifted, as it always did, to the floor while Buttercup's went upwards, to the table full of food that looked fit for royalty.

"Miss Blossom, Miss Bubbles, and Miss Buttercup, please," Bossman greeted the Girls once more, before waving his beefy hand at some empty seats before him. "Have the three of you had lunch?"

"We were going to, but we had a call," Blossom explained as she took her seat - which just so happened to be the one next to Bossman, who was sitting at the head of the table. Bubbles was too shy to sit so close to the biggest don of the Lombardi, while Buttercup wanted a spot close to most of the food. "We were asked to come down here, and I was thinking of eating my field rations."
She pulled a silver packet out of her thigh pocket and showed it to Bossman. "It's… not very nice."

"Good thing we're celebrating then," Bossman said, smiling at the buffet laid out before them, before remembering about his enhanced guests. He waved his hand again, this time at the food. "Why not have lunch with us… and celebrate?"

"I don't mind," Buttercup said. She didn't wait for anyone to start. The chocolate she ate earlier hadn't hit the bottom - instead, it'd done exactly the opposite and made her crave for more. She began piling food on her plate, and the first thing he did was to chomp down on a steak, splattering brown sauce all over her face and table.

"But why are we celebrating?" Blossom asked, more hungry for information than food. For her, the few pieces of chocolate she ate would have to do until she'd find out what she wanted to know. Bubbles, on the other hand, had only taken small amounts of baked potatoes and venison as a form of courtesy, nibbling on them nervously as she watched and listened while Blossom and Bossman had their conversation.

"Why, only a few things, of course," Bossman said, jubilant - which didn't suit his voice and demeanor. "My, uh, path to redemption, yeah. And… our partnership."

"Partnership?" Blossom said, confused. She barely knew the word, much less what it was supposed to mean in this context.

"Isn't that what we shared? Me, the Head Don Ricci, and you, Blossom Utonium," he explained, leaning towards her. Despite the fact that they were no longer fighting one another, Blossom still had to fight the urge to lean away from the mob boss. He placed his massive arm around her tiny shoulders. "Together, we cleaned up the slums! Chased out the rats plaguing it!"

"But…” Blossom said, and couldn't finish her sentence at first. The day had weighed heavily on her shoulders, much more so than Bossman's arm around her. It was so bad that she could no longer cringe on being touched by the leader of the Amoeba Boys. "Is it over? It didn't feel like it. It was horrible today…"

Slim and Junior couldn't help but throw their heads back in laughter. Bossman threw a glare at them when they did this. On getting the message, they tried to stifle their laughter and ended up giggling quietly. Finding this acceptable enough, the Head Don returned to Blossom.

"I'm a man with strings of… considerable length, Miss Blossom," Bossman said, in what seemed to be an attempt at comforting a little girl. His growling voice had, somehow, become more tame to Blossom's ears though it hadn't changed. "I wouldn't want my partner to be so troubled. I'll talk to my pals, see if I could put an end to all those inconveniences in town. I'm sure I can with their help."

Blossom was close to tears. The cultic sacrifice of the little girl who looked like her was still fresh on her mind. Bossman patted her on the back before withdrawing his arm away from her.

"You will?" Blossom said, surprised at the lengths her former enemy would go to make things better for her.

"Yeah, of course!" he said, before shifting his eyes to his wine glass. He stared at his own reflection. "But… As powerful as I am… There are many things I don't control. I would be lying if punching Don Exposito's card is the end to all our problems."

"There are more like him?" Blossom asked though she knew what the answer would be, and that
answer scared her. She hated killing, even if it was killing someone as heinous as Bossman said he was. She glanced at her sisters briefly. Buttercup was busy stripping a chicken drumstick down to the bone, while Bubbles looked absolutely lifeless.

"Many, many more…" Bossman said. He signaled for a servant to come over without even looking at him. That servant had a wine bottle with him, and he proceeded to pour Bossman a glass of the wine. The liquid was almost black - but it might as well be. As if rehearsed, the waiter wordlessly poured Blossom a glass as well. That was when the head of the Lombardi noticed what was going into Blossom's glass. "What the hell is that?"

"Only the finest from the cellar, boss," the servant said. "Just like what you ordered."

"Jeez, you trying to get the kid drunk?" Bossman reprimanded the servant. "I thought I corrected myself and ordered sparkling grape juice instead?"

"Sorry, boss, I must have forgotten," the servant apologized, then reached for Blossom's glass to get rid of it. Bossman grabbed his arm.

"Just- leave it. No point wasting good wine - never waste, that's what I'd say," Bossman lectured the servant. "Just go. I'll deal with you later." Afraid, the servant turned around and left quickly, walking briskly for the doors, almost breaking into a jog. The Bossman turned to Blossom, who had been watching with mild interest, still upset over how the day went.

"Tell you what, Blossom Utonium," Bossman continued. "I scratch your back, and you'll scratch mine. How 'bout that?"

"Huh?" Blossom enunciated, unclear about what Bossman meant - expressions were still a relatively new thing to her. Plus, being upset wasn't doing any favors for her cognitive ability.

"It's hard to hear that there's a hundred Don Expositos out there, I get it," Bossman said. "But if we work together… We'll clean up the city in no time - as partners." He picked up his wine glass, in a style befitting an aristocrat, holding it in front of him but not drinking it. "I'll work to stop all the small-timers from starting their schoolyard fights and petty tit-for-tats, and you'll help me help those evil crime bosses check out. Do we have an understanding… Partner?"

"I guess…" Blossom agreed reluctantly - numerous thoughts were going through her head, faster than the speed of light. It had been hard enough to kill one - a figurative hundred as a mere thought felt like death to her soul. Then there was still the fact that she was working with an enemy. She felt unease because of it despite all the reassurances she got that it was fine, that she was doing the right thing. Something was wrong - but she couldn't understand what. There were contradictions everywhere that she could feel but not rationalize with any clarity.

"Then pick up your glass, Blossom," Bossman said to her. Bossom did as she was told, pinching the glass' stem instead. The don held his glass of wine towards her. The gesture confused Blossom, and so Bossman had to instruct her: "Clink your glass against mine, Blossom. We'll drink to this deal and seal it."

Blossom did as she was told, before drinking the wine. The taste was horrible, but not entirely so. There was some sweetness to it, mixed in with bitterness. But it felt like something she could get used to. Thankfully, her liver, enhanced with Chemical X, had ensured that it would take many times the amount and concentration of alcohol to inebriate her.
Chapter 67: Doing Harm

Chapter Summary

Bunny is taught harder lessons, while Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup teaches some hardened criminals a lesson.

Chapter 67: Doing Harm

B-50 Training Report 02261989-A

DOC: 26 FEB (Sunday) 1989

Created by: General Blackwater

Title: B-50 Training Report 02261989-A

Below is a summary of B-50's progress in training.

Training Segment: Orientation

Time: 0600-0620

Description: B-50 is given primers on how to behave, what to expect and what is expected of her, and why she is training.

Results: Successful. B-50 has attached herself to me. She is now more compliant. I believe I will be able to exert limited control over her. This is possible in short notice due to her childish and naive nature.

Training Segment: Standard Equipment

Time: 0625-0700

Description: B-50 is introduced to and taught the use of standard-issue equipment as agreed upon through meetings 02151989B, 02221989F, and 02241989A.

Results: Successful. B-50 is familiar with the identity, function, and use of her standard equipment. Her photographic memory helped.

Training Segment: Firearms Training

Time: 0710-1100

Description: B-50 is trained in the use and maintenance of common and uncommon firearms, both military and civilian grade models.

Results: Successful. B-50 is now more proficient with firearms than even a fully-trained soldier. Being stronger than a bulldozer has made carrying and firing even a gun meant for stationary emplacement a non-issue.
Training Segment: Communications

Time: 1130-1245

Description: B-50 is taught military communications theory as well as the basics of language.

Results: Successful. B-50 has achieved greater confidence in the use of English. She has become a viable substitute for any communications officer in the USDO. Again, her photographic memory is a factor to the speed at which this is achieved.

Training Segment: Human Anatomy

Time: 1300-1400

Description: B-50 is given an introduction to the human body, its organs and how it works. She is also taught how to cripple any part of the human body, cause pain or fatality.

Results: Mixed Success. B-50 is even able to gain full marks on a questionnaire presenting different scenarios with different objectives ranging from killing to torture. However, Doctor Simmons might have compromised her willingness to complete missions by talking to her about Professor Utonium, who is a bad influence on her. Photographic memory helped.

Training Segment: Unarmed Combat

Time: 1400-1600

Description: B-50 is trained in the basic theory and practicals of unarmed combat, in systems including Karate, Jujitsu, Aikido, Judo, Taekwondo, Hapkido as well as selected techniques, subject to availability as provided by our in-house instructor, from styles found in other parts of the world.

Results: Successful. While there is only so much B-50 could absorb despite her photographic memory, fine motor skills and enhanced physique, what she is able to master are devastating when applied by her due to the multi-ton force she is able to apply. It takes many years of practice for a Karate black belt to be able to break a cinderblock. B-50's aptitude has reduced that process down to within minutes. Her enhanced strength, stamina, speed, and reflexes had made her second to none even before she was trained.

Training Segment: Close Quarters Combat (Melee)

Time: 1600-1830

Description: B50 is taught numerous systems dealing with the use of archaic weapons, which will be useful even with modern-day batons, truncheons and improvised weapons scrounged from the environment. The instructor is to inculcate an appreciation for the ways of Kendo, Kyudo, and Iaido as well as general Chinese kungfu. Local 'western' styles would have been implemented had there been an available and appropriate instructor, but with the best we can hope for being a re-enactor, that option has been delayed at best.

Results: Successful. B-50 will be ready if she is forced to resort to more brutal measures than a suppressed pistol in the field. Factors same as above.

Training Segment: Strategy and Tactics

Time: 1900-2100
Description: B-50's mind is molded for tactical flexibility and acumen.

Results: Beyond successful. She has also been successfully taught the value of sacrifice, even to the point of ignoring her own feelings. All factors have been covered and will not be mentioned again.

**Training Segment: Rest & Recreation**

Time: 2100-2200

Description: B-50 is allowed R&R as a reward for her good behavior. Had her performance been poor, R&R would have been replaced with a punishment regime. Sergeant Selicia Goodwin, B-50's assigned handler, has been ordered to provide educational value to the R&R.

Results: Successful. Nothing additional to report.

**Training Segment: Orientation 2**

Time: 2200-0500(Next day)

Description: Disguised and doubling as bedtime, B-50 is taught in this lesson the value of alertness and awareness. The training segment is also aimed at making B-50 more compliant through capitalizing on B-50's need for connection in a way more beneficial than Professor Utonium's method.

Results: Successful. Nothing to report.

---

**B-50 Training Report 02271989-A**

**DOC: 27 FEB (Monday) 1989**

**Created by: General Blackwater**

**Title: B-50 Training Report 02271989-A**

**Training Segment: Day 2 Revision**

Time: 0500-0630

Description: The revision is meant to test B-50's retention of knowledge and skills. The content of this test is drawn at random from her previous lessons.

Results: Successful. However, B-50 was late for the revision as a side effect of the second orientation, through no fault of her own. Based on Professor Utonium's reports and experience with the prototypes B-47, B-48 and B-49, B-50's neurological make-up are that of a child's, and as such, will act like it, and be sensitive like one.

**Training Segment: Vehicular Operations**

Time: 0700-1000

Description: B-50 is taught, in this training session, how to drive a wide selection of vehicles. Though the fleet assembled for this use is not exhaustive, it will give her a general overview of the common control schemes found in all vehicles.
Results: Mostly successful. B-50 will be able to operate most vehicles confidently, though not without mistakes. Her carelessness can be remedied with more driving hours, and will eventually be eliminated with experience in the field. She seems to prefer the motorbike issued to her to everything else.

**Training Segment: Stealth and Subterfuge**

**Time:** 1030-1230

**Description:** B-50 is to be taught the art of stealth and field operations taking place behind enemy lines. She will be taught how to sneak, hide and infiltrate and apply it practically to pursue an objective in a simulation.

Results: Successful. B-50 apparently has a talent for sneaking around and tactically achieving the objective without undue expenditure in time and energy. Based on the analysis of the camera feed, she appears to be exhibiting the same developments that would lead to airborne capabilities, such as being able to produce brief spurts of thrusting force from parts of her body - this allowed her to land softly from a great height.

**Training Segment: Psychological Warfare**

**Time:** 1330-1430

**Description:** B-50 is given a quick overview of the human mind and how it responds to stimuli, with an emphasis on fear. She is then encouraged to brainstorm of ways to scare and destroy the morale of hypothetical enemies.

Results: Successful. B-50 was able to create multiple hypothetical scenarios that have been rated by a panel of five judges, which includes members of the security, social services, and psychiatric department, as suitably unnerving. Details will be available once cleared through the administrative department.

**Training Segment: Human Anatomy 2**

**Time:** 1430-1530

**Description:** Building off on the first anatomy lesson, B-50 is, this time, taught the best way to provide first-aid to it, rather than destroy it. The class is taught by combat medic Sergeant Joy.

Results: Successful. B-50 is now certified to provide first-aid.

**Training Segment: Interrogation Resistance**

**Time:** 1530-2130

**Description:** [REDACTED]

Results: Successful. [REDACTED]

**Training Segment: Rest & Recreation 2**

**Time:** 2130-0500

**Description:** [REDACTED]
"You need to eat, Bunny," Wiggums tried to encourage the USDO's latest enhanced individual, but she wouldn't even face him. She was lying in her cot, resting on her side and facing the wall with the rabbit soft toy held tightly to her chest. She hadn't even showered and was still a singlet and short jogging pants, both of which smelled of sweat, though they had long dried out. Her left arm was in a sling. Blood had poked through the fabric. "I know what happened to you is terrible, but your father wouldn't want you to starve."

Bunny was silent. Balancing a bowl of soup, on one hand, Wiggums clutched her by the arm and tried to turn her.

"Go away!" Bunny yelped, before swiping her good arm at him, knocking the bowl of soup clean off his hand. "Leave me alone!" She glared at Wiggums childishly, her eyes completely bereft of the same kind of innocence found in her just hours before. One of them was ringed with bruising, as was one of her cheeks.

Wiggums sighed, before picking up the bowl. It wasn't the first bowl of soup that had spilled, and he wasn't the first person to try to coax Bunny into eating something. The drill sergeant in charge of Bunny had… encountered resistance when he tried to get her to shower and eat, as was prescribed by her training program. He didn't succeed and had to be put in the medical wing.

There was a knock on the door, but it opened even when no permission was given to open it. Bunny knew who it was, and she curled up into a fetal position when she heard, with her enhanced sense of hearing, footsteps and breathing consistent with the man who had ordered her ordeal materialized in a previous lesson.

"Wiggums, get the hell out," the voice boomed. Bunny shuddered at the baritone booming. "You're not even supposed to be here." Without a word, Wiggums mopped up the mess on the floor quickly with a piece of rag and left, brushing shoulders with the huge man replacing him.

There was silence after that. Bunny knew that the new presence in the room was watching her. She refused to give him the same respect she used to give. But it couldn't just be that - she was, after all, not even a week old. She was terrified. Angry, too, just like how he taught her, ironically.

"Bunny," the voice said, unconcerned with her fear and anger.

"Look at me," it compelled Bunny to turn and sit up, and she did - not because she truly wanted to, but because her past with the man meant something, and her relationship with the man still do. Despite what he had done to her, she still wanted it to mean something.

She was only able to lay her eyes on the man for a second before her eyes flitted away to the floor, where the remains of her supper were. She could still smell it in the air, and though it was sweet, she didn't have the appetite to recognize the appeal of the aroma.

"I said LOOK AT ME!" the voice strongly compelled her to do so, and this time, Bunny affixed her gaze, confused and upset as it was, on the man before her. It was General Blackwater. The general's massive paw found its way to a chair. The chair screeched as he pulled it towards her and set it down next to her cot. Sitting down, the chair creaking, he growled more calmly: "Tell me
about what you're thinking and feeling. I won't yell at you as long as you don't disobey me again."

Bunny could barely keep her face from contorting into a mask of sadness. She took a deep breath and tried to bury her sadness, only for another feeling to take over. Anger.

"You hurt me, Mister Blackwater." Bunny cried, glaring at the general. She never thought she could do that.

"Douglas Carver. Please call me that," the general corrected the enhanced girl. He looked like he was caught on the fence between wanting to smile and wanting to appeal to the strange bond between them.

"You put me in that- that metal table and you hurt me," Bunny said, her voice and body both shivering with anger born from betrayal. The general couldn't help but smile. Bunny had begun using pronouns, finally. It was a habit he thought she would adopt. The change was catalyzed by torture of all things. "I trusted you, Mister Carver, and you hurt me."

"Bunny, I-" the general wanted to explain things, but found that his words were stuck in his throat. The previous 'lesson' had been traumatic for him too. As cold and strict and severe as the general were, he was never really sadistic. His bloodlust was reserved exclusively for his enemies. "What I did… hurt me too." It was hard for him to admit any form of weakness, even understandable ones, all the same. Given the choice, he wouldn't want to admit that there was a chink in his armor.

"Then why did you hurt me!?" Bunny yelled, crying. She couldn't hold it back. It was impossible for her to understand the general - she'd thought he was harmless, even if loud and abrasive. The only person she liked more was dear old Dad. Yet, not only had he cut her with a scalpel, and shot her with a huge and scary-looking gun, he had pounded her with some kind of a mechanical arm device, something that loan the general greater strength. And he had humiliated her before then by tricking her into getting on the table before fastening her there. He'd torn her uniform away before that, to make her more accessible. She was naked for hours, vulnerable, and not just physically.

And that wasn't even the worst part. He'd said all sorts of things. 'Your family is hiding, Bunny', he'd said. 'I want you to kill them all,' he'd ordered her. 'I want you to plan, verbally, in great detail, how you will kill them,' Bunny would refuse, of course, which would usually be followed by pain, pain which she had never felt before. Pain of all sorts, as if they were different tastes or different kinds of smell.

"It was for your own good, Bunny," the general explained, his growl softer. He felt pain in his eyes, a kind of pain he hadn't felt in a long time. "I was teaching you some important lessons. You need to know how pain feels like… You need to know how betrayal feels like… and now you do. I was teaching you what your enemies would do to you if they have you - that is what they will do to you."

"I hate you!" Bunny cried uncontrollably.

"Good. Hate… is good, Bunny. I've always taught you the right things, haven't I?" the general continued when Bunny fell silent.

"Yes…" Bunny said, reluctantly, still crying.

"This is so it wouldn't hurt as bad when you're out there," the general, sensing that he was breaking ground, went on. "When you're out there, helping your sisters, you can't slow down because of pain, or when supposed friends turn against you. Even if your own sisters turn against you, you cannot stop!"
"But why would they turn against me?" Bunny asked, wiping away tears with her good arm.

"They won't always understand what you're doing, Bunny," the general explained. "They might think you're trying to hurt them when you're actually doing good. Do you understand?"

"I… Yes…" Bunny said, and she was sincere. The general's logic had clicked in her, though it was still hazy. It'd reminded her of Dad, how he would teach her how to walk. She would fall and she would cry, but dear old Dad would continue to push her to walk upright the next hour, the next day until she was more steady and no longer fell down. It'd hurt, but it was good.

It'd occurred to her then that pain wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

"This is important because even your elder sisters won't know that they are doing harm sometimes," the general went on. He took Bunny by the hand, which stiffened up. "But let me tell you what you are, Bunny. It was tough, what I did, but I can see now that you are a loyal, and determined, and strong little girl."

---

The City of Townsville. Little Tokyo Business Hub. The Tri-Chrysanthemum Twin Tower.

27 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1623.

"-You've continued to serve him well, and he smiles upon you..." a Japanese woman in a red hooded cloak said to a conference table full of Yakuza clan heads, speaking in Japanese. "He knows of your intentions, of your selfishness, but that is immaterial to his generosity - good service must be met with good reward..."

The red-cloaked woman was guarded by two men in similar attire, except better clothed where the woman wore nothing, not even a singlet, not even the shortest pants or underwear or shoes beneath her cloak hanging on her shoulders. How she could stand the temperature outside was beyond the powerful crime lords in the same room as her, but they didn't care; they were mesmerized both by what nakedness was showing in the opening of her cloak and the reward she was about to present them.

A fourth person in hellish red emerged through the portal leading into the conference room, bearing a black casing. He handed it over to the woman at the head of the red procession, who placed it down at her end of the conference table. Opening it, she revealed a collection of four katanas to the men. Taking one out, she unsheathed it, showing off the blade to them. It shimmered in one color then the next, seemingly at random and in mockery of physics. Duranium.

"These blades are forged by the very same hands guiding thousands of His faithful in this city," the Japanese woman said. "It will cut down even the traitorous Shadowkins they call 'The Powerpuff Girls', should they meddle in your affairs..."

"Your master's generosity is much appreciated," the head of the Yakuza, who sat appropriately at the head of the conference table, replied in Japanese. He was wearing a smart business suit of black and white, like half the men at the table. The others had the black swapped for some other dark color. "However, like the bonsai in my garden or my children, friendship and loyalty must be maintained and cultivated anew. I am sure your master has more in mind - the profits we've earned is reward enough. What does your lord desire we do?"

"You have been hard at work, distributing His gift to the many in this part of the city," the woman in red reflected. "He wants you to continue, but swiftly. The unbelievers and traitors in this city are beginning to take notice, and there might come a time in the near future when He will have a use
for those who partook in his gift."

The high-ranking members of the Yakuza were confused by what the woman had said. They exchanged looks and whispers for a while before their absolute leader called for silence.

"We'll do as you ask," he said. He stood up, and his underbosses did the same. He bowed, and they followed. "Thank you for gracing us with your presence."

That was when the explosion happened. As if something had detonated on the same floor as them, rocking the office the Yakuza called home. Then there were the shouts and screams and soon, gunshots.

"The Shadowkin traitors are here," the woman in red said, a grin forming on her face. "It seems that His gifts are urgently needed..." With that, she turned around and left the conference room, followed by her cultic attendants.

---

**The City of Townsville. Little Tokyo Business Hub. The Tri-Chrysanthemum Twin Tower.**

27 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1627.

Blossom had led Bubbles and Buttercup flying headlong towards the office said to belong to Townsville's very own infamous Yakuza organization. They'd smashed right through the ceiling-high windows, shattering glass, sending shrapnel flying in all directions.

Bossman had pointed out the Yakuza as one of the worst gangs in Townsville, responsible for blackmailing numerous businesses and people, earning huge profits from vices such as gambling and prostitution, usually of the illegal sort, assassinations and, yes, drug trafficking, including the trafficking of various kinds of His Secret. The legitimate businesses they owned were frequently leveraged as criminal fronts to hide their activities.

All hell broke loose the moment they got in. The Yakuza were far more alert than the Exposito crime family. As office workers scrambled to get away, some of whom were wounded by the glass shrapnel, Yakuza enforcers were coming forward to empty their pistols at them, shouting in Japanese.

"Protect the Kumicho!" Bubbles heard one of them bellowing. Taking cover behind a desk, she hovered up and fired her ion beam at several of them, sweeping the bright blue emanation across the office, causing men to scream and sizzle, and electronics to pop whenever they were hit, but the men she'd hit had only been incapacitated - with her ocular energy discharge, it was hard to kill, nor did she want to. Despite this shocking display of her power, a terrifying spectacle to behold, Yakuza enforcers were still charging her, pistols blazing, and when those ran out of ammo, they pulled their wakizashis out.

Feeling a little tired, Bubbles switched to firing with her stockless XM4 Carbine, but she was aiming at their legs, sending men who were caught out in the open tumbling to the floor, writhing, howling and moaning.

Blossom and Buttercup were less concerned with using lethal force, however. Blossom's thermal beam had joined Bubbles' ion beam, but it was searing at men, burning through them. Buttercup was cutting them up with her laser eye beam, if not severing arms and legs, or parts of the limbs, then lobbing heads off. Most of the vengeful sisters' attacks had killed, and Bubbles had seen it all. She couldn't recognize the look on Blossom's face.
And if this all wasn't enough, Buttercup unclipped a high explosive grenade, a gift from Bossman himself, primed it and threw it. As if propelled by a grenade launcher, the grenade killed a Yakuza on impact, and exploded, engulfing several of his associates in the fire, and rocking the floor to its foundations.

"Defend our oyabuns! Kill them all!" Bubbles heard one of the more senior Yakuzas ordering the men around him, despite the horrific casualties and mutilations Blossom and Buttercup had inflicted upon them.

"Bubbles, Buttercup, let's go!" Blossom herself ordered, before jumping out of cover. Feeling merciful, she'd burned an enforcer in the legs instead. Buttercup, however, was far less discriminate. She'd mowed down a group of Yakuzas brandishing swords, shotguns, and pistols with her Stoner light machinegun instead. Bubbles, despite the horror of it all, did not stop firing, whether it was through her eyes or the barrel of her gun, because she knew that she was more merciful - the only merciful being in the Yakuza office, in fact - and a man injured by her wouldn't be a man cut in half by Buttercup or singed to death by Blossom.

They were able to fight their way through with ease. Although the ruthless Japanese killers would hurl themselves at them with no thoughts of self-preservation, inflicting pain with bullets and blades, they were merely speed bumps hindering them from their goals - as Bossman said, killing the leaders of the evil organization will put an end to their foul deeds.

Before Bubbles knew it, they were crashing through the doors leading into the conference room, where the Yakuza high-rankers were. The moment they did, men came at them fiercely with swords and guns and screams - Bubbles was sure they were more afraid than brave.

That was when Bubbles saw it - flashes of… something. Strange colors were coming off some of the blades the Yakuzas were using, brighter than ever before.

Tired from blasting at the bad guys with her Infrared beam, and with her guns out, Blossom seized the closest man by the blade of his katana and gave it a twist, yanking the sword out of his grasp before giving him a punch in the face, sending him flying backwards into his associates, who had to push him aside and continue charging at her. Buttercup followed suit, not because she was out of bullets - and she'd rather kill herself than admit that she was feeling tired - but because she wanted to feel flesh while she pounded on the bad guys.

One of the blades that was shining oddly, of different colors at any one time, was coming really close, and the wielder, some Yakuza underboss with graying hair, was swinging it - and, occupied with twisting the elbow of another underboss, Blossom wasn't aware.

"Look out!" Bubbles shouted, but it was too late - Blossom was struck. It'd all happened in an instant - it was amazing how even normal human beings could be so fast and so strong. There was a spray of blood from Blossom's shoulder before the leader of The Three could reach up for it.

"Blossom!"

"They're using those funny-looking metals!" Bubbles warned her other sister.

"I'll show them funny!" Buttercup growled while she was striking down one of the Yakuzas with an overhead drop-kick. Behind her latest victim was another, one who Buttercup could just barely make out was carrying the same kind of sword dangerous to them. Despite feeling tired, she unleashed another burst of laser beam, cutting through the body of the second Yakuza, but not before he was able to get a slash in, cutting through Buttercup's vest and making an ugly, bloody gash down her chest. She screamed as she fell to the floor.
Bubbles had wanted to tend to her sisters' wounds, but there were still numerous Yakuza leaders in the room, so she flew in the thick of it, shielding Blossom, who was the most severely wounded. After launching a rapid flurry of paralyzing punches, Bubbles elbowed one out of the way, and his face was smashed into the wall. Another replaced him, this time while bringing down another Duranium sword on her. All Bubbles could do was block it with her arms, but just when she thought she knew for sure that she was going to lose them, a bright blue energy bubble blocked the blade - the Yakuza's arms were too weak to force it through. It sent the man recoiling backward instead.

Taking a peep at Blossom behind her, Bubbles saw that she was leaning against the wall, her strength sapped by the injury she suffered. She thought she could see her wound. It wasn't just the skin that had split. The flesh, too, was rent in two.

Gritting her teeth, Bubbles let out a high-pitched scream before charging into another group of Yakuzas in front of her. It helped that there was only one more criminal with a Duranium blade left, and he was nowhere close to her, nor Buttercup either.

"No one hurts my sister!" Kneeing one in the stomach, Bubbles could hear bone snapping when she did. She punched another in the face next, and the ill-fated man's normal steel katana had done nothing to her except stoke her anger with pain. She was too fast for the third man in her last group, who sustained a kick to the side of his face, fissures breaking out in his skull from the sheer force, loud enough for everyone - or at least whoever was left - in the room to hear.

The last Yakuza to defend his Kumicho had backed away just in time to avoid Bubbles' second kick, and as Bubbles stared him down, he backed away some more, clearly intimidated by the number of bodies in the room that used to be his associates. His shaking sword and arms had given his terror away. Buttercup, in the meantime, had finished off the last Yakuzas on her side too, making it worse for the lone, remaining underboss, as it meant that the only person on his side left was the head of the entire Yakuza organization and clans in Townsville - and he wouldn't be budging until he was alone.

But, pushed by his loyalty to his oyabun, the last underboss lunged forward, sword swinging overhead - only for the blade to be seized by Bubbles, who then swiped at him with a screech, her fingernails cutting his face, causing blood to spurt in great amounts. A bloodcurdling scream escaped his lips before he crumpled to the floor to join his fellow fallen Yakuzas, his sword still clutched in Bubbles' hand.

Blossom, having recovered somewhat from her wound, flew to the edge of the conference table and stood there before the Yakuza boss, still clutching her shoulder.

"We win, Mister Yamo- Yamae-" Blossom struggled to pronounce the Yakuza Kumicho's name.

"It's Yamamoto, you insolent child," the crime boss corrected the leader of the Powerpuff Girls in heavily accented English. He was still clutching the sword the woman in red had given him tightly. It was sheathed, but all three of the Powerpuff Girls knew that it was still dangerous.

"Put down your sword, Mister Yamamoto, and I won't hurt you," Blossom offered the Yakuza. Bubbles had been speaking to her for days now, about how she had changed and how she should still be merciful and kind even to the bad guys - as Dad would tell them to be. She knew how it was like to hide certain facts from Dad and Mom, and she made sure to mention that to Blossom as well, telling her that it was something she should avoid. It simply didn't feel good and wouldn't end well.

"And dishonor my clan? Never!" Mister Yamamoto snarled stubbornly. "If you have any shred of
honor at all, you will tell me who ordered this! I should have known about this long before it happened!"

"Don Ricci told me about you," Blossom explained, thinking that perhaps something coming from the Yakuza clan leader's mouth might persuade her to let the man live. "You're a bad man, Mister Yamamoto. You've hurt a lot of people, stolen their things and force them to do stuff. You're a big bully." To be fair, Blossom still couldn't understand what half the things Bossman told her were about. Credit card fraud? What was that even? And what on earth was match-fixing? And prostitution? Or pornography? What Blossom knew, however, was that the Kumicho Yamamoto was also a cold-hearted killer and torturer.

"So, he's finally done it," Bubbles heard the Yakuza boss say in Japanese. There was no surprise in his tone at all. Just resignation.

"I don't understand," Blossom said.

"He said 'he's finally done it!'," Bubbles repeated what the boss had said, wondering why Blossom couldn't understand. But Blossom didn't care to understand the criminal.

"Put down the sword, Mister Yamamoto," Blossom repeated her demand again. The man, however, wasn't listening. With his eyes affixed to the floor in a death glare, he gritted her teeth as he held his sword tightly, shivering with fury.

"NEVER!" he shouted, before sprinting towards Blossom, removing the sword from the scabbard and slicing at her with one fluid motion. Blossom flew forward with a punch ready. It had all caught Bubbles and Buttercup off-guard.

The two leaders clashed, then crossed each other. Bubbles saw Blossom's punch connect. The Yakuza's blade had slid across Blossom's neck but… Did he miss?

The singular exchange of blows was over very soon after it started, and it'd ended with Mister Yamamoto convulsing on the ground, having collapsed chest-first, his sword clattering a distance away.

His neck was broken, and his head was hanging loosely on exposed windpipe and gullet in an awkward position, having been punched with such force that the skin in his neck was torn open and the muscles separated. Blood was pooling beneath his neck. He didn't have long to live.

Blossom's hand went up to her neck, feeling something there.

"Blossom? Are you okay?" Bubbles asked, afraid for her sister. Blossom, however, did not reply. She simply turned to look at her… with blood spurting out of her neck, on free-flow and gushing between her fingers. There was a cascade of blood down her neck as well, sprinting down as if in a mad rush to claim her uniform, vest and body as their territory. "Blossom!"

The leader of the Three fell, but Bubbles was able to hold her just in time.

"Y-You're-" the Yakuza patriarch somehow managed to say, despite barely having a neck left. "You're not justice- not goddess- b-bleed like… the rest of…"

And then he was silent.
Chapter 68: Rabbit Stew

Chapter Summary

New discoveries were made...

Chapter 68: Rabbit Stew

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

27 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1706.

"B- -som?" a voice, unclear, muttered. ":-lo -m?"

Blossom squinted at the shape above her. Everything was a hotchpotch. Blurry. She couldn't even
tell who it was above her, only that it was bright above. Or was that an illusion as well? She wasn't
even squinting - as in actively. She was just looking. Her entire body felt like a block of ice, numb
and almost impossible to move. A second silhouette hovered over her, a smaller one.

"Blos-" it said. Blossom could just about make out the fact that it was higher-pitched. " -all -fault.
I- sorry, -som! Plea- don't- d-!"

And before she knew it, everything went dark.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

27 FEB (Monday) 1989. 1933.

"Blossom…" a voice sung out to her, menacing and ominous. She couldn't even tell if it was a male
or female voice. "Bloooossm…"

Blossom opened her eyes, and found herself in a green field, under a gigantic moon surrounded by
the night sky. She was lying down on a picnic blanket. Sitting up, her eyes met that of the man of
her dreams. He was tall and well-built as always, and she saw him pick up a glass of… black stuff
gracefully, almost like a lady, and, pushing it up to his face, started sipping it. She remembered his
goatee, how prominent it was.

"It's you…" she uttered. It had been some time since she last saw him. Had it been two weeks? Her
mind was still a bowl of scrambled eggs after what had happened with the Yakuza.

"Oh, hello back to you…" the man greeted her. Memories were flooding back into Blossom's mind.
She remembered how their last meeting went. How wrong he was to suggest that she should kill
her sisters to prevent them from hurting anyone else. The man of her dreamed picked up a plate
of… something, offering it up to her. "Chicken sandwich?"

Blossom looked down at it. It was certainly not a chicken sandwich. It was a dark mass, swarming
with even darker… ants of some kind. Blossom grimaced in disgust at it.

"You know, you've been doing the right thing… Yes… Yes…" he said as he lowered the plate of
black, slimy refuse.

"I have?" Blossom said, confused. She didn't even know what he was referring to.

"Yes - killing all those bad guys. Your Daddy would be proud," the man of her dreams went on.

"But... he wouldn't be," Blossom countered. "That's why I haven't told him."

"Well, he SHOULD BE!" the man exploded, causing Blossom to jump, before giving her a sly smile and continuing: "After all, you are ridding the world of bad people... That's commendable in my book."

Blossom fell silent, before starting up again. "What do you want?"

"Why, I want what's best for you... Most definitely..." the man of her dreams said. "If only you wouldn't ignore my warnings about your sisters... But what's done is done. We can work with that..."

Blossom's eyes fluttered open, and before she was aware, she took a deep breath. There was still a light above her, though it wasn't as glaring as before. Another difference was that there were no silhouettes looming above her, just when she could see clearly again.

Her body was still a block of ice, heavy as if she had no Chemical X in her blood. Still, she tried to sit up, and barely succeeded, only to feel light-headed. Her neck still stung as if it had just been slashed in the jugular. Reaching up to it, she felt thick bandages. Her neck would be stiff with or without them.

Her uniform and gear were gone. Replaced by a little patient's gown.

"Blossom! You're awake!" Blossom heard someone say. Without looking at her, she knew it was Bubbles from the voice. She didn't dare move her neck, but she didn't have to as Bubbles had zipped up to her side, holding her.

"W-what happened?" Blossom asked, still dazed.

What happened. Bubbles' mind went all the way back to that second when she thought she'd lost Blossom for sure. Blossom had turned around to look at her, seemingly shocked, when she saw the blood spurting from her neck, through the spaces between her fingers. The amount of blood was shocking, painting her pink uniform red in just moments.

That was when she fell, and Bubbles caught her and laid her down on the conference table. Blossom was convulsing as soon as she hit the table, but Bubbles didn't have time to be afraid. Buttercup had to hold her down while she bandaged the slash wound. The bandage was soaked in an instant. It was chaos; Blossom was hyperventilating, Buttercup was panicking, surprisingly, and together, they carried Blossom on their shoulders and ditched the Tri-Chrysanthemum Twin Towers for home, piercing the air at full speed.

The entire journey home was tense. Frantic. Unbearable, except they had to suffer it to get Blossom home. Both Bubbles and Buttercup, the latter perhaps influenced by the silver lining in her brain, were panicking all the way to Dad. By the time they got Blossom home, she was gasping for air, her breathing worryingly slow, her body ice cold.

But she was saved.

Bubbles would find out later from dear old Dad that Blossom had lost three-quarters of her blood,
something that would have killed a normal human being ten times over. However, she also found out the good news: a normal person's bone marrow was already a wonder on its own, being able to refill lost volumes of blood within a day or two, and the cells within the space of weeks. The three of them, with their enhanced bone marrow, could replace whatever blood they had lost within hours, including the cells. Their Dad knew about this from last December, when Mojo Jojo (allegedly) had nearly succeeded in assassinating Bubbles with a Duranium sniper rifle, only for her to pull through. Meanwhile, the wound in her neck was already sealed, the tissue repairing rapidly.

In the meantime, however, it was dinner time, and Bubbles had to help Blossom into a kiddie wheelchair and into an elevator built over January to get her to the dining table.

Chewing and swallowing were painful to Blossom, but she had far more motivation to eat as losing most of her blood had made her ravenous. Dinner was mostly eaten in silence. Professor Utonium was feeding her, and Blossom was glad to have some of his attention, finally.

"Bubbles, how did you know what the bad guy was saying?" Blossom asked, trying to fill in the silence with a conversation, no matter how arbitrary the topic was. The day was bad enough; she wanted a semblance of normalcy in the house to make it better.

"I don't understand, Bloss. He was loud enough…" Bubbles said, confused by Blossom's question.

"But he was using words I've never heard of," Blossom struggled to speak. She thought she had stumbled on something interesting, to take her mind off her neck, her dream, the Yakuza, and the Amoeba Boys - she was still unsure of what to think about them.

Bubbles, after looking confused for a while, began giggling.

"What's so funny?" Buttercup asked, herself sucked into the conversation. She wasn't deaf to the conversation they had with the Yakuza clan head.

"Aw, you're so sweet, Blossy," Bubbles said, but she was a puzzle to Blossom, still, and the rest of her family.

"What… do you mean?" Blossom asked, wincing at the sharp pain that rose and fell in her neck.

"You're calling me smart, aren't you?" Bubbles said, practically blushing. "You know words better than me, Blossom, and now you're saying I know words you don't…"

"But… I don't think he was even speaking English," Blossom said. The professor seemed to light up at this, where previously, he appeared depressed, close to the point of being dysfunctional.

"Blossom, do you know what language this… bad guy was speaking?" the professor asked. Selicia was beside him as well, and even she knew that it was important - if it was enough to get her lover out of the rut, it was indeed something.

"I don't know," Blossom admitted.

"Well, what does it sound like?" the professor asked, his voice and question gentle. He had just put another spoonful of porridge into Blossom's mouth, so he waited patiently for her to chew weakly and swallow her food hesitantly.

"His name's Yamamoto…" Blossom said, thinking back to the battle at the Yakuza's sky office headquarters. She remembered killing a good number of them, burning them with such intensity that the heat had cut through them, or cooked them to a crisp. But she'd spared some of them too.
Killing had always felt wrong, and Bubbles had made every attempt to pull her back. Now, it'd left a bad taste in her mouth. Her eyes were wet when she thought back to the battle, what she'd done. She took a deep breath. It'd always helped. But talking helped more: "He and his friends look different. Their skin's colored differently, maybe a little like Buttercup's, but darker. They all had black hair too, like Buttercup."

"Hey! I'm not like them!" Buttercup exclaimed, offended by Blossom's comparison. "I'm the good girl, and they're the bad guys! I'm better than them!"

"But you do look a little like them," Bubbles backed Blossom, squinting at Buttercup. It wasn't something she'd noticed before, in the heat of battle. She didn't have the words for it, but Buttercup did indeed look like the Yakuza in terms of physical appearance. Asian. Or to be precise, Japanese. But not completely. It took a direct comparison and some studying to recognize it.

None of the Girls knew this, but Buttercup's DNA had some Japanese ancestry in it. Only two persons in the room knew it - Professor Utonium and Sergeant Selicia Goodwin, and the former knew it most intimately. He'd nearly gagged on his piece of chicken steak when Bubbles actually came close to figuring out, indirectly, the fact that Buttercup's DNA wasn't derived from his and Selicia's, which would have meant finding out, eventually, that they weren't his biological daughters.

"Ah, he was speaking in Japanese, of course!" the professor exclaimed, caught up in his favorite activity for once in the past couple of days - distracted from his misery. Anything but the uncertainty of Bunny's suffering and The Three discovering that they weren't even related to him.

"What's Japanese?" Bubbles asked, confused. Mister Yamamoto hadn't been talking in Japanese. He was clearly talking in English!

"It's a language that came from Japan, just like how English, our language, came from England," the professor explained.

"Duh, who wouldn't know?" Buttercup scoffed at the exchange. Bubbles threw her a disapproving stare. The both of them knew what the former meant.

"But… if he's speaking in Japanese, why could I understand him?" Bubbles asked, confused. "And Blossom couldn't?"

"You know, Bubbles, I think I should bring you down to the labs later for a brief experiment," the professor said, completely caught up with this new discovery. However, this excitement and joy of discovery and family bonding wouldn't last.

It wouldn't last… for as long as Bunny was missing.

---

**The City of Townsville. Downtown. USDO Headquarters.**

**28 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 0451.**

"Bunny, you've hardly touched your food," Putting down his fork, General Blackwater said to his newest student. The two of them were alone in the cafeteria, guarded by eight soldiers forming a perimeter around the hall. Bunny had been playing with her food. Although made as scrumptious as possible, it didn't entice her enough to gobble it up. "We don't have much time before training starts again."

"I miss Dad… and Mom," Bunny said, close to tears as she was prone to be. Her wounds had
healed completely in her sleep, much to Doctor Simmons' astonishment as it had healed at a rate faster than even Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup's, but there was still pain elsewhere. In her heart. "I miss Blossom. And Bubbles. And Buttercup."

"Is this what you will do in the field? Curl up and cry for mommy and daddy while the enemy is moving against you?" the general had picked up his fork while Bunny spoke, only to slam it down onto the table again, making Bunny jump. "You need to learn how to bury your emotions. And the time, Bunny! I swear to God if you hesitate one more second-!"

That had pushed Bunny over the edge. Soon, she was watering her bacon and eggs and bread with her tears. The general sighed. Time was still on the move against them as if an invisible, omnipresent enemy.

"Would it help if I say that you'll see them again tomorrow?" the general growled a little more gently, though that wasn't saying much with him. Bunny did not acknowledge him but just continued crying anyway.

"You know…” the general went on. There was a better way of doing this, he knew. In fact, he thought he'd fouled up considering his lack of subtlety and nurturing. After all, there was something between him and Bunny. "When I was fighting the Germans back in the 40s, I was just like you. My brothers were still back home, yet to be deployed, and my pop and ma were still at the farm then. I was young, and I missed my family terribly. I… cried, while all my friends weren't looking. In the bunks or on watch."

It took Bunny some time to understand the general as she was still crying. Sniffling, she tried her best to stop. But it was like trying to dam a river at short notice, or building a dome over a park when it was already storming.

"Y-you did?" Bunny managed, wiping tears away with the back of her hand.

"Yeah. And I was away for months before I was allowed a furlough to see them," the general recalled.

"But- months?" Bunny said in disbelief. It was easier now to keep a lid on her emotions as her curiosity was piqued by the general's unlikely story. "How could you take months without daddy and mommy? Isn't that really lonely?"

"I wasn't really alone. I had friends, just like you," the general said, flashing a rather flat smile at her. Bunny smiled back. He was right, she knew. She'd met Doctor Simmons, and Mister Wiggums (with whom she decided she should apologize to later), and Mister Vanum, along with some soldiers and her instructors. They were all nice to her. "And I tell myself: 'Look alive, soldier. Fight well, fight hard, and you'll live long enough to see them again.' I tell that to myself every morning, before every battle. I kept doing that, until..."

"You get to see them again?" Bunny completed his sentence for him.

"Yes," the general concurred. Bunny seemed cured of her sadness at first, but then she became downcast again, threatening another outbreak of the tears.

"Am I going to go away for months?" she asked. The general stared at her for a while, wondering what he should say, and what he should do in the future. "Am I?" she asked again. Before answering, the general thought about it and thought hard.

"No. No, you're not going to," he finally said. Bunny looked up at him with the biggest smile on
her face, tears breaking out anyway, but this time, they were tears of joy. "Most of the missions you'll be sent to won't even last a day. There might be some that might last a few days - maybe - but-

"Oh thank you thank you thank you!" Bunny interrupted the general to profess her gratitude. She'd gone around the table within an instant such that the general barked in shock, and before he knew it, she was hugging him tightly, such that he actually believed that she might break a few of his ribs.

But even if she did, it would have been worth it for the progress they had made.

Training Segment: Day 3 Revision

Time: 0500-0730

Description: This training segment is dedicated as a refresher on what B-50 has learned on Day 1, and a test of how much she has retained from Day 2's training.

Results: Day 1 training content intact. Test on Day 2 training content yields a nearly 100% proficiency rate.

Training Segment: Urban Warfare

Time: 0800-1100

Description: B-50 is to be put through a series of common urban warfare scenarios, including performing CQC in a street setting, room-by-room or in larger, more exposed building configurations. The training segment is conducted as a simulated mission. The subject is transported to a secure US Army training facility for the duration of the simulation for the purpose of secrecy.

Results: Building off on what she had learned, B-50 has exceeded expectations. She was able to utilize her motorcycle piloting skills to enter the fire zone quickly, before dispatching a group of mock terrorists via lethal shots to the brain or heart. Her approach to breaching rooms is unorthodox, and no doubt inspired by her stealth training. Her small size gives her options that wouldn't have occurred to a regular soldier. Even with her heavy armor, she was able to travel through ventilation shafts with ease and holes in the walls without difficulty, making her attack vector unpredictable. Less stealthy approaches were encouraged as well, and she has, again, exceeded expectations. She was able to punch through solid walls to get at her targets, and even tear off vault doors to take down targets hiding in bunkers and panic rooms. While it has resulted in an increased budget for us as we will need to pay the army for the damaged facilities, the result is worth it.

Training Segment: Winter Warfare

Time: 1130-1430

Description: While the lesson is titled as 'winter warfare', the lesson plan includes elements found normally in jungle and forest warfare training doctrine. The lesson will teach B-50 the importance of camouflage and how to maintain it, as well as finding cover in a natural setting. This will be taught through a simulated mission.

Results: B-50 has exceeded expectations, and her morale is high while doing so. She appears to enjoy the outdoors, perhaps because this is the first time doing it. After some failed attempts, she
was able to build herself a viable ghillie suit to wear over her armor. She was able to assassinate a mock terrorist leader after avoiding detection by 30 mock terrorists. She was then able to proceed to eliminate the closest terrorist lieutenants, sowing confusion before dispatching the rest of the mock terrorists.


28 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 1441.

"And then I shot them! Pow pow pow!" Bunny recounted her experience with taking down a terrorist cell from the inside out as if it were an amusement park ride. "They didn't even know I was there!"

"Are you proud of yourself, Bunny?" General Blackwater asked as he sat at a camp with her, listening. They were at break time, though it served as debriefing as well.

"Yes!" Bunny replied with a triumphant grin, all pumped up. "I'm going to protect my sisters, and I know how to do it!"

"Good," the general said with his own grin, slight as it might be. "There's just one thing though."

"What is it, Dad?" Bunny asked. The general stared at her as if she had killed someone. It was only then that she realized her mistake.

"Sorry, General Blackwater. It was a mistake," Bunny apologized.

"I hope that's the last time you make that mistake," the general warned the enhanced girl before continuing: "Now, we've been running simulations so far - meaning that all the missions you've been on are not real."

"They feel really real," Bunny said.

"Real terrorists shoot real bullets, which would have hurt for real. And when you put them down with real bullets, they don't come back up to crack open a can of soda when it's all over," the general explained. "Will you be able to kill if it were real, Bunny?"

"Yes…” Bunny claimed, though her face said otherwise. The general could read concern and uncertainty from it. Something that he would be fixing real soon.

"Did you bring Rabbit the rabbit here? As I've instructed?" the general asked, even though he knew fully well that Bunny wouldn't disobey him in such a trivial task, and neither would she have forgotten due to her photographic memory.

"Yes…” Bunny said, her face completely transparent, her confusion showing through.

"Show me," the general ordered. Together, they left the camp for her humvee. From the back of the vehicle, Bunny pulled out a gilded cage, which contained Rabbit the rabbit.

"Have you been feeding and watering it? Did you bathe it and brush its fur like I showed you?" the general asked.

"Yes, General Blackwater," Bunny replied in the affirmative proudly, holding up the cage for him to see.
"Do you love it? Do you see yourself taking care of it for years? Do you even want to?" the general asked even further. Bunny thought that it was a test - that if she answered it correctly, the general would be proud of her and she would be happy because of it, and because it would mean that she was somehow abler.

“Yes, General Blackwater. She's my friend and you gave it to me…” Bunny said, wondering if she had said the right things, though her sentiments were genuine. She imagined playing with Rabbit the rabbit with her sisters, petting it with Dad and even bringing it out for one of those 'picnics' she heard so much about. Oh, all the fun things they would do together! Already, it seemed as if they were destined to be owner and pet. Rabbit had never tried to hop away, and she seemed connected to her somehow, comforting her with her stares and nuzzling. Bunny, on the other hand, had been caring for her religiously, and not just because the general ordered her to.

"Is that so?" the general said while he opened the cage and took Rabbit the rabbit out. Cradling it in his hands, he stroked its fur a few times before continuing. "I'd like you to kill it.

Bunny's eyes went wide upon hearing the order.

"But- but- why?" Bunny cried, confused, but above all else, utterly upset. "You said I could keep it and I should take care of it and-"

"Are you afraid of really killing something now, Bunny?" the general interrupted.

"Not Rabbit, please!" Bunny begged. Soldiers were watching from a distance. Listening too. The look on their faces wasn't reassuring, but Bunny didn't need that hint to realize that General Blackwater never joked around.

"Please! You said that I could keep it for years and you asked if I'll take care of it for years and I said yes and-" Bunny went on, but the general overrode her:

"And what if I tell you that Rabbit is an enemy all along?" the general added.

"But…” Bunny looked at Rabbit, which returned her gaze as if it knew that its time was up.

"Kill it, Bunny," the general insisted, no, ordered. He handed Rabbit back to Bunny. The enhanced girl cradled the bundle of joy as if it was her baby. "Show me that you've learned something."

Bunny's eyes were filling up fast, wet from what she must do.

"Is this what you will do if you've been betrayed by a friend? Or even one of your sisters? Buttercup, for example?" the general snarled at her. "You're going to just stand there and take it? If this were out there, you would be dead by now! Kill it, Bunny!"

"No!" Bunny hugged Rabbit the rabbit tightly.

"She's the enemy, Bunny! Rabbit will kill you if you don't kill her!" the general barked aggressively. Bunny's hands had found their way to Rabbit's neck at the same time. "Kill it! Destroy it! Show me your loyalty! That you're ready to defend your family! Do it! Do it now!"

Bunny's hands tightened around Rabbit's neck, and the animal did not even resist, as if having accepted its fate a long time ago.

"Or are you the enemy, Bunny? Will you betray me and your family over a rabbit?" the general insinuated. Bunny, shocked by the general's words and possible rejection, afraid that her world would come crashing down around her if she did not kill, finally squeezed her fists.
Something gave, and the bundle of joy in Bunny's arms stopped wriggling about. What passed for resistance was a brief jerk from Rabbit, before that, too, stopped. Bunny wept; first, Mom had left, and now Rabbit too.

"Repeat after me, Bunny," the general growled at her, grabbing her by the solid collar of her armor. Bunny gazed up at him, whatever resistance she'd put up after her Interrogation Resistance training gone, replaced by submission. "Obedience brings victory. Say it!"

"Obedience-" Bunny whimpered and sniffled. "Obedience brings victory."

"Good," the general praised, though it felt empty to Bunny. To her, disaster had been averted, but at what cost? The general took the carcass of Rabbit off Bunny's arms. She was reluctant to give it away at first, but she knew she had to obey. "It brings a good meal too, apparently. Follow me and I'll show you how to prepare a good bowl of rabbit stew. Just in time for survival training."
Chapter 69: Interrogation

Chapter Summary

Different views on different situations are explored.

Chapter 69: Interrogation

B-49 W15 Experimental Report


Created By: Professor Utonium

Title: Further Development in B-49

B-49 (Bubbles) has just developed an amazing new ability. However, it is uncertain if she has this ability all along, or if it is newly acquired. There is no way to pinpoint and verify the exact date of its occurrence or if it even 'occurred' at all - she might even be created with it.

However, what is verifiable is the use of this new ability. In short, Bubbles has somehow acquired the ability to mentally translate foreign languages into English, in real-time. What is even more amazing is her ability to speak languages other than English after translation. This, however, has a limit.

On discovery of Bubbles' new ability, I was able to devise a quick and cheap experiment to examine Bubbles' abilities and to test its limits. The basic test involves me speaking languages foreign to Bubbles' cultural upbringing. Due to my basic understanding of languages other than English, I have decided on English as a control, followed by simple French, German and Latin.

Full documentation of the experimental set-up and results is appended to the end of this report. To summarize it here, she is able to understand words spoken in French, German and Latin and translate them back to me. Armed with dictionaries of my chosen languages, I began testing her on some of the more uncommon words - and the result is still positive. The control results are particularly interesting. Despite her newly-formed ability, she is unable to understand English words she has not learned yet and needs to be taught in that case. Otherwise, she appears to understand whatever language I throw at her. However, what came next was unexpected: she was able to speak the language as well.

With the discovery of this part of her new ability, I expanded the scope of the experiment. I began conversing with Bubbles in French, German and Latin. The results are positive. However, it is at this point that I noticed a pattern in her translated speech. She appears to be using very simple words, sometimes to the point of butchering the language.

It is not until much later that I realized that Bubbles was using words that I would have known, and no words that I have no idea about. The few that I have trouble deciphering are words that are what I remember learning and using but have forgotten until recently when I had to look them up on the dictionary to understand Bubbles. In short - her ability to understand, translate and speak languages she does not know is limited to the person speaking to her.
This leads me to my theory on Bubbles' translation ability. She might have gained a low-key passive telepathic ability that draws on a target's thoughts and knowledge, activated in times of stress from an inability to understand the target's speech. There must be a minimum level to this stress as this does not work on English words she simply has not learned yet. However, this is, at this point, an educated guess.

I continued the experiment after that with a modification to the set-up. The experiment is repeated in an MRI and PET scanner to determine what is going on with her neurologically. As expected, the appropriate centers of control related to language show increased activities. This includes the Broca's Area, the Insular Cortex and the Angular Gyrus. Memory forming areas such as the Prefrontal Cortex shows a selective increase in activity, present especially when the words given has an English analog.

How Chemical X is involved in this, and the mechanisms of this is currently unknown, pending investigation.

Addendum 1: Videos were taken during the experiments. I have examined the videos for both scientific and personal reasons, only to discover that there appears to be slight distortion in the air above our heads while the experiment is being conducted. This brings back memories of previous Project Powerpuff subjects with telepathic abilities, though the distortions with those past subjects are more visible. It is possible that Chemical X is released into the air to be used to form a connection between Bubbles and whoever she is translating. It is likely due to the fact that her translation ability is very subtle and low-key, utilizing very little Chemical X in the process. For comparison, subject B-46 (Blissstina), would erupt in purple lightning and light up her pale hair whenever she utilizes her telepathic or telekinetic abilities (or other psionic abilities).

Addendum 2: I've interviewed Bubbles about her ability, and got her to talk about her new translation ability. I suspected that she might have developed them at an earlier date and I was right. Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup and I had sat together to talk about Stanley Talker, the talking dog before, and in our conversation, Blossom and Buttercup remarked that he was hard to understand but Bubbles, on the contrary, believed that he was easy to understand. This might have been due to her translation ability kicking in at such a low level that no one noticed - Stanley Talker was speaking in English, albeit a version of it that is more conducive to a dog's facial and oral configuration. In other words, different enough that it required a small degree of translation.

But there is something much more amazing than this. Bubbles' experience goes further back than Stanley Talker's entry into their life, all the way to the beginning, and it is something that I and a few others can second.

Bubbles is able to speak to animals. More experiments will be planned and executed.

The City of Townsville. Downtown. Townsville Police Department Headquarters.

28 DEC (Tuesday) 1989. 1445.

I was marching through the corridors leading up to the chief. The floor was dirty brown and ancient, and it had been collecting cigarette ash and spilled beer and blood for decades. Washed weekly, the stain could never be fully removed - or our perception and memory of it. But it was somehow different for the past couple of months. Someone had rolled out the red carpet, not physically, but it was there. It was a consequence of my higher profile, but the red carpet wasn't just a welcome mat.

In the City of Townsville, nothing is ever so simple. A cigarette or a bottle of beer passed between
acquaintances could pass for a lot of things. Words coming through the mouth of a Townsvillian would gain a few extra definitions along the way. A red carpet wasn't necessarily a welcome mat. Stakes could be hidden underneath, a trap waiting to be sprung. Lives were at stake.

People stared as I came through with Detectives Olivia, Wednesday and Patrol-dog Stanley Talker at my back. The people who stared were all wearing uniforms or badges. They weren't all my co-workers, hadn't been for decades. I ignored the snide comments and expletives hurled my way. I hoped to God that my daughter could ignore the veiled rape threats and Stanley, the 'hotdog' threats. The two-faces were losing some side money from the work I'd been putting in out on the streets. But one type of comment stuck out the most. If words could still break my bones, these would be the words:

"Where're your Powerpuff bitches now, Mullens?" one of the blue-scaled snakes had said. I didn't see who it was, but I knew who it was. I recognized the voice. He was one of those who'd be stuffed into a tiny, dark hole once all this was over. Except for the goal post had been moved way out of the stadium.

I didn't bother knocking. I'd just barged straight through the chief's office while my entourage waited outside.

"What the hell's goin' on, chief?" I said to the man. To ask me to hold back on the teetering cauldron of boiling vitriol would be asking too much - and I knew the chief was asking without words - but I held it back (barely) anyway.

"What are you talking about, lieutenant?" the chief asked. I knew he was acting dumb. He was too smart to be in the dark.

"You've been keeping the Powerpuff Girls away from me," I unloaded the bullets. I didn't feel like playing the game, not when I was this close to slaying the dragon, not when I could taste it, smell it in the air - the validation of decades of rot and stagnant water for some kind of closure.

"That's one hell of an accusation, Mullens," the chief said, pinching a pencil with both his hands before him.

"You knew how important they were to me - to my operations," I was spitting more out. I didn't just have an old revolver in my hands, and I'd been collecting the bullets for a long time. The Powerpuff Girls had always been available to me and my task force. A few days ago, when they were nowhere to be seen and elsewhere, serving some other, likely lesser, purpose, I'd put it down to high demand of service. But then they were ghost for a second operation I needed them for, and then a third. All three planned operations were canceled, replaced by kid-sized alternatives that wouldn't have helped. Three times the charm. That was when I knew something was up.

"Mullens, come on," the chief said in that condescending tone, standing up and putting his mitt on my shoulder, gesturing for me to sit down. I shrugged it off and told him that I preferred standing. It was good for the heart. The chief sat back down, unafeard of the shadow I cast on him.

"I'm just a police chief, one out of many. And I'm sure you know that mine isn't exactly the highest position, right?" he continued to play dumb. If he was a salesman, he'd be broke by now. Except he wasn't - probably because of the side businesses he'd been running. "There are dozens of us in this city, and when the commissioner or the DA and their deputies ask us to jump, we ask, 'how high'. You get it, right?"

The cauldron's gotta spill sooner or later. I slammed my fists on the table. But he was a mountain, used to my method of anger management since a long time ago. How I wished for those moments a
"Just once! Just for fucking once!" I roared at him, let him know how much I resented the law I was enforcing - because it was preventing me from killing him. "What I'm doing could end this - all of this! You could have fought harder for me but I know you didn't!"

"Now that - I resent that," the chief said while he had pinched a cigarette out of its box. He jabbed his fingers, with that cigarette between them, at me. "I've been fighting for your use of the Powerpuff Girls for weeks! Months! How 'bout a little appreciation!?"

"And now they're just magically under some other chief's control? Just when things are picking up steam?" I shot at him again. I knew how the game was played. You don't show your hands until the very end. How I fell for it despite being an old bird, I had no clue. "Who is it, chief?"

"You need to learn to relax, Mullens," the chief condescended, avoiding my magic question. "It's good for your health. Take it easy - go with the flow. You've been watching the news, right? The Powerpuff Girls… they're still doing good, aren't they? Kicking more ass than ever, I'd even say."

"I would hardly call shutting down one small gang at a time 'kicking more ass than ever'," I said. I knew I was just beating away the chaff. There was more to it than that. 'Duty' wasn't exactly a common word in Townsville.

"Now you look here!" the chief shouted again. It was still just as manufactured as his cigarettes. "As much as you'd like to think you are, you're not the center of the universe! No, you're a dime in the dozen, no matter what the newspapers and mouths on the street say! Your plan isn't the only one, Mullens! Those damn super-powered kids don't belong to you! You've had your chance to use them, and now it's someone else's turn to shine! Fuck, they just busted the fuckin' Yakuza right in the head, you know that? How's that for important?"

I didn't think much of the Yakuza bust. I had run out of trust a long time ago, along with many other things. It wasn't the first time a local weed was pulled, and it wouldn't be the last. The weeds would grow if not one species then another. Sometimes, the police were just hands, pulling them out to make way for another.

"I want them tomorrow, you hear me? Don't make me climb the ladder," I didn't stick around to argue. I wasn't in the debate team back in high school, hadn't had the patience for it since. I don't talk the talk. I wanted to walk, and fast. Get to the finish line before anyone else.

"That's a tall order," the chief said, resigned. Good.

"Then make it a full glass of cocktail with an umbrella and slice of lemon on top," I sassed him before putting on my hat and turning around, letting him appraise the back of my trousers.

He didn't say anything more as I took my leave. Good.

---

The City of Townsville. Downtown. USDO Headquarters.

28 DEC (Tuesday) 1989. 1521.

As Bunny sat in General Blackwater's office, her mind couldn't help but wander back to the wintry forest out there, back in time, back to that specific time. General Blackwater had chopped Rabbit's carcass into two right in front of her, the intestines and blood spilling onto the snow, red and stark, while she watched. The general made her watch, saying that she needed to toughen up. He then
gave her the front portion and then demonstrated with the back portion how to skin a rabbit.

Bunny didn't want to. It felt wrong. But she did it anyway because OBEDIENCE BRINGS VICTORY. Because it'd satisfy the general, make him happy. They would then cook the rabbit in a pot of boiling water, with additives to make a stew.

When the rabbit stew was ready, General Blackwater made her eat it, no matter how many tears she had shed, no matter how many times she begged not to. It didn't help that she was hungry, and the rabbit stew smelled so great. She began chewing faster, swallowing quicker, until she had devoured the rabbit stew made from her friend.

It felt worse than cannibalism - something which General Blackwater actually talked about after that - that if she had no other choice, she would have to consume the corpse of a person to survive. With Bunny, General Blackwater reasoned that it would be slightly more acceptable since she wasn't exactly human in the normal sense.

"Bunny? Come here and I'll show you something," the general said to her some time after she was done thinking about the near past. Stiffly, she got off the chair opposite the general's and skirted around his desk. With no other chairs available, the general welcomed Bunny to sit on his lap, groaning under the weight of Bunny and her heavy armor.

When Bunny was settled in, the general opened a video file and played it. While Bunny was unfamiliar with the contents of the video, General Blackwater had already scanned through the file numerous times over the past two months. Had Bunny's elder sisters, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, been here, they would have recognized it too.

It was some security footage taken from inside the Townsville Central Bank, from over two months ago. It was the Powerpuff Girls' first mission (who were then named The Three), and it'd gone horribly wrong.

Bubbles was shot in the eye, shattering her combat ballistic goggles and knocking her out, forcing Blossom to pull her back on the retreat with Buttercup hesitating and attacking, only to be outnumbered and forced to run anyway. They were shot dozens of times on the way out, and Buttercup was even set on fire using a molotov cocktail.

Bunny could barely even look, and the general had to prod at her and order her to keep looking. She'd burst into tears in the middle of it.

"Do you understand now?" the general said, and Bunny nodded her head even though he didn't elaborate.

"Stop crying and listen. Your sisters are weak, and you need to protect them; fight crime and neutralize the enemy so this does not happen again. Do you understand?" the general explained, knowing that Bunny wasn't quite in the right state of mind to be asking questions. Bunny could barely hold it in even as she listened. She broke down again after that. Just the violence of it all being ruthlessly exacted upon her elder sisters was unnerving.

The general, however, wanted something more. This simply would not do. Taking her by the shoulders, he shook her up. "I said stop crying!" He threw her off his lap, and she landed hard on her back. "Stand up!"

Bunny did as she was told, brought out of her weeping by the pain and shock from the general's actions. She stood up immediately, like a soldier berated by a drill sergeant. The general got off his chair, pushing it back violently as he sprung to his feet.
"You want to be emotional, Bunny? Then be angry!" the general said to her. "Be furious! Mad! Those men hurt your sisters! Come on, give me your angry face! Think about it! The pain those men caused your dear sisters!"

Bunny needed several tries before she could get it right. She'd imagined getting shot a million times, and how it might have been for her sisters. She had been shot before, ironically by the general who used a Duranium XM90 Anti-Material Rifle. It wasn't something unknown to her.

"You know, we do have the same criminals who hurt your sisters in custody," the general tempted Bunny and the fact that she had taken the bait had shown through her transparent look, that look that told everyone that she wanted sweet vengeance. It was the first time she felt that way, and the feeling was ambrosial and natural to her. "Good, good. You're born to suffer, to feel your sisters' pain. For now, it's because of those men. But you're born to do something else, Bunny. I think it's time you make them feel your pain."

---

**Training Segment: Enhanced Interrogation**

**Time: 1530-1730**

Description: B-50 is to be taught the art of inflicting pain and fear for the purpose of compelling cooperation from an unwilling and previously uncooperative subject. Up to three real prisoners will be provided for the purpose of this segment, and B-50's goal will be to force them to confess to a number of crimes they did not commit and to reveal information about the crime scene they were found in that is already known and corroborated by evidence on the scene. The prisoners' survival is optional.

Results: In the course of the lesson, B-50 is able to apply her knowledge of where to target to inflict the most pain from her human anatomy lessons, and how to cause fear from her lessons in psychological warfare. Her experience of being tortured herself has helped, I believe, as there was some resemblance in her technique to mine when it comes to terrorizing the target while cutting him with a knife. She is incredibly successful in this regard. She was able to interrogate all provided subjects without killing them for the duration of the training segment. However, only 1 in 3 prisoners was completely broken – better results are expected as she gains experience in this field.

---

**The City of Townsville. Downtown. USDO Headquarters.**

28 DEC (Tuesday) 1989. 1733.

"I'm proud of you, Bunny," the general whispered into her ear as the enhanced girl was cleaning her face with a wetted rag from a basin nearby. Bunny, however, was shaking. In just a few days, she had gone from being a normal girl living in a suburbs to a little superhuman terror who was unafraid of being a monster. The change had caught up with her after she was done working on the prisoners provided to her. She had released her anger in a basic sense of justice, but fear and regret had replaced it, despite everything the general had talked about.

Four USDO officers in grey uniforms came in shortly after that, and they began unstrapping one of the prisoners from a chair. The man shouted in pain as the guards grabbed him by the arms and dragged him in front of Bunny. He had been thoroughly worked on. The general had lost count on the number of cuts on his body, though the number of fingers the man still had left was much easier to count. The prisoner had to be dragged to Bunny because he couldn't walk anymore, not because of exhaustion and pain, but because balancing would be an issue without the correct
number of toes, though the fact that one of his knees had been drilled with an electric drill was much more pressing. He wouldn't have been able to navigate well anyway, with one of his eyes mutilated before being gouged out.

The prisoner, a disgraced Lombardi capo with a scorpion tattoo on his forehead, gave an off-keyed shout when he was dumped on his knees in front of Bunny; with half his teeth torn out, he couldn't even do that right.

General Blackwater unholstered his pistol and stuck it out in front of Bunny, handle-first.

"He's yours, Bunny. Protect your sisters. Shoot this man and show me that you can," he said, and when Bunny hesitated and stared at the gun, he continued: "If we let him live, he might escape and threaten them again."

Bunny had hesitated not because she was afraid or unwilling to kill. She had hesitated because she still found it hard to believe that she had changed so much, into something even she knew her Dad wouldn't like.

"Your parents will be proud of you. Your Dad hates killing, I know, but he'll understand. Obedience brings victory, Bunny," as if reading her mind, the general said. Bunny took the gun and cocked it. She pointed it at the captured criminal's forehead. His one good eye was staring into the barrel of the gun as if welcoming what would come out of it. It would be hard to understand why not, for he was shivering not just from the cold, but also from how stretches of his skin were hanging loosely from his side and chest.

"Obedience brings victory," Bunny repeated the general's words before squeezing the trigger. There was a brief, but loud explosion and the tattooed prisoner collapsed, finally released from his agony.

"You are ready, Bunny. I can feel it," the general said, a rare grin spreading across his face. He turned to the four USDO security officers. "Take the other two back to their cells. I have a feeling they'd be good for another training session."

"No! No, please! I confessed! I'm guilty! Please, no more!" one of the torture survivors begged as he was being unstrapped, cuffed and taken away. He was brought through the door, still dripping blood from his countless wounds. His screams could still be heard until eventually, he was too far away.

"Did you have fun?" the general asked Bunny, who'd been watching her torture victims being dragged out all along. She turned to him, looking up, more serious than ever before, the last vestiges of her innocence either stripped away or superseded, terrorized into hiding in some dark corner of her psyche. The general looked down to trade eye contact with her.

Bunny had never been surer in her life before. She was born (created) for this. A grin spread on her face to match the general.

"Yes."
Chapter 70: Finest Hour

Chapter Summary

A whole new world has opened up for Bunny as a day ends and another begins...

Chapter 70: Finest Hour

B-50 Training Report 02281989-C (Continued)

Training Segment: Navigation

Time: 1800-1900

Description: B-50 is given a map and instructed with the aim of memorizing the layout of The City of Townsville, as well as the surrounding country. This includes the power grid, sewage systems, phone lines, and other infrastructural layouts.

Results: B-50 is able to commit to memory even the finest details when it comes to any location in Townsville and the surrounding area. She scores 47/50 on a quiz prepared before the lesson, with the 3 mistakes attributed to misinterpretation of the elements on the map, not a failure of memory.

Training Segment: Infiltration

Time: 1900-2000

Description: B-50 is put under the charge of Corporal Nana Weston, who has moderate experience in covert operations and infiltration, in order for her to learn how to blend in with the general populace. The lesson is conducted in a manner similar to a game of dress-up to ease the enhanced subject into the lesson.

Results: B-50 is able to disguise herself to the point of being completely unrecognizable as an enhanced being. The fact that there are very few physical aberrations to hide is a huge factor impacting her level of success, something which subjects created by even Chemical W does not have. Through the use of contact lenses, dyes or wigs, and various everyday clothing or uniforms, B-50 is able to blend into any environment ranging from a school to a summer camp to the streets to a suburban area.

Training Segment: Dance (Ballet)

Date: 28 FEB (Tuesday) 1989

Time: 2000-2100

Subject: B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

Role: Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)
"Come on, sweetie, don't be shy," Nana Weston coaxed Bunny into a multi-function room, cleared for the hour's activity. "Take off your armor - here, let me help you. There's a good girl. Now, you're going to change into these tights and we're going to have some fun, okay?"

Bunny had been following her every word without question. Besides the fact that 'obedience brings victory', Nana Weston had become something of a surrogate mom in the absence of Selicia Goodwin, her real mom (though she didn't know, of course, that she wasn't really her biological mom). Nana had been extremely sweet to her, as a mom would be when other women would either give her the stare or avoid her entirely.

Nana was in a pair of dancing tights herself too, and while Bunny was busy putting her purple tights on, she was doing some warm-up exercises, stretching her muscles and even doing a split on the ground. Nana was so engrossed in this that she didn't notice that Bunny was done, and soon, she was spinning on the tip of her toes and pirouetting gracefully across the air as if effortlessly.

"But what are we doing?" Bunny asked, perplexed by the moves Nana was busting out. She knew beauty and art when she saw it, even if she couldn't quite describe them, but she couldn't see how it was related to protecting her family or fighting crime. "Do I do this when I'm out in the field?"

Nana stopped soon after Bunny started asking questions, listening.

"Heavens, no. We're just going to have some fun, Bunny. You and me, together," Nana said cryptically, a mothering smile on her face as she came forward and took Bunny by both hands.

"But I want to protect my family!" Bunny said, still focused on her previous lesson in 'enhanced interrogation'. It'd made clear what her purpose was. "General Blackwater said-"

Nana put a finger on Bunny's lips to shush her, before continuing.

"You know, I used to do this a lot before I joined… this place. I still dance sometimes," the corporal explained. "Dancing taught me many things - not just hard work and art. I learned to follow orders - really complex stuff, right down to where I point my toes and which direction I leap to and how. It made me who I am, and it gave me something to look back on. Now, why don't we start?"

Unknown to Bunny, General Blackwater and Director Cliff were watching from behind a one-way window.

"Ballet? You're joking. Right?" the director said, incredulous, as he watched the expensive enhanced individual he ordered doing a few basic spins and twirls, mastering them quickly.

"Dancing has its uses," General Blackwater said as he watched through the same window, far less surprised by the direction of the crash course he'd set Bunny on.

"And what would they be?" Director Cliff said sarcastically. "Is she going to dazzle the enemy with her dance moves? Are they going to fall over or fall in love with her because she knows how to put on a good show?"

"No. It will teach her how to use her body better," the general defended his decision, barely even aware that the director was highly skeptical of the current lesson. He was watching Bunny intently, determined not to miss even half a second of her doing ballet. "That, and it'd show her a thing or two about following orders. To the letter."
"If you say so," the director deferred to his decision. "As long as she does what she's supposed to do."

Training Segment: Music

Time: 2000-2100

Description: B-50 is to be taught how to sing by Nana Weston, with material taken from lullabies, children's songs and military marching songs. She is also taught the anthem, its meaning and significance to instill a degree of patriotism. She has been taught the use of several musical instruments common to US military tradition, such as drums and flutes.

Results: After a period of shyness, B-50 is able to 'sing like her most promising classmates' according to Weston. The most important thing, however, is B-50's new-found sense of rhythm and enhanced receptiveness and adherence to orders even if they are not given in the verbal or written form. The use of instruments is another matter, as memory work has nothing to do with skill. It will take time for her to master the instruments Nana Weston has chosen for her, but that is secondary to the actual objective of the lesson.

Training Segment: Basic Military Drills

Time: 2100-2200

Description: To complete B-50's training and ensure that it is well-rounded, she is introduced to the basics of regular military training, which includes marching drills, precision drills, cleanliness and grooming regimes, and alertness and scramble drills.

Results: B-50 is successful. No additional notes.

Training Segment: Final Revisions

Time: 2200-2300

Description: B-50 is given one final chance to clear any doubts by asking questions and practice whatever she believes to be lacking in her abilities. The entire B-50 training staff is present to assist, except for Sergeant Selicia Goodwin.

Results: Believed to be successful. B-50 is proactive in asking questions, filling holes in her understanding of her role that even our training doctrine has been unable to pre-emptively fill. One good example is regarding what she should do should she encounter specific enhanced enemies mentioned in brief to her – something that would only have been disseminated to her on a need-to-know basis. Not a single minute was wasted, and she spent the remainder of her time practicing unarmed and melee weapon drills.

Training Segment: Finest Hour

Date: 28 FEB (Tuesday) 1989

Time: 2300-0000

Subject: B-50 'Bunny Utonium'
'Your mission is simple,' Bunny recalled General Blackwater's words as she flew down the highway on her modified motorbike. Despite all her training and every preparation she made, she could still feel a tingling down her spine, goosebumps rising on her skin, nervousness making itself clearly known in her mind. There were butterflies in her stomach, fluttering aggressively. 'Your sisters, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, will be scrambled to attack a confirmed Foundation hideout. You will beat them to the location and attack it before your sisters do. You will do so without being seen by your sisters. The more enemies you kill, the less danger your sisters will be in. There's a chance there will be enhanced individuals similar to you guarding the site. I estimate that you have about 30 minutes to complete your mission if you leave immediately.'

The general would then go on to show her the location on the map. She was given free rein as to how she prepared for the mission. She would choose to equip herself with only a suppressed pistol and a combat knife for maximum stealth, not counting less offensive articles of gear. After painting black camouflage stripes on her face and contact lenses to mask the purple glow of her eyes, she took off in her motorcycle beyond the top speed, purple X-contrail trailing behind her.

With even the geography of the outskirts of Townsville memorized, Bunny was able to take the shortest route to the location, stopping a couple of miles away to proceed on foot – just like what the general said to do when approaching an enemy position in a vehicle.

Despite ditching her favorite and only bike hesitantly, Bunny was able to zip across the wilderness quickly, avoiding roots and branches and rock with her superior reaction time and finesse. Two miles were covered in mere minutes and Bunny would even leap to clear obstacles a normal human being would take minutes to scale, and she'd done it silently too, using what she'd learned about footfalls and landing in her stealth lessons.

The contact zone came within sight. Bunny squinted at her watch under the moonlight. She had about 14 minutes and 22 seconds left to complete the mission before her sisters showed up. Assuming they were on time. Part of her hesitated – oh how much she'd missed her sisters! She wanted so badly to meet them, too! But the mission was the mission, and orders were orders. 'Obedience brings victory,' she remembered what the general had so painstakingly and lovingly taught her. Victory, this time, meant protecting her sisters.

The site was an abandoned bunker. Two Foundation terrorists were guarding the entrance. Another two were patrolling its parameter, consisting of a ring of rusty, broken-down chain-link fence with many opportunities of entry for her that she was spoiled for choice.

She spent further precious seconds shifting her angle of reconnaissance, sighting the entrance of the bunker. The door was closed. Made of steel. Rusty, but sturdy. Still, it was likely no match for her.

She gave the patrolling terrorists time to circle away from her, their torchlights shining haphazardly across the wintry forest, but she had hidden too well to be seen. It was only when they had their backs turned that Bunny zipped in for the kill.

As she flew across the snow, past the chain-link fence, she unsheathed her knife. Her footsteps were soft, but still loud enough to be heard in a forest frozen by both the winter and the night.

But she was fast – blindingly fast. By the time one of the guards could shine his flashlight on her, she had already jammed her combat knife through his eye socket. The other Foundation agent
could only give a frightened shout before his throat was slit in a single motion - a slice of the knife - and he couldn't even squeak. The bad guys' flashlights and guns tumbled to the ground, followed quickly by their bodies – Bunny was only able to catch hold of one of them. Flashlights were shining in her direction, mostly blocked by the surface protrusion of the abandoned bunker. She could hear the patrolling terrorists.

"Did I hear something?" One of them said, ignorant and puzzled.

"Could be nothing," the other said. "Just them fooling around again. I'm not radioing that in."

Bunny could tell from their lights that they were going to check anyway. Rushing to the wall of the bunker, she unholstered her suppressed pistol, came out from the corner and fired two precise rounds, the bullets, though subsonic, penetrating their foreheads. They fell almost simultaneously, and their comrades would be none the wiser because of their rusty, steel door.

She looked at her watch. 11 minutes and 35 seconds left. She stood before the door that would lead into an underground complex full of bad guys, some possibly stronger than her. After taking a deep breath and remembering that she would get to see Daddy the next day if she pulled through tonight, she sunk their fingers into the steel door, ripped it off its hinges and threw it aside in short order. The next thing Bunny saw was a flight of stairs leading down, lit dimly by barely-functional lights. A man sitting on a rickety wooden chair at the base of the stairs leading down squawked in surprise and fumbled for his pistol when he saw the impossible happening before him.

Bunny promptly quick-drew her pistol and shot him between the eyes, instantly killing him. The time for sneaking and hiding was up - this the enhanced girl knew when she heard more men and women barking orders and scrambling from deep within the bunker.

Leaping down several steps at a time, Bunny hopped to the landing of the concrete stairs to confront a group of six or so Foundation fighters. With pistol and knife in hand, Bunny rushed them, ignoring rounds fired in her general direction, the pain a mere inconvenience, before firing shots of her own while she closed the distance; two were killed outright, one with a bullet to the heart while another in the cerebrum. Another somehow survived a gunshot to the eye - which qualified as a miss to Bunny - collapsing as she screamed.

When Bunny was right next to them, her victory was a foregone conclusion. In rapid succession, she pistol-whipped one man, dashing his head against the concrete wall fatally before plunging her knife into the ear of another. The last man standing was wrestled to the ground as he screamed and fired pistol shots into Bunny's chest fruitlessly before she tore his head off his shoulders, painting the otherwise dull gray ground with his blood.

With the last man down, Bunny stood up again and looked at her watch. 10 minutes 20 seconds. Her armor was drenched in blood. There was gasping from the floor. Bunny searched it for the source. The woman who was shot in the eye was still clinging onto life. She pointed her suppressed pistol at her and squeezed, putting her out of her misery.

Next, she searched the bunker room by room for any other enemies who would hurt her sisters. The underground facility barely qualified as one. It was small, and the rooms were empty; the enemy had made it convenient for her by bunching together, it seemed. Thankfully, it also meant that there were no enhanced individuals like the feared four-armed Naga or the scheming Mojo Jojo in the area. She took a glance at her watch again. 4 minutes and 45 seconds. She had searched every nook and cranny of every room for any survivors hiding in any possible crack or hole or furniture, but there were none.

It was over. Her first mission was done. Beaming as she returned to the main corridor of the
bunker, she admired the work of art she had created there - six bodies in one tight spot, most of them killed with clean shots, with only one of them executed rather messily. There were ten in total, which wasn't bad for a first mission. In the back of her mind, it was shocking - the blood, the gore she'd made, the violence and loud noises - but she'd learned to separate herself from it by the general's grace. She knew it had to be done. They were the enemy, and they were going to hurt her sisters.

Going back up to the surface and ditching the underworld, Bunny ran off to reclaim her motorized bike. Minutes later, pink, baby blue and lime green streaks of light would weave past trees and rocks and piles of snow towards the bunker.

---

Pokey Oaks County. Abandoned Bunker 63-5A.

28 FEB (Tuesday) 1989. 2336.

"Where is everybody?" Bubbles said, confused at how silent the forest was. Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup had flown into the forest expecting to take heavy fire. Yet, there was silence. They had crept up to the rusty chain-link fence, their eyes lit up like lanterns.

It didn't take long for them to discover the bodies as they inched their way towards the bunker. One of them was shot through the eye. The rest, the brain.

"I guess that answers your question," Blossom commented as they made their way towards the rusty steel door of the bunker. It was ajar.

"What a buzzkill," Buttercup said as she pointed her Stoner machine gun to and fro as she swept the landscape for enemies, only for there to be none.

It was the same story inside the bunker. A heap of bodies, all expertly killed, efficiently dispatched with a bullet to the brain or something less elegant but equally fatal.

There was nothing for them, and it'd confused them. It was something that had never happened before.

"What's going on?" Blossom wondered out loud. She didn't have to wonder for long.

"This is comms unit Bravo-3. Powerpuff Girls, what's your status? Over," the Girls' radio came alive.

"There's nothing here, Mister Bravo-3," Blossom reported.

"Everyone's dead, Mister Bravo-3!" Bubbles exclaimed into her radio.

"Yeah, there's no bad guys to fight! It's boring!" Buttercup complained. "Can we go somewhere else!?"

"Observations noted, Bravo-Four-Seven, Bravo-Four-Eight and Bravo-Four-Nine. There's nowhere else to go. Return home for R&R, over and out," the comms officer on the other end said, with an air of finality.

"But who did all this?" Blossom asked over the radio. There wasn't a reply to that. Compared to Bunny, the Powerpuff Girls' performance had been slipshod, though no one was there to tell them that. They had gotten lost on the way to the bunker as even Blossom wasn't very familiar with the county outside the City of Townsville. As a result, they were late. Even if they had arrived earlier
than Bunny, they would have made a mess of things by attacking the Foundation cell head-on, alerting it to their presence right from the beginning outside the bunker and allowing the terrorists on the inside to send out a distress signal to the closest Foundation cell. The entire illegal organization would then come to know that they were being raided, and shift locations entirely.

---

**Training Segment: Graduation Ceremony**

**Date:** 29 FEB (Wednesday) 1989

**Time:** 0000-0030

**Subject:** B-50 'Bunny Utonium'

**Role:** Black Ops Organic Weapons Platform (Bioweapon)

**Status:** Operationally Ready

Bunny's bike roared as she drove it back to the USDO HQ beyond full speed. She was proud of what she'd done – she had protected her sisters, and she had beaten them at a game they were supposed to be better at. She'd barely even seen their X-contrails while she was leaving.

The garage doors had opened for her automatically while she was turning into the headquarters' underground carpark. She knew that it was strange – she knew at heart that she was supposed to answer a challenge question or give a password or a series of key phrases.

Something had changed.

And that change was made obvious when a surreal scene met her at the lobby of the HQ carpark when she came through. Two rows of USDO honor guards flanked her on either side of the door, ten on each side. At the other end of this human corridor was General Blackwater in his ceremonial uniform. Corporal Nana Weston stood beside her, in ceremonial uniform, too.


She was so amazed at the sight that she couldn't react immediately, the general's request not registering immediately until she was aware that she would spoil it soon if she did not move. Coming forward to him, still, in her combat gear, her eyes met the general's, and they both agreed with each other.

The general saluted her. Bunny saluted him back. He then presented to her a pair of rank patches, each with a chevron on it. The general had deliberated for the entire length of Bunny's crash course on the manner of the enhanced girl's service. With each day that passed, he became ever more convinced of the current route he would take.

"You are not a cadet anymore, Bunny. As of the first hour of the twenty-ninth of February 1989, you are now Private Bunny Utonium," the general said before putting the rank patches into Bunny's outstretched hands. The girl's eyes misted as she smiled at the general. "A soldier in your own right, prepared, trained and qualified to defend your family, your sisters, the USDO and Townsville, against the forces of evil. Congratulations."

"What do I do now?" Bunny asked, unsure of what to do with herself now. It was all too overwhelming - just three days ago, she didn't even know which end of a knife to hold.

"For now, rest, Private Bunny Utonium. It's going to be a new day when you wake up," the general
ordered. Nana took Bunny by the hand to guide her, first taking her into an elevator. By that point, the first thing Bunny was thinking about wasn't even Dad or her family any longer. Now, she wondered what the next mission would be…
Chapter 71: Wait

Chapter Summary

Bunny Utonium is committed to another mission.

Chapter 71: Wait

Phone Recording 03011989-0734-TH

DOC: 01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989.

Extracted: 01 JUN 1989.

Corporal Nana Weston: General Blackwater's office. Who am I speaking to?

Professor Utonium: It's me, Utonium.

Corporal Nana Weston: I assume you'll want to talk to the general?

Professor Utonium: Not yet. Nana, right? Have we met before?

Corporal Nana Weston: Not really. We've met at your house but never sat down to talk. I was recruited a couple months ago.

Professor Utonium: It doesn't matter. I heard about you from Selicia-

Corporal Nana Weston: I hope it isn't anything bad. Bunny's such a dear, Utonium. I enjoy teaching her what I can.

Professor Utonium: I heard. Selicia's a little jealous of you, but she trusts you. How is she? Bunny, I mean.

Corporal Nana Weston: She's… fine. The training's hard on her but she's taken well to it.

Professor Utonium. I see. Thanks for taking care of her - I mean it. I'd like to speak to the general now.

Corporal Nana Weston: Thank you too. It's an honor speaking to you, sir. Transferring now.

(There is beeping while the line is being transferred)

General Blackwater: Blackwater here. What is it?

Professor Utonium: General Blackwater! You said three days, general. Three days! Where is she? Where's my Bunny?

General Blackwater: Let me correct you there, prof. I said three days of training - and she'd just had three days' worth of training, and it's more than what you could ever provide her in your lifetime. Don't get your lab coat tied in a knot, professor. She'll be 'returned' to you today.
Professor Utonium: What have you done to her?

General Blackwater: What I should have done to Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup right from the start. Don't call me again for such trivial matters. I assume that is all? (Hangs up)

Professor Utonium: (Hangs up after a pause)

---

The City of Townsville. Downtown. USDO Headquarters.

01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 0849.

"You can't let him know about this, Private Bunny Utonium," General Blackwater said. Bunny was standing at attention in his office. Her face, however, was anything but a soldier's."Do you understand?"

"But… I tell my Dad everything," Bunny reluctantly said. She knew that the general was the kind who wouldn't take no for an answer. But Dad was everything to her, even now, when the general had more influence over her. "The man I shot- he-"

"Private Bunny Utonium!" the general growled at Bunny, who tensed up at the sound of his anger. She'd wanted to move away, preferably towards the door, but her discipline and training prevented her from moving. However, he eased up surprisingly, growing gentle: "Bunny - sweetheart - you know how your father is like. It would be good for both you and him that you tell him nothing. Let me take the fall for it."

"But you can't!" Bunny broke out of her pose, alarmed by what the general was suggesting. But on remembering that the general preferred her to be a little more stoic, stifled her own emotions and stood still. "I don't know if I can…"

"Your concern is duly noted, but he knows that I'm a killer. Nothing will change if I take the wrap for it," the general reasoned. Sensing that there was some awkwardness and too many emotions between them, he turned around to look out the window instead. "Besides, it wouldn't exactly be a lie, would it? I ordered his death, and you were merely carrying out that order. You did well, by the way, private. It's commendable that you did it despite your feelings for that man."

Bunny felt anything but comforted and proud. His blood was in her hands, and the fact that she was 'just' carrying out orders didn't make her feel any less guilty. And it showed. The general had caught a glance of her staring down at the floor, her face screwed up as she was concentrating her entire will on not crying. A drop of tear broke through anyway.

"Jesus, Bunny. I don't blame you for feeling this way. I've worked with that man for many years, and I know he's a likable guy," the general continued staring out the window, mulling over the bushes and trees swaying in the direction of the late winter wind. "But remember what I told you? About how some people would never understand? How some people could never see the greater good? Betrayal could come from anywhere, Bunny. It's why I've warned you to keep a close eye on your own family too."

Bunny thought about it. Her mind wandered - her heart was hurting now, and what better way to escape it than to return to the past? However, all she could think about was that moment when she fell into the rabbit hole, and there was no way out…

---

The City of Townsville. Downtown. USDO Headquarters.
"God damn it! Of all the people to do this! Of all the people!" Bunny could hear General Blackwater ranting from a mile away. Her superior sense of hearing had left no mystery to unnerve her, but what she heard was unnerving enough. She had been ordered by the general to meet him, and Corporal Nana Weston was the messenger. She had been whispering advice into her ear on how to behave in front of the general (if Bunny's own experience wasn't enough), but her advice was only half-absorbed as Bunny was mainly focusing on what the general was screaming about. "After everything we've been through! So much for an understanding!"

Bunny was gently led into the office by Nana, who then closed the door behind her, and quickly too. The general whirled around the moment he heard her come in. The enhanced girl thought that she was silent, but apparently, she wasn't quiet enough.

"Private Bunny! Get over here!" the general bellowed at the lab-grown child, who scooted over, afraid but, for now, not afraid enough to express it. "Take a look at this map!" The general jabbed his massive finger at the paper. It felt to Bunny as though he might puncture it and the tabletop beneath. "You see this highway here? Highway 16?"

"Yes, General Blackwater," Bunny acknowledged. She didn't even need to read the map to imagine where Highway 16 was in relation to her position and orientation.

"A humvee FULL of TRAITORS is traveling down this highway towards the Town of Citysville," the general said. "They plan to destroy Project Powerpuff! Ruin everything we've achieved! It would mean losing any and all military gains we've made over the past three months! They are heading towards an FBI safe house in Citysville - they plan to spread sensitive data to the rest of the federal government! We can't have that - Foundation and criminal agents would gain access to those data! And the FBI - the rest of the feds - they're going to try to shut us down!"

By this point, the general was ranting to himself, absorbed in the consequences of the traitors' actions. Bunny wasn't able to understand all of it. For example, she had no idea where Citysville was or what kind of place it was, nor did she even understand what Project Powerpuff covered. But it didn't matter because…

"They are now enemies. And they will die as traitors. Private Bunny, that's your second mission. You will intercept the humvee along that highway - kill everyone in it - no mercy, no hesitation, no survivors," the general ordered at length. Looking at Bunny, however, he noticed that she was shifting uncomfortably. She knew enough to understand that she would be killing people who weren't terrorists or criminals. "If they reach their destination, Bunny, you will be separated from your family forever. Your family will be broken apart - your sisters will never see each other again. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes…"

_______________________________


01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 0637.

A humvee's top speed was about 70 miles an hour. A sensible driver, however, would drive it at slightly below the military engine's maximum, at 60 miles per hour. It would mean that the USDO deserters were halfway to Citysville by then, just passing by the town of Pilgrim's Fall since they had left just under half an hour ago. Bunny's modified bike had a top speed of 100 miles per hour, and she was capable of pushing it beyond that. General Blackwater had measured 140 miles per
hour, which meant that Bunny would be able to catch up with them on the outskirts of Citysville, Townsville's sister city.

And this, Bunny had done. Within under an hour, after pushing her and her modified motorcycle hard, she was able to catch up with the traitor humvee on a hot pursuit, screaming rapidly towards them like a bird-of-prey. As it was an open highway with the morning commute still incoming, there were few vehicles on the road. She was sighted immediately when she came within range.

A USDO deserter-soldier popped out of the hatch on the roof of the humvee to man the machinegun on top. Bunny swung left and right on both the right and the wrong lanes to avoid the machinegun fire, at one point nearly hitting a civilian sedan. She had swung back to the right lane in a nick of time. Tracer rounds gave away the deserter's aim. Only a few bullets had hit home, doing nothing to Bunny's arm but ripping pieces off the hull of her motorcycle. They weren't aiming at her; they were aiming at her vehicle. And Bunny didn't like that one bit.

She had anticipated this and brought an answer to the machinegun. Pulling a Mk 153 Shoulder-Launched Multipurpose Assault Weapon from her back, Bunny aimed it at the machinegun one-handed and fired, blowing up the machinegun with an explosive rocket and sending the deserter flying ahead of the humvee and landing on the road. He was run over across the chest by his own vehicle, leaving a huge, bloody splat behind with two unequally sized parts of a body. He didn't survive the accident for long, only enough to see that he had lost more than half his body.

Bunny was easily able to close the distance between bike and humvee after that, and she'd done far more than that. After catching up with the humvee, she went above and beyond and overtook it, and then some - putting distance between herself and the gray humvee of the USDO. In the meantime, she reloaded her rocket launcher one-handed.

The soldiers within the humvee weren't deterred by their comrade's gruesome fate. Coming out from the side window of the shotgun seat, another deserting USDO soldier began firing shots at her using an XM4 Carbine, but even her armor wasn't penetrated at all, and the pain down her back was negligible due to the protection it provided.

Giving herself another boost while ignoring the enemy rifle shots, she screamed far ahead of the humvee before swerving and stopping. Bunny aimed her SMAW downrange, the weapon huge on her small frame, and fired her rocket.

The anti-tank ordnance slammed into the humvee's front, exploding and completely penetrating the armor, destroying the engine. It was a HEAT warhead, something a small vehicle like the humvee could not hope to stand up against.

The humvee swerved, spinning on the highway as the driver lost control. To his credit, however, the humvee did not flip. The brakes were applied, and the military vehicle stopped a distance from Bunny, who had thrown away the shoulder-fired rocket launcher in favor of pulling out her suppressed pistol. The soldier at the shotgun window, disorientated by the blast and bumpy ride, was shot dead mere seconds after his vehicle died.

More men began pouring out of the downed vehicle. The driver and one other soldier in the backseat, who was dragging along some non-combatant in a flak jacket. Bunny exchanged shots with the driver, who was armed with an MP5K submachinegun. His rounds slammed into her chest and head but were just mere inconveniences that inflamed her. The driver wasn't as durable and died on the spot.

The remaining two men didn't even fight back as they ran towards the snowy forests at the side of the highway, only for Bunny to put shots in their backs. Being reaction shots, she wasn't sure if she
was able to kill them; she was aiming for their hearts. But they did go down.

Grimacing because of the violence, Bunny walked towards her latest pair of victims. She didn't like what she had done one bit, but Obedience Brings Victory, and that victory would save her family from being torn apart because of selfish traitors who would hurt the feelings of her beloved Douglas Carver.

When she reached the two, she flipped the soldier on his back first. He sprang, thrusting his pistol at her. Bunny seized it before he could fire it and thrust her foot down into his face, smashing it like watermelon and his helmet was like a bucket, collecting the melon juice and pulp.

As it turned out, the non-combatant was still alive, too, and he'd gotten up and bolted surprisingly fast. But Bunny was faster. Within milliseconds, she concluded that he was still alive because of his flak jacket, and so she aimed higher to bypass the Kevlar inserts. The man flew forward from the force, twirling before falling to the ground a second time, this time on his side. He screamed, and that scream sounded familiar. Bunny walked up to him. The man rolled over, and for the first time, she got a good look at his face.

It was Mister Wiggums, the man she had yet to apologize to.

"Why, Mister Wiggums?" she gasped in surprise. She knew she recognized his ponytail, but she refused to believe that a nice man like him would turn traitor. The soldiers who she did not recognize were more acceptable as enemies. "Why did you betray us?"

"Is that what Blackwater said?" the thin, poorly-built logistician said while sitting up.

"He wouldn't lie to me," Bunny said.

"I was trying to help, Bunny," Wiggums claimed. "It's something I should have done sooner."

"The 'FBI' would have taken away my family, Mister Wiggums! I won't be able to see them again!" Bunny snarled at him; she didn't like the idea of anyone hurting her family, or even put a finger on them in any way. She was supposed to be back home with her family today. It was painful to stomach even a possibility that that would not happen. "Is it true, Wiggums? Would that happen?"

Wiggums hesitated. "Yes."

Bunny's eyes widened. She lifted her suppressed pistol and aimed it at his head.

"But it would have been for the best. Look at what he's done to you! And your sisters!" Wiggums countered. "And you're going to defend him? Think about it, man!"

"The FBI would have separated all of you, sure, but they wouldn't hurt you! And they'll make sure General Blackwater can't hurt you either!" he went on. Bunny wasn't convinced. Her mind was still held up at the part where he admitted that whatever he was doing would break her family apart. "They might even reunite all of you in a few years' time after the USDO's finished!"

A few years. To Bunny, who had lived only a week, it might as well be a million years. Wiggums was a complete traitor - planning to break her family up, and even admitting that he wanted the USDO destroyed. Bunny had a special treatment for traitors. Without another word, Bunny drew her knife and thrust it at him. He was just about able to block the blow with his hand, but the blade had gone through his palm and out the back of his hand. He howled loudly.

"Wait! Please!" he screamed, but Bunny was beyond reasoning. Hatred had long filled her heart, and it was like a drug - young as she was, she couldn't resist what she felt. She withdrew her knife
and stabbed him again, this time in his chest - but she wasn't aiming. She couldn't - tears stung her eyes as she felt the betrayal hard. Wiggums screamed, but Bunny didn't care. She continued stabbing him in the chest over and over. The Kevlar plate in his flak jacket hindered her, so she tore it away and continued stabbing until he fell to the ground.

But he was still breathing.

"Wait…" he croaked, the snow beneath him turning red. "Please…"

Bunny didn't wait. Instead, she quoted from memory Blackwater's message for Wiggums - to be given to him if he was still alive and subdued: "Blackwater told me to tell you this, Mister Wiggums: You are hereby charged with desertion, abandoning your post, dereliction of duty, the attempted release of top-secret data, the endangerment of your fellow USDO agents and treason to the United States of America. The penalty is summary execution."

Bunny did not understand half of it, but it all felt right to say.

"Wait…" Wiggums was still croaking, coughing up blood. But Bunny did not wait. She plunged her knife into him one last time - this time through the eye and upwards, an instantly fatal stroke. Blood spattered on her and on the snow when she withdrew her blade. Little red dots forming a line along with the force of the withdrawal.

Obedience had brought victory, and it'd made sure her family stayed together too. She had to admit that there were some doubts in her when Wiggums claimed that what he was doing was for the best, but she would never doubt General Blackwater again - as long as she got to see her family.

"I'm sorry…" she finally apologized to him, though he wasn't quite there anymore to hear it. "You were nice to me."

With that, she returned to the humvee she had disabled. After punching open the fuel hatch, she lit a bundle of paper taken from a box of documents inside the military vehicle and lit it on fire. She'd made sure to spread the fire to the interior of the vehicles and the boxes of documents found inside before throwing the bundle of fire through the humvee's fuel filler line and into the fuel tank. She walked away, leaving the vehicle to erupt in flames.

Before she left the scene altogether, she took one last look at Mister Wiggums, a good man she had killed, with tearful eyes. Her gaze then wandered briefly to the decaying, polluted town of Citysville and its iconic suspension bridge before mounting her motorcycle and driving away. Sirens blared at the distance as cops from Townsville's sister city caught wind of the strange incursion.

"It's my third day here, Daddy, and… I don't know how I feel. I want so much to be back with you and Mom and Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup but… General Blackwater felt like home too. He's done some bad things to me, but they felt good. I remember how you kept pushing me, Dad. You kept pushing me to stand up, to walk, to talk and brush my own teeth. What he was doing felt like the same thing.

Both of you have taught me to do the right thing, even though I don't feel like doing it. The two of you don't seem to like each other, but I wish we could all meet and have a nice party. Blackwater can be really nice too.

I'll do whatever it takes to see you again, Dad. I'll do anything for you, and Mom, and my sisters. Will you be proud of me, Dad? I can't wait to see you again - General Blackwater said I'll be able
to do that tomorrow! (yawns) I'm going to sleep now. Tomorrow wouldn't come if I don't, right? I can't wait! Good night, Dad, good night, voice recorder!" - Bunny Utonium, 03/01/89, 0015. Sound Record File 3
Chapter 72: Sacrifice (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup descend into the underworld once more to fight evil...

A/N: Sorry it took me forever to upload this one. 7-8 days, last I counted. However, there's a bit of good news in that. It's because what you see in this chapter is less than half of what I've written so far in the past 7-8 days. At first, I had 2000 words that I decided after the fact should belong to a future chapter further down the line, then I wrote something like 6000 words before deciding that I should split things up into a multi-parter. Yeah, in other words, I've written really far ahead. Expect the next couple of chapters to be posted in rapid succession. Merry Christmas!

Chapter 72: Sacrifice (Part 1)

The City of Townsville. Tenements District. Tenements-Slums Border.

01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 1221.

"Sorry we had to take you out from your class, Blossom," Detective Mullens said to the leader of the Powerpuff Girls as they strolled through the sidewalk of a street with crumbled curbs and potholes at places. "I know you like to do your ABCs and 123s, but crime is changing now ever since you came on board. They know you're a kid, and some of them thought you'd be less inclined to fight crime during class."

"I hate missing class, but if people need help, I don't mind," Blossom said, hovering beside him.

"Ah! Who needs classes anyway? Math isn't going to help me beat up the bad guys!" Buttercup exclaimed dismissively. She wasn't stupid - quite the opposite of that - but she'd be damned if she was willing to admit that she needed something so insubstantial as alphabets and numbers.

"I'm just glad to see you - and Olivia, and Stanley…" Bubbles added. It managed to coax a smile out of Mullens.

"Yeah, it's been forever since we met - what happened anyway? Why aren't we seeing each other more often?" Blossom asked though she had some ideas of her own. Helping the Amoeba Boys help her fight crime might have something to do with it - but shouldn't good people be on the same side? Even if they weren't friends? Even kids knew how to make it up to one another!

"It's a long story," Olivia said. "We'll talk about that after this is all over." In truth, she knew that it would be difficult to explain politics and the ugly side of law enforcement to the Girls, and she knew that her father had the same thoughts too.

"It's not that long a story," Stanley the talking dog commented but said nothing more - he disagreed with Olivia's stance, but only because he knew better than the Girls. Bubbles touched
down next to him, sensing something negative in him, and began walking next to him with an arm around the large German Shepherd's neck. She thought he was just lonely, but the talking dog appreciated her company all the same.

"What are we doing anyway? Who're we beating up?" Buttercup asked impatiently. She didn't like the conversation they were having. It was too boring, and she wasn't in the center of it.

"Hey! I was just about to ask that!" Blossom retorted. Detective Mullens stopped, his hand going up to her shoulder. They were close to a T-junction. Strangely, the area was bereft of moving vehicles - something that the Girls were beginning to notice.

"The three of you aren't going to like this…" Olivia muttered. She didn't like putting the Powerpuff Girls through the dirty side of law enforcement – and this time, it was quite literal in that sense.

"I don't like the sound of that…" Bubbles mumbled, afraid of what Olivia meant. No one had to explain anything, for when they rounded a corner on the T-junction, they were faced with an open manhole on the streets. The stink came after that after it occurred to the Girls why there were no moving vehicles on the streets and in the area.

"Ewww! Not again!" Blossom exclaimed. "The smell's worse this time too!"

"The bad guys stink!" Buttercup added. "Why do they have to be down there anyway? I'd die if I have to live down there!"

"Yes, they do stink. There were reports of them using the sewers as their personal underground railroad even long before you were born," Detective Mullens explained. "With the three of you kicking their butts every other day, they've started using it more often than ever to move their souvenirs around."

"We're catching on to them," Olivia added. They stopped right beside the manhole. "We're not the only ones flushing them out. Some pals of ours - good officers I know - are doing the same thing. Have at it, kids."

"I hope this is the last time we're going in there…" Blossom said. She couldn't help but pinch her nose as she jumped down the manhole upon reaching it. Everyone was looking down after her, and they saw that she had lit up her eyes and illuminated the chute she was going down at first, then the muck in front of her.

"I'm going to hand them an extra-large knuckle sandwich when I see them!" Buttercup threatened the unseen criminals as she jumped down to follow her leader sister, lighting up her eyes the same way.

"I'll never get the stink off this time…" Bubbles mewled.

"Hey, at least you'll get to enjoy a long bath," Olivia joked.

"That would be nice…" Bubbles said with a faint smile. She was shivering, feeling a little cold but sweating anyway. The smell was making it worse. Without another word, she jumped into the manhole.

It took a lot longer for Mullens, Olivia and Stanley to get down below. In the meantime, the leading detective had gotten the Girls to move forward, towards the crumbling tunnels below the slums. As the Girls crossed over to the sewers of the slums, they noticed that even the infrastructure below had a border between the have-nots and the definitely-have-nots, with steel bars separating the sewers of the two regions. A barred door was supposed to act as a portal that
could never be crossed, but the chains and padlocks securing it were snapped open.

"We're on the right track. Must be the smugglers who did it," Mullens explained when Blossom reported the observation on the radio.

And so they went deeper inwards, and deeper, until-

Bang! Someone shot at Blossom, who ducked the moment she saw the glint of metal in the darkness. The Girls scattered, with Bubbles and Buttercup hanging onto the curved walls of the sewage tunnel, but soon, they were darting towards the shooter, with Blossom tackling him and punching him out.

But there were more of them, letting off shots that ricocheted off Girls and masonry. The Girls pursued them.

"What the hell's going on!" Mullens shouted over the radio. As usual, he and his team had to play catch up. It was the only way, seeing how vulnerable he and his daughter were against even the lightest of weapons.

"There're lots of them!" Blossom reported over the radio. Mullens could hear more from her, though it wasn't intentional on the enhanced little girl's part: "Buttercup, right, Bubbles, left!"

Back to the Girls, the bad guys they were pursuing had retreated deeper into the tunnels, splitting up at a cross junction, necessitating that the Girls split up as well. It wasn't hard to catch up with the bad guys - whoever they were. Blossom was able to knock a second shooter into the brownish water of the sewers, which was when she realized who they were. The second man was wearing red robes.

"Mister Mullens! It's them! It's the cultists!" Blossom screamed into the radio, but before she could say anything more, a hail of bullets struck her, and a few had shredded her radio, which fizzled in its death throes. A group of them had found her, and as soon as she turned her lit-up gaze at them, they fled. "Come back here!"

The lack of communication was the least of her problem when she had cultists to catch, and they'd just turned a corner to her left, which she followed.

In the meantime, Bubbles was being led deeper to the left - which, by coincidence, was to the west. A man was running away from her, popping off wild shots with some kind of small rapid-fire weapon while he was at it. She was feeling feverish and sweaty, but that was the least of her concerns. She could feel it coming back. Delaying her medication wasn't a good idea, but the timing of the operation couldn't be worse.

Making a final push, she landed on top of the shooter before kicking him in the back of the head and cuffing him to a set of railings. Just when she thought it was safe to inject herself with the watered-down His Secret that her Dad called her withdrawal meds, more men, which she noticed were cultists from the red robes, had emerged from further down the tunnel to fire upon her once more.

Buttercup had been doing the same thing, taking out one cultist after another, following them like breadcrumbs. At first, she was doing the right thing because Mullens was around - incapacitating the cultists for retrieval later, but as she got deeper and deeper towards the eastern part of the sewers, she began to care less, and she began questioning her adherence to the 'right' way of doing things. She had been killing criminals even in full view of Blossom recently, so why should she stop now? Could they even arrest all of them and bring them in without some of them escaping?
She'd answered that question by driving her fist through the chest of the next cultist she encountered.

Killing the cultist felt like a reward. The very act of defiance was thrilling - and it was a gift that kept on giving. In the distance, further and deeper into the sewers, a couple of cultists had opened fire on her with pistols. She flew towards them, driven by bloodlust, first smacking away one of the cultists' weapons before smashing her face in. As the second cultist fired on her at point-blank range with futility, Buttercup simply looked at him from head to toe and her laser did the rest, splitting the man down in half vertically. It'd taken lots of energy to do that, but the result was worth it. Buttercup cackled with delight at her 'artwork'.

Yet further ahead was another reward - a woman in red robes, armed with a pair of scimitars. For some reason, she knew - she just knew that the swords were made of Duranium. The glint of the metal had given it away, and the Duranium had shined like never before, in a way that no other metal would do so.

It was different this time, however. Like Little Red Riding Hood, the woman in red ran away, turning a corner to disappear. Buttercup, like the Big Bad Wolf, gave chase, expecting the woman to be sloshing in feces and urine helplessly… Only to find that the woman was faster than she'd thought. Buttercup could just - only just - see her bare heels and robes flitting away in a corner.

"Are you scared, little girl!?" Buttercup yelled sadistically. She liked that she was inspiring fear in the cultic swordswoman - she imagined that she had a reputation in Townsville. Didn't they call her the 'Teeth Collector'? She liked the sound of that, and she'd thought about restarting her jar of teeth, except she'd try to hide it better from Mom and Dad.

Turning the next corner, Buttercup was met with a long corridor. She stopped. It wasn't a sewage corridor. It was like a corridor in her home – the carpet and the walls were exactly the same. Except this corridor was longer. Instead of a cultist, Mom was standing at the end of this corridor instead. It was bright at the end of the corridor, and Mom, in her red dress, looked like an angel.

"Mom?" Buttercup muttered, confused. She landed on the carpet, walking cautiously towards her. Something wasn't right – but how was this happening? Even the stink of the sewers was gone, replaced by Mom's perfume.

Instead of waiting for her, the Mom turned around and started walking away. Buttercup noticed that she was wearing black heels.

"Mom, wait!" Buttercup shouted after her and started running. The figure at the end of the corridor merely turned and laughed, beckoning for her to follow.

There was only one thing Buttercup could do as she was isolated from friends and family, led far away from them. Even her radio was picking up only garbles and static.

The City of Townsville. Tenements District. Tenements-Slums Border.

01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 1235.

On the other end of the local sewer system, Blossom had downed what felt like ten or more cultists. Were they all cultists? Blossom wasn't sure, as not all of them had donned robes or red clothing. She had been led into a huge circular area, where a man with a spear had rushed her from behind some kind of a water pump. The spear tip had flashed all kinds of color out in the dark. Duranium. It was clearer than before - Blossom knew that she had developed some kind of new
ability, one that allowed her to see Duranium better than ever.

The man thrust the weapon at her, but she was able to hover sideways, duck and land to avoid his strikes. Frustrated, the man, robed in red so she knew he was with the cult, swiped at her with the spear. Blossom didn't expect this, but she'd blocked it with her arms out of reflex. The man wasn't strong enough, and only her Kevlar arm guards were damaged.

Throwing off his robes, the man thrust his spear at her once more, taking advantage of the momentum of his attack. All Blossom could do was block it - but something new happened. A luminous, pink bubble had formed around her, and the man's Duranium spear had bounced off of this protective shielding. Blossom didn't have time to be amazed at herself. As the man staggered back, she gave him an uppercut, sending him flying and landing in the water. The moment he emerged out of the putrid gray-water, gasping for air, Blossom gave him another punch, knocking him out before dragging him to dry land.

Blossom was surprised that she was able to pull it off, but then again, it wasn't totally unexpected. Bubbles had been teaching her and Buttercup how to form a protective shielding around them for days. It'd turned out to be similar to flying. The sensations of energy coursing through her was the same, except through the arms. It then became a matter of channeling it.

However, she still couldn't help but worry about Bubbles, even though she had proven herself to be willing and able to fight, a far cry from the helpless little babe she used to be back in the days before the Silver Age Cinema.

The City of Townsville. Tenements District. Tenements-Slums Border.

01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 1239.

At the northern end of the septic tunnels, Bubbles hadn't encountered many people who would do her harm. There were some who came at her one at a time, curiously, leading her deeper and deeper north, but after six or seven foolhardy cultists had fed themselves to her punches, there were no more. Despite this, she'd gone on ahead anyway, wondering if the cultists were trying to stop her from discovering something.

Deeper in, she came upon a flight of stairs leading up to a door. A man in jeans and jacket fired upon her with a sawed-off shotgun the moment she did. Kicking herself off to a high flying position while blocking the shots with her baby blue shield bubble, she unleashed an ion beam on him, paralyzing him with pain. The man's hand-held radio fizzled out of life as he fell down the flight of stairs. Not wanting to hurt him too much, Bubbles flew to his rescue and picked him up before he could roll down the stairs all the way. She cuffed him on the railing of the stairs before landing behind the door he was guarding. With bated breath, she opened it on tiptoes and went through it, expecting a squad of crack dealers to come down on her.

Except there was no one. The room was a dimly-lit, dilapidated and sad affair. The walls were naked bricks. She recognized it as some kind of office, but with the wooden furniture half-eaten by mold and other bottom feeders. The only source of light was coming from a rusted floodlight, with bulbs that were likely on the verge of blowing out. A crate stood in its glare.

Bubbles walked up to it, her head bowed as if the ceiling might come down on her any second. She knew what the crate contained the moment she saw it. They were only in the sewers for one reason thus far. The crate was a big one, but short enough for someone as short as her could easily see what was inside.
She stopped. She couldn't even breathe the moment she realized what was in it. It was a crate full of drugs, and not just any drugs. Stacked neatly in a grid pattern were plastic boxes filled with metal syringes. His Secret 2.0. She could see the labels. The fact that she had been sweating and shivering from the cold that wasn't even there became even more acute, reminding her of her forbidden cravings.

With shaky hands, she took one box out of the crate and opened the translucent and white plastic container. There were five in it, enough for a week if she rationed it. She pulled one out, studying it, thinking bad thoughts, wondering if she should give the drug another go, fooling herself that it'd be different this time, that she could somehow take it and be herself and be fine.

'Maybe just a little,' she thought as she continued to eye the metal syringe as if she was seeing a long lost sister or someone she loved who'd been away. Someone like Bunny.

'A little can't hurt, right?' she thought as she unsheathed the needle and began unrolling her sleeve. In the meantime, somewhere in the tunnels, there was a loud explosion somewhere, and the gunshots behind her were growing louder. A headache surged in her. The past followed - how she pursued her own sister, Blossom, across Townsville to harm her, how she hurt her entire family badly, stabbed Blossom in the shoulder after knocking out Mom and Buttercup via severe head injuries. How she nearly killed Dad.

The memories were painful, and she crushed the syringe full of red liquid in one little hand. The red liquid, sparkling with bits of broken glass, dripped from her hand. It'd hurt a little, feeling the cracked glass in her hand and the jagged metal, but it felt so much better than the Fairy Godmother's tricks.

She'd come very close to relapsing and repeating her past mistake again, and it didn't feel good. The worst part? She felt the same frustrations she would have felt in the past, had she been denied the drug. The pain of abstinence was faded, but not enough.

Screaming in anger, Bubbles flipped the entire crate over, spilling lunchbox-sized containers filled with illegal drugs all over the dirty, concrete floor. She started stomping on them, and she did it hard enough to flatten both plastic containers and metal syringes in a single motion. She was so absorbed in the drug's destruction that she didn't hear the door open behind her, nor the footsteps of a man coming up to her.

She'd only noticed when she felt a hand on her shoulder, at which point she turned around with a scream and pointed her SMG at whoever it was behind her, lightning-fast.

"Hey, hey! Bubbles! It's me!" the man behind her had put his hands up, his revolver still clutched in his hand. It was Mister Mullens. Bubbles didn't lower weapon immediately, still in her moment. She was panting like an agitated animal, her teeth gritted as she glared at the man. The detective knew immediately that something wasn't just wrong. Something was very wrong. He peeked at the floor. Drugs. He knew what it meant.

Olivia came up behind him when nothing had happened so far; she was told to stay behind as backup. Garrett didn't tell her that he was just playing it safe, making sure that his daughter would live in case he was facing down a room full of crack dealers.

"Are my eyes red!?" Bubbles snarled, still feeling the fire in her, embers leftover from her addiction. Her MP5 shook in her hands. Detective Mullens looked her in the eyes long and hard. It was difficult to do so, more so than staring into the eyes of hardened criminals, but he made himself do it.
"No," he said.

"What did you do!?!" Olivia exclaimed when she saw the drugs on the floor and what Bubbles had done to them. Her father had to stop her from confronting the Powerpuff Girl. In her hysterical rage, Bubbles had unknowingly destroyed evidence and damaged the crime scene.

"Stop, Olive, it's not important right now," Mullens said.

Bubbles remembered what she'd done to Mister Mullens the day she tried to kill her Dad. When she'd put a bullet into his chest, she had thought then that she had lost a friend. In the red haze of her addiction, that wasn't a problem as all that mattered was the drug - the realization that she had nearly lost a friend only came later when she was on the Duranium table.

Her gun shook, still trained on Mullens, but then it went down. She'd done it again - that was what she thought. She'd nearly put everyone she cared about in danger.

"I'm sorry…" Bubbles cried as she scooted away. "I'm so sorry…" She'd hid under one of those desks, ashamed of herself.
Chapter 73: Sacrifice (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Detective Mullens and his circle discover some inconsistency with the Cult of His Promise's activities.

Chapter 73: Sacrifice (Part 2)

The City of Townsville. Tenements District. Tenements-Slums Border.

01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 1242.

Buttercup ran down the corridor when Mom went out of sight. The corridor seemed to stretch on forever, with endless doors flitting by. There were too many for it to be her house. Some of them would open and slam shut as if moved by invisible hands, and Buttercup would catch a glimpse of herself, re-enacting some past event. When there was still no Mom, she took flight towards the white, until even the infinity corridor she was in was taken over by the light, until all she could see was searing, bright whiteness that she had to cover her eyes.

"Mom? Where are you?" Buttercup felt like she was talking into a void because there was no reply. She could still see the light through her hands, somehow. But as time passed, it'd gone down somewhat. She uncovered her eyes…

Only to see that she wasn't alone. And there was no Mom.

The cultic swordswoman was standing before her, but she was different. Her hood was down, and she was wearing some sort of golden cultic mask that obscured much of her face except for the mouth. Spikes held together by bands rose from the top, making her look imposing - not that it was enough to intimidate Buttercup. What was more alarming was the assembly before her - some twenty or so other cultists, sitting on raised ledges in a kind of central area in the sewers, though it looked more like an auditorium rather than a place for human waste. They were mostly unarmed, with some wearing belts with swords or pistols hanging off them. It looked as if they weren't expecting her to put up a fight as if they weren't expected to fight even if she did.

Buttercup raised her light machinegun, intimidated by the number of cultists. She had never felt alone - indeed, she had never felt the need for her sisters, or anyone in her family, to be around her until now.

"I'll kill every one of you!" Buttercup yelled, her face a rage-filled grimace. "Try and make me!"

"Hush, shadow-kin," the cultic swordswoman said, apparently unafraid of the machinegun she was pointing at her. Instead, she stepped forward, barefooted. Buttercup tightened her grip on her heavy weapon.

Buttercup had anticipated more violence, but she was met with something else instead. The cultic swordswoman dropped her swords before the spiciest of the Powerpuff Girls instead, the blades clattering on the mossy old concrete.
"You are among friends, 'Buttercup Utonium',' she said.

"Who are you?" Buttercup asked, disarmed by curiosity of all things.

"I am Ishtar, but it does not matter," the cultist introduced herself, sort of. "What matters is that you're a very special girl."

There was no violence to be had. It was a shame, as Buttercup welcomed the challenge and thrill of facing over twenty cultists on her own, though she wasn't sure if they were enhanced beyond baseline human performance.

"Of course I'm special! But what's going on, missus?" Buttercup asked. The only reason why she didn't pump the red-robed woman before her full of lead was that she had information, things she never knew she wanted to know.

"You are about to meet someone very important, shadow-kin," the woman said, before extending a hand for her to take. Buttercup took it, and she was led down the sewage hall. "Someone you should be expecting. The cat had spoken about him, had it not?"

The woman had been blocking the view all along. An altar had been arranged in the middle of the septic auditorium. Braziers surrounded it. Someone was lying down on top of it. Buttercup squinted to see who it was, but unlike Blossom, she couldn't 'zoom in' her vision much. All she knew was that she - the person was a girl - wasn't wearing any clothes. She wasn't sure how old she was, but she had been tattooed all over with lines running across her entire body. She looked to be older than her, that was all she knew.

"The cat?" Buttercup wondered about what the woman meant. It didn't come back to her immediately. But it'd hit her soon enough. "The dead cat? How did you know about it?"

"His Magnificence is everywhere, dear Buttercup," the cultist woman said. "And now, you're going to take an important step towards seizing your birthright…"

The cultist woman led Buttercup to the altar, right up next to it. The girl was a teenager, nearly old enough to get married. Buttercup could tell, because the girl on the altar had a far more pronounced chest, like all the adults. She was also tattooed from neck to toe, though she wasn't sure if her face was pure or inked. She was wearing a golden mask like the cultic swordswoman, though it was without the spikes. Stylized tears were drawn below the eyes of the altar girl's mask, like that of masks worn by Greek actors.

Her tattoos were like nothing Buttercup had seen on the various criminals she had fought. They were lines tracing the natural curves of the human body, with hieroglyphics and pictographs that looked alien, a world removed from a modern, American city. The girl wasn't chained to the altar, and yet she was lying down on it as if it was bedtime. Buttercup thought she was brave (though not as brave as her), considering how she was lying down soldier-styled and face-up instead of curling up into a fetal position.

"She has been specially prepared for you," the cultist woman said, waving a hand at the shapely young lady on the altar. "She's the best among us. Intelligent, strong, beautiful… with an unshakable faith in Him. And yet so young, so very young… A worthy sacrifice."

Buttercup was thrilled by this sacrifice. It'd reminded her of that last time in the Silver Age Cinema when a cultist had given himself over to her, to be mutilated at her pleasure. He had smiled all the way, even after she ripped his lower jaw off.
But this one seemed different somehow, and it wasn't just because it was a step towards meeting the friends the dead cat had been promising her all those weeks ago.

"What do I do?" Buttercup asked. The cult set-up seemed elaborate, formal. The cultic swordsman took a ceremonial knife from the altar and handed it to Buttercup.

"Do you see that circle on her chest? Stab her heart, that which is marked by the Circle of the Shadow, and leave the Dagger of the Holy Assumption in," the red-robed woman hissed. She'd explained the steps loud enough for the entire congregation to hear, and yet the girl to be sacrificed did not even flinch one bit. "Do this for yourself, and I will guide you along after."

Buttercup could see it. The Circle of the Shadow was like a target on the sacrificial lamb's chest, with hieroglyphs written all around it. There was no mistaking where she would plunge the Dagger of the Holy Assumption in.

"But my Dad…" Buttercup hesitated. She'd thought back to what Professor Utonium had done to her to make sure she would not hurt anyone again, the things he had said to her. But he'd gotten through to her more than that, beyond threats of grounding or the forfeiture of her desserts. The silver lining in her brain had done its work - a little bit here and a little bit there, ensuring that she'd felt a little guilt here and a little sadness there to make her understand subconsciously. Easy to ignore usually, but not during a pivotal moment like this. She backed away, dagger still clutched in her hand.

The cultist woman pushed her forward gently, a hand on her shoulder.

"He is not your real father, Buttercup. Did you not see the signs of it?" the cultist said. "He is denying you your true destiny even now - you have a powerful friend waiting for you, Buttercup. You'll need only take a step forward…"

The cultist placed her hands around Buttercup's tiny, gloved hand and guided her towards the sacrifice. Buttercup had to float to see what she was doing.

"Do it," the golden-masked cultist egged her on. Buttercup gasped; she wanted to. She knew the pleasure of killing all too well, and the promise of friendship with this new, all-powerful entity was enticing. She'd been fed well with cultists, and she wanted more! Damn her Dad for holding her back! It's not like she would ever be first in line for his affection, anyway!

And she didn't hesitate any longer, bringing the ceremonial blade down on the tattooed, masked girl. She'd done it with so much force that she could feel stone at the tip of the blade. The sacrificed young cultist gripped the edge of the stone altar as she gasped and heaved her final breaths. It would be a slow death, however, without the blade removed.

"Very good. You've brought the Master great pleasure by doing this…" Ishtar said as she drew another blade from inside her robe. "Put out your hand."

Buttercup was ecstatic. What's next? Who cares? As long as she got to indulge in all this excitement! Obliging to her new friend's instructions, she removed her combat glove and put out her hand. The cultist proceeded to put a diagonal cut there in short order.

"Ouch!" Buttercup shouted. "Hey! What gives!"

"Shhh… This pain is temporary, but the pleasure you'll gain from the Master's promise will be infinite," the cultist said. She then proceeded to pick up a bowl on the altar. Kneeling down, she then positioned it below Buttercup's hand. She closed the enhanced little girl's hand for her and
squeezed it gently. Blood was pouring into the bowl, and when enough of it was collected, the cultist returned to the sacrificial lamb on the altar and proceeded to make a slice on the dying teenager's jugular. Blood was spurting out, and the cultist made sure to collect an equal volume of the lamb's blood.

"What are you doing?" Buttercup asked, confused as to how bleeding her and a tattooed teenager would achieve anything. Looking at her with a mysterious smile, the cultist stirred the blood mixture with her index finger. The woman's eyes went down to the swirling blood, which had turned black, before flitting back up to Buttercup, whose mouth had gone agape when it was done.

"Drink this, shadowkin," the cultist commanded the enhanced little girl.

"Ewww! No way!" Buttercup was shocked. It was bad enough if she had to drink her own blood, but when it was mixed in with another girl's blood, turning black as a result? And in the sewers no less? "You're icky! Yuck! That's disgusting!"

The cultist woman simply stared at Buttercup, unblinking, unfeeling, the bowl still clutched tightly in her hand, held up to her.

"You are tired of living around people who understand you not. You hate being ordered to avoid satisfying your unique needs, and yet what few common needs you share with others are neglected. You dread living the life of a 'good little girl'. Do you want to go on like this? For years and years and years?" the golden-masked woman said.

"Blossom's letting me kill-" Buttercup said, but was interrupted quickly by a stranger who seemed to know her far too well.

"It will not last. Soon, you'll be back to being the 'perfect little angel' you're not if you're not punished harshly for doing what comes naturally to you first," the cultist went on. "Is that what you want? Because my Master - your powerful friend - has an alternative for you. He will give you what you want, as much as you want, to your heart's desire…"

Buttercup looked down at the bowl of blood. Her image was vaguely recognizable in it but blackened and distorted. She still felt disgusted over the idea of drinking blood, whether it was hers or another girl's, but it had never sounded more enticing than the way the golden-masked woman put it.

"You'll get to kill and bring justice to this world at the same time. He'll let you do whatever you want, for His vision is not as narrow and short-sighted as your 'father's," Ishtar continued whispering words of seduction to Buttercup. The enhanced little girl thought about it some more, but now, the thought of rejecting the bowl of blood had become unthinkable. The woman, who was an enemy she wanted to kill just ten minutes ago, was completely right. Buttercup couldn't think of an argument against her. Her life in her Dad's family was empty - like falling into one hole after the next, all the while hoping that the place she was going was a worthy destination, except that she remained unfulfilled all the while. The slim hope she held was more torture than comfort.

Buttercup brought the bowl of blood up to her face and tipped the content into her mouth, gulping down the blood mixture greedily with unnatural enthusiasm and gusto. The taste was terrible - it was like drinking metal, but there was something else - a texture and smell not of this world, so indescribable even to her senses that it shifted from one thing to another, at first clay-like and bitter, then burning and acidic in the next. But it didn't matter - she was doing it! She was taking the next step towards meeting a powerful friend! Hell, she felt good just by being rebellious!

Then the pain began to spread in Buttercup, starting from where the vile, bloody mixture had
touched, then to the rest of her body. At first just a dull ache, it became stronger, then sharper. Buttercup fell to her knees and clutched her stomach as she tried to endure the agony. Her vision became red, and unknown to her, her eyes had gone red like Bubbles back when she had gone BerXerk. "What did you do to me!?"

"The shadow-blood you consumed will change you - just subtly and slightly," the woman explained. She'd gotten down to her knees too, holding Buttercup as a mother would just so that she wouldn't collapse on the floor entirely. "The Master will be able to sense you better from now on. He will be with you, always. If you're fortunate, he'll even converse with you soon, even bless you with certain… gifts. Oh, how I envy you!"

Buttercup could barely hear the cultist. Her vision had gone dark, and her limbs numb. The cultist lowered her to the floor, gently. And soon, even her mind had gone blank…

---

The City of Townsville. Tenements District. Tenements-Slums Border.

01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 1249.

Detective Mullens had to search from desk to desk to find Bubbles. She had run away so fast that he didn't catch where she had hidden in shame. The decommissioned utility office, however, was a small place, so it didn't take long for him to do it. Leaving a disappointed Olivia to pick up the pieces when it came to the evidence, he actually got down and sat next to Bubbles, nearly bumping his head on the old desk.

"How're you holding up, kid?" Mullens asked, genuinely concerned and asking himself if the Bubbles had relapsed.

"I'm sorry…" Bubbles simply repeated herself, unable to bring herself to look at Mullens or sit close to him.

"Ain't nothing to be sorry about," the old detective said. He moved himself closer to the enhanced kid and began checking her for needle marks. He had faith that Bubbles had remained clean, but he was damaged in that department by decades of repeated betrayals. He had to know for sure. "Here, let me see."

"I didn't do it…" Bubbles blurted out.

"I know, I know," Garrett cooed at the enhanced little girl. "I'm just concerned about you is all, missy." He had never been more gentle with anyone else than Bubbles. Pulling down her sleeve properly, he buttoned it as though her arm might fall off if he'd applied any real force. It was odd that she was wearing a sleeved set of uniforms. But the fact that it was wet with perspiration had told him everything. She was feeling withdrawal symptoms hard today for some reason, all the way from morning until now. The father had told him about her need to take watered-down His Secret as withdrawal medication. Thinking back to this, it'd explained everything.

"Have you taken your medication?" he asked. Bubbles didn't react immediately. Detective Mullens knew the look. She looked like she'd broken a glass in class like she was about to be asked to stand in a corner for the rest of it.

She shook her head after that. "I hate it."

"Take your meds, Bubs," the detective insisted. "It's for your own good."

"Hey, lieutenant!" Olivia yelled out to her father. Detective Mullens didn't like her calling him that,
even though it was the professional thing for her to do. The old man popped back out of the desk, accidentally bumping his head on the old wood.

"Damn it," he winced as he straightened up, gasping when his back was giving him some trouble. "What is it?"

Olivia had been rooting around inside the crate that contained the drugs. She'd been digging into it with her hands. A combination of yellow hay and white styrofoam was billowing out of the wooden box. Stanley Talker had been sniffing around the room - what Olivia had tasked the talking dog with was a mystery to the old man.

"It's the drugs. I think we've overestimated the volume being trafficked here," Olivia said. When she was done making it snow around her, she got out of the crate and got up. In her hands were pieces of styrofoam boxes. "It's funny enough that there's only one crate, but what's funnier is this lonely boy's mostly empty. Stuffed with trash, mostly. The number of drugs here wouldn't be enough to supply even a small crack den."

"Ri don't smell ranything relse reither!" Stanley the talking dog barked from the far side of the room, which wasn't that far off, to begin with. As it turned out, Olivia had tasked him to sniff for hidden caches.

"That's all there is, then," Olivia said. Pulling her radio off her belt, she requested a status update on other narcotics teams, only to receive a negative on drug recovery from every one of them. "Why would the Cult of His Promise commit so many of its members and resources into a slim fraction of a crate?"

Detective Mullens watched Bubbles inject herself with watered-down His Secret as he thought about it. It was indeed a mystery. Even to a cult as big as the thousands-strong Cult of His Promise, splurging something like an estimated fifty members and twenty or so allied associates into what amounted to not even a quarter of a crate of drugs was counter-productive, even stupid and pointlessly suicidal in all respects. Except the cult was far smarter and craftier than that.

"Maybe these drugs are going to someone important?" Olivia suggested. "For some kingpin's personal use?"

"Nah, that can't be. After the Expositos' takedown, I don't think there's anyone left in the slums. The Gangreen Gang's next in line, but they don't play by the mafia's rules," Detective Mullens said.

"Bubbles? Buttercup? Where are you!?" another voice interrupted the discussion. It was coming from everyone's radio. Mullens picked his up.

"Blossom? What took you? I've been trying to reach you for a while!" the old detective spoke into the radio.

"The bad guys broke my walkie talkie," Blossom said over the radio. "I had to borrow your friend's."

"I'm fine…" Bubbles spoke into her radio to reassure her sister. There was a pause after that from Blossom's side. The leader of the Powerpuff Girls knew her sister all too well. "I'm really fine."

"Yeah, she's with us," Detective Mullens seconded Bubbles.

"But where's Buttercup?" Blossom replied after that.

Garrett and his daughter, Olivia, exchanged looks. Olivia shrugged her shoulders. He then turned
to Stanley Talker, who started taking a few whiffs of the air.

"Rrr… Not around here," the talking dog said. The moment he was free of any duties, he'd gone to Bubbles, whining and licking her in the face in the hopes of making her feel better.

It would take another hour and the entirety of Detective Mullens' task force to find Buttercup. They would find her almost a mile away from the flashpoint of the police raid, passed out in some sewage hall.

As far as they knew, she was alone and unable to say what had happened. It was something for her to know and for the rest of them to find out; even the altar was gone and her eyes, while she was looking at them, was glowing green as it should be.
Chapter 74: Homecoming (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Bunny returns home and things inevitably change.

Chapter 74: Homecoming (Part 1)


01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 1844.

Bunny roared down the highway towards home on her modified bike. The time had come. It was finally here. It was time to go back home. Initially, the plan had been for Bunny to return home in the morning, but Wiggum's betrayal in the early morning had necessitated a delay, first for the mission, then for the debriefing, and finally, for the worst part of Bunny's grief to pass, not that it ever would. She'd spent most of the day in her bunk, alone, conflicted and afraid of herself. Wiggum's final moments kept replaying in her mind, like the voice of her father recorded in the sound recorder he gave her.

'Wait… Please…' he'd pleaded with her. She was still debating with herself if she should have waited. Her training had jumped the gun immediately, because her objective was clear, leaving no room for hesitation. She'd stabbed him to death, all the while knowing that he was her Dad's friend. It'd complicated things, and she was way over her head.

Bunny would have stayed in her bunk longer had Nana, the closest person she had to a mother in the absence of Selicia, not come to fetch her. In the meantime, she'd screamed and cried into the void of her room, refusing to eat or drink and soiling herself in bed because she couldn't even will herself to go to the washroom.

As if things couldn't get any worse, Bunny would have to endure yet more changes. Nana had grown on her, and now she was leaving her. The woman had told her that while she showered and cleaned her, and the only comfort was that she would try to visit her occasionally, or perhaps they might meet again while prosecuting their duties. Bunny was a little dazed throughout, but she thought she might have seen Nana shed a tear or two. It was even harder that way, knowing that their separation was causing someone else some hardship.

A final debriefing with General Blackwater had set the stage for the future. Bunny would be working with Chief Intelligence Officer Rook in the future. He would be calling her through the USDO hotline, which was becoming known as the Powerpuff Hotline. If the recent turn of events were any indication, there would be many missions to follow, though the general had tried to reassure her that they wouldn't involve friends and family. The slaying of Wiggums was a fluke.

After making a turn on the highway and then going off it, Bunny found herself in a familiar place. She couldn't help but feel nostalgia even though she had been away only for three days. Four, counting the delay. Being only a week old, she had spent longer in the USDO than with her family. Things had changed drastically, even though the suburbs she was in hadn't.

For one thing, she was racing down the rows of houses in her own vehicle, under her own power.
She was stopped at a USDO security checkpoint, and all she had to do was simply show them a black pass card and she was allowed through. She had done the same thing when a police patrol cruiser did the same. They didn't ask too many questions - in fact, they didn't ask anything at all.

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

**01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 1905.**

Professor Utonium had waited near the window for ages, doing nothing the whole day beyond the bare necessities that constituted his duties to the Girls and the USDO. Selicia had been supportive all the while, either staying with him or making sure that he didn't starve or thirst while he waited for Bunny.

As it was right now, all he could think about was Bunny, and what abuses she might have suffered. He could only imagine how it was like, and he couldn't imagine it well enough either, as he was neither a soldier nor a security officer. His training in the art of war was only basic, something to make it an inconvenience for the enemy to take him dead or alive. It kept running in his head how terrible it must be for a child to have to go through training that would bring some adults to tears.

Selicia, in the meantime, had just finished preparing dinner. They'd planned to leave it in the kitchen until eight or even nine if they had to, just to wait for Bunny - it'd meant so much to her Thomas. Buttercup, and Blossom (surprisingly), had helped her out, while Bubbles sat next to her Dad, leaning on him with his arm around her.

They didn't have to wait for long.

Soon, there was activity in the swirling snowfall, and light that didn't come from the streetlamps. A strange silhouette appeared at first, before being bathed in the yellowish street light. Although the professor could not see her face, which was blocked by a shaded motorcycle helmet, he recognized her instantly.

Bunny was turning into the driveway when the Girls scrambled to the window to see her.

"I can't believe it!" Buttercup grumbled, already unhappy that Bunny was coming back. She was a competition, but there was something more. "She gets a bike but we don't?"

"Yeah…" Blossom said, acknowledging that fact, though she had other things in mind too. The moment she saw Bunny, she was reminded of the jealousy she had towards her. How Bunny would take away Dad's attention from her, the attention that was well-deserved, alienating her. Even when she wasn't around, Dad had paid little attention to Blossom because he was too worried about Bunny, and whenever he talked, it was always something to do with Bunny.

"At least we got Bunny back," Bubbles said. The bike controversy was hardly anything worth mentioning to her. "I missed her. I wonder how she's doing?"

"Can't believe she gets a bike…" Buttercup continued grumbling. Like Blossom, she felt jealous, and even more so than her more level-headed sister. She wasn't even trying to bury it, unlike Blossom, who'd decided that sisters were sisters, and jealousy was wrong. "I want a bike too, but no, Daddy said no, of course…"

When Bunny turned in, it didn't help that she looked menacing in her biker jacket and helmet, the fully-modded MP5 on her back and her silenced pistol on her thigh. The parts of her armor that weren't covered by her jacket promised overwhelming odds to anyone who would think to go
against her. The purple glow of her eyes was shining through the shaded visor. It was easy to feel negative things towards someone who looked dangerous - it was a justification Blossom and Buttercup could have, not that Blossom wanted it and Buttercup didn't need any to hate someone.

Upon seeing Bunny getting off and removing her duffel bag from the back of her bike, Professor Utonium got out the front door as soon as he could. Selicia was more level-headed and went into the garage to open the shutters for Bunny to wheel her bike in. The Girls hovered out to look, with Buttercup looking especially offended.

"Dad?" Bunny couldn't believe her eyes either when she saw Daddy running up to her. She lifted her visor - pulling off her helmet, in fact - before running up to him. Bunny dumped her duffel bag in the snow. They both threw themselves at each other, embracing in the snow. "Dad! I miss you so much!"

"So did I, Bunny, so did I!" the professor shouted in relief. Bubbles joined in the hug after that. Blossom followed, deciding to put aside her jealousy of Bunny. Buttercup remained where she was, however, floating above the uncomfortably cold ground, her arms crossed as she scowled at the returning Bunny. "I thought about you every day! I was so worried!"

"Me too..." Bunny said. The professor let go after that.

"Look at you, all grown up," the professor said. He hated that the general got to see her through four days of development without him, but Bunny was still his adopted daughter all the same. "Using pronouns now, riding a bike..."

"Are you proud of me, Dad?" Bunny asked. Looking up at him, she was crying not just tears of joy, but something darker. Her perfect memory was a curse now as she remembered how she killed her own Dad's friend just half a day ago. She waited desperately for his answer, even though she needed to wait only a second.

"I'll always be proud of you," he said. "You're my little rabbit, forever and always. Come on, let's get back inside - it's cold out there. Here, let me take your bike." The professor helped Bunny wheel her motorcycle in. The entire family was in the garage before Selicia closed the garage shutters.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 1913.

Bunny was eating through her spaghetti and mash potatoes like how a compactor would crush metal fed into it. Half her meal was gone in a minute - and that included her lemon juice. She had made a mess on her face and spilled some of the tomato sauce on the table. Everyone was looking at her, and they had barely touched their meals.

"Honey, slow down. You'll choke like this," Selicia had to tell her, at the same time pulling her back from her plate. It wasn't the first thing she or Professor Utonium had to remind her. She had sat down to her meal in full gear. The professor then had to remind her to remove her weapons. Selicia got her to remove her jacket and armor after that. The suit of purple, gutted (de)power(ed) armor had ended up standing guard at a corner of the kitchen with the duffel bag as if watching them.

"Sorry, Mom," Bunny apologized before haphazardly cleaning her face with a napkin. "I like your food, and I have to be ready."
"Ready for what?" the professor asked.

"I could be going on a mission any time," Bunny explained, after sucking up another long tendril of spaghetti, and chewing and swallowing quickly regardless. She had to wipe her mouth again. "There's going to be lots of them, General Blackwater said so."

"But don't you want to spend some time with your family? You've just gotten back, and I thought you'll be thrilled to do that?" the professor asked. He didn't like this one bit. The last time he'd seen Bunny, she was content with simply being. What he saw was a change of priorities in Bunny, and he didn't like it.

Bunny, in the meantime, had nearly finished her spaghetti by the time the professor was done. She looked up at her Dad when she was distracted from the zone by what he said.

"Yes, Dad, of course, I am," she said. The professor couldn't help but notice that her ability to speak was dramatically improved too, and it wasn't just the pronouns. From what Selicia had told him, Bunny was just a few hours shy of training twenty-four hours a day, and some of that time could have been used to develop her communications ability - for once, it was something he agreed with when it came to the USDO. "I just… need to be ready. I'm supposed to protect you, and Mom… and Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup too."

The professor laughed. Selicia followed. Blossom frowned at Bunny, but reset it to a smile when Bunny turned to look at her.

"Yes, you do," he said with a smile, though he didn't really think much of it. To him, it was just Bunny's youthful spontaneity and optimism at work. The USDO would surely be sending her to missions like how they'd been using Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, but he doubted that Bunny would ever need to protect her family, not with the older Three in The House, and the adults already trained and given a security detail for protection. Blossom had protected him - even if it was against Bubbles, and the gap between the older and the younger enhanced beings was huge. That said, he still couldn't believe that millions of adults were relying on little girls for protection - and it hadn't even been six months since their creation.

"I'm proud of you, my little Sugar-Bun," Selicia said, then pulled Bunny in for a hug. It'd reminded the enhanced girl of how it felt like. She didn't let go until she had her fill of it. "You're growing up so fast!" In the meantime, Buttercup was sulking in her corner of the table, and the fact that no one noticed made her even mad. The only thing keeping her from flipping the table and assaulting Bunny then and there was that it would be social suicide, something she had actually committed multiple times before and miraculously survived.

It was something she couldn't afford right now, at least not until she'd met her new powerful friend.

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

**01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 1949.**

Everything that Bunny did, every action that Dad took was, all of a sudden, grating on Blossom's nerves. Blossom thought that Bunny had become an attention-seeker, what with her bike, her refusal to remove her equipment, right down to the way she ate and behaved. Dad, on the other hand, hadn't paid much attention to her whether Bunny was home or not, and now that Bunny was with them, it was even worse. He had become entirely fixated on her.

Dad and Mom had to separate the Girls when it came to bathing. With Bunny in the picture, the
bathtub simply couldn't fit all of them, and a single parent wouldn't be able to handle them all. Dad chose to bathe Bunny, and Blossom, who was seething with secret anger, chose Mom out of spite, only to regret it. Buttercup had followed her, leaving Bubbles with Dad and Bunny.

'But I can bathe myself!' the attention-seeking Bunny had exclaimed. That show-off! Blossom knew exactly what Bunny was doing. As if having Dad's undivided attention wasn't enough, Blossom knew that Bunny was trying to cement her place as the only Girl Dad would care about, leaving no room at all for her - or her sisters for that matter.

"How about for old time's sake? You're only a week old, Rabbit," the professor had said in response. The term of endearing had actually hit Bunny hard, as it reminded her of her deceased and eaten pet rabbit, but as a master of subtlety by then, she'd hidden it well.

"Sure," Bunny smiled.

In the other bathroom of the second floor, Selicia had ended up giving Blossom the roughest bath she had ever received, though Blossom couldn't tell if it was intentional. The security officer had chosen to use the hardest, roughest sponge in the washroom, and was applying a lot of force whenever she was scrubbing her down and rinsing her hair that it was downright painful. That, and she had rushed through Blossom's bath, quickly shooing her out of the bathtub to focus on Buttercup, callously throwing her the towel and leaving her there, cold and wet, to dry herself. Blossom barely knew how, and she could feel intensely the neglect her Mom was putting her through.

Blossom had spent some time moping while drying herself sluggishly as she sat, upset, on a stool, all the while watching Buttercup having a fun time with Mom as they played with the water and joked and laughed.

Feeling left out, Blossom did not want to watch any further, so she threw on her undergarments and dress on by herself - with some difficulty - before opening the bathroom door. She took one last look at Mom and Buttercup. They didn't even notice her leaving. They didn't even care. And so Blossom walked away.

Out in the corridor, she saw Dad leaving the common bathroom with Bunny and Bubbles in fresh pairs of dresses, chatting happily about - why, about Bunny's experience in training, of course! What else could they possibly be talking about?

"Oh hey, Blossom! Why didn't you join me for a shower?" Bunny had the nerve to ask Blossom. "I've really missed you."

'Of course, she'd want me with her - it'd make it easier to show Dad how much better she was!' Blossom thought venomously as she tried her best not to give her youngest sister the stink-eye. She'd flashed a smile, though it was so hard to pull off that her face might crack from the effort.

"But that'd mean I can't join you for a shower," Bubbles said, half-parroting Bunny already. Blossom hated it.

"Oh yeah," Bunny said, on realizing what Bubbles pointed out. "Well, I've really missed all of you! I'm so happy to be back home!"

'Of course, you would be', was Blossom's reaction, though she didn't let it be known.

"Why don't the two of you go on ahead - Bunny and I have some catching up to do. Don't worry, she'll be playing with the two of you soon enough!" the Dad would say with a laugh, before
bringing Bunny down the stairs with him, leaving Blossom outside her room and on the verge of tears. Bubbles simply held her hand and led her back into her room, just as oblivious to Blossom's feelings.

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 1954.

Professor Utonium ended up bringing Bunny down to the labs for a checkup. In between lab tests and interviews, they were both playing catch-up with each other. The professor had learned, however, that there were things that were off-limits. 'It's classified,' Bunny would say to such inquiries.

"Can we just… be together?" Bunny had requested when everything was said and done when it came to her checkup.

"Don't you want to show me your voice recordings?" the professor asked. To him, it was an informal project, something he'd be more than happy to go through, not just out of his own curiosity both scientific and mundane, but also out of love for Bunny: for three days, he was unable to fulfill his role as a father, and he'd wanted to make up for it.

"I just want to be with you, Dad. I've missed you so much and… I just want to spend some time with you?" Bunny had said instead. The professor couldn't refuse her. How could he? When she had sacrificed so much just because she had the fortune or misfortune of being created artificially and biochemically enhanced?

They'd ended up sitting together while Daddy worked on his computer, with Bunny leaning on him, or hugging him once in a while, asking questions occasionally. The professor enjoyed every second of it, such that all his worries about her time in the USDO headquarters had evaporated. He enjoyed learning how far Bunny had come in her development - and she was developing really, really fast. Faster than even Blossom, in fact.

Time flew by, and while Dad and Bunny were enjoying each other's company down in the labs, Blossom was left in her room with Bubbles and Buttercup, and they were all playing halfheartedly, as each of them was haunted with their own demons and ghosts. Blossom had still her own perceived failings in the raid on the cultists to deal with, and the only man who would listen to her was busy with some other Girl. This was not to mention the jealousy in her swelling to proportions she had never felt before.

Bubbles, on the other hand, was still coming to terms with her close shave when it came to her drug problem. Like Blossom, she missed being able to talk to Dad about anything, but unlike her, she wished she could play with Bunny immediately. After Bunny was born, she wasn't able to really get to know her, and she was anxious to get started.

Buttercup, on the other hand, was having a bit of an epiphany as she was clutching Blankie closely to her while flipping through a stack of word cards. None of it mattered - not Blossom or Bubbles, not even Dad, and not the social norms they enforced. Mom had become the only thing in the family she remotely even cared about. Only one thing mattered now: her desires, and that included her need to meet the powerful friend she had never met before. No, it was worse than that, for try as she might, she couldn't dissociate herself from it all. She had expected nothing but neglect from her sisters, and that was fine. The disappointment had come from elsewhere, Dad had failed to provide her with what she needed, and even Mom was guilty of this, as she should've been able to intercede on her behalf, except she didn't.
01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 2047.

It was an hour before Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup finally had the pleasure of seeing Dad and Bunny walked through the door of their room. The Girls hadn't been very busy in that hour, and it was only in the latter half of it that they had finally gotten back together to appreciate the little things - beating the hardcore criminals of the city and genuinely cleaning it up (though Bubbles still had reservations about killing some of them), and being the thing that drove the Amoeba Boys towards the path of goodness. Of course, they were things they had to keep secret from Dad.

They were talking over their building blocks when their youngest sister came in, hugging her shiny and purple cutting-edge armor and hauling a huge duffel bag full of equipment into the room. How Bunny could have balanced the bag on her motorcycle was a mystery to the elder Girls, who had never ridden bikes before.

Blossom and Buttercup were trying very hard not to scowl at her, resisting open hostilities with Bunny for some very different reasons. Bubbles, on the other hand, was all natural with her smile. To Blossom, it was all about the family, and doing the right thing by them. To Buttercup, a family had become an undesirable thing, and the only reason why she was staying was Mom; having a new member was only going to add to her woes.

"Hello, Girls," the professor greeted his original three. "How about the three of you welcome your little sister to your den?" Little sister. Blossom thought it funny, considering Bunny's size. She was more than a head taller than they were, owing to her physical age and luck of the draw - whoever gave Bunny his or her DNA must surely be a huge, hulking guy or girl.

"Aren't you going to spend some time with us?" Blossom asked Dad, and while she was at it, she couldn't keep the disappointment out of her voice, nor the smile up.

"I'm going to have to take a bath," the professor said, having never seen Blossom's reaction, only heard it. He thought her reaction was normal; Blossom liked him very much, and she couldn't be left alone for even a minute without missing him. "I'll be right back in, oh, maybe half an hour."

He still had Selicia to tend to. She tended to desire him at night, and he didn't mind helping her out with that. With Bunny now on board, time would be an even bigger premium... but the emotional rollercoaster he'd been through had taxed him more. He needed to get away, even if it was just for half an hour.

With that, the Girls were left alone with Bunny, who had decided to leave her armor standing like an honor guard right next to the walk-in closet. Blossom thought that Bunny was a big show-off for doing that, though in reality, Bunny had looked into the closet and decided that there was not enough space between the Powerpuff Girls' crate of weapons and their uniforms and gear.

"Come on, Bunny, join us!" Bubbles was the first to offer her a place beside them. "We're having lots of fun making a tower!" And failing, apparently, as it'd come crumbling down several times in the twenty minutes they were at it.

"Yeah, why don't you join us?" Blossom added, though not quite concurring with Bubbles. With Blossom, it wasn't an invitation. She wanted to weigh Bunny out - then assert herself. There was no way she was going to let Bunny take the lead away from her. No, it couldn't be that way. She had always been the smart one, and therefore the most deserving of the attention of a smart Dad.
"I really miss you guys!" Bunny said while scooting over and sitting herself down on the floor next to Bubbles, who welcomed her wholeheartedly by giving her a hug. "I thought about the three of you all the time while I was training…"

After clearing the debris of their last failure, the Girls started all over again, this time with Bunny's help.

"How was training like? Is it as scary as it sounds?" Bubbles asked. Blossom gave a stealthy sigh. Buttercup gave Bubbles a quick glare; she hated even how Bubbles sounded like.

"It was hard, really hard. I had to do some terrible things, but it could be fun sometimes," Bunny reminisced on her time in the USDO headquarters, and it was more nostalgic that she thought it would be. She was helping her elder sisters with the foundations of their tower at the same time. They had arranged the pillars on the ground floor roughly, putting one in each corner. Bunny thought it would be safer if she added twice the number, with some were arranged inside the box of pillars. It was better to be safe than sorry - that was one thing she learned during her training, no matter what the subject matter was.

"I'm going to protect all of you," Bunny said unexpected as they continued building their tower. The three elder Girls, in particular, had lots of inspiration to draw from, considering the number of skyscrapers they'd been visiting in recent weeks.

"I think we should be protecting you instead," Blossom said. Had she not been concentrating on building her tower, irritation would have risen in her voice, thinly veiled. Dad had bought them more wooden blocks to play with and Blossom was eager to see what she could do with quadruple the number of materials - but in truth, it represented the height of the amount of attention her Dad had been giving her since Bunny came into the picture.

"But isn't she supposed to fight crime instead of us now?" Bubbles reminded the quartet of them. "That's what Dad said. I'm tired of all the-"

"Not right now, Bubbles!" Blossom interrupted her, annoyed at her mildly-mannered sister's timing. At this moment, she had accidentally knocked off a foundation block for the third floor of their tower. It would have crumbled down and taken the entire thing with it had it not been for Bunny's intervention. Within the space of milliseconds, she'd propped up the structure with a finger, keeping it steady while Bubbles replaced the pillar Blossom had accidentally demolished. Blossom didn't like that one bit. It'd made her look bad.

"General Blackwater said that I can't do it all for the three of you yet…" Bunny said to her sisters. "As much as I want to. He said I'm too 'inexperienced' to do that."

"You should listen to him," Blossom told her blatantly, just barely holding back her disdain for what she perceived to be arrogance and disrespect in Bunny. "You can't protect us, Bunny."

"Yes, I can," Bunny said stubbornly. Buttercup snorted at her, laughing at the altercation. If nothing else, it was free entertainment for her. "I want to."

"Can you fly?" Blossom asked with a straight face, crossing her arms.

"No…” Bunny said.

"Can you shoot a heat beam with your eyes?" Blossom pressed the youngest of them all.

"I can't, but-"
"What about lasers like Buttercup?" Blossom continued to drill into Bunny. Buttercup relished being recognized.

"No, But Blossom-" Bunny tried to speak.

"Can you do a sonic scream like Bubbles, then?" Blossom continued to pile on Bunny's inabilities.

"No…" Bunny said, feeling discouraged as she looked down at the tower and away from Blossom.

Blossom couldn't help but smirk at her.

"What about a bubble to block bullets?" Blossom pursued Bunny relentlessly.

Bunny shook her head, unable to even speak anymore, upset by the revelation that, for all her training, she was still inferior compared to her sisters, as Blossom pointed out.

"Blossom, you're not being fair to her!" Bubbles couldn't help but exclaim at the injustice she saw.

"You couldn't make a bubble until today and I taught you that!"

Blossom turned around quite suddenly to glare at Bubbles. She looked so angry, Bubbles was actually considering making a shield bubble pre-emptively to avoid getting singed by her infrared beam. To Blossom, this was betrayal of the worst kind; she'd forgiven Bubbles for harming her entire family, taught her many things that they had been taking for granted (such as flying). She'd never faltered in her support for her. Bubbles was being unfair! Mean!

"Yeah, and I taught you how to fly!" Blossom exploded. "I protected you out there when all you knew was how to cry like a baby!"

"I didn't mean-" Bubbles tried to defuse the situation; her attempt was cut short. She knew what was coming when Blossom started digging up her past faults.

"Shut up! At least I didn't hurt Daddy like you did!" Blossom shot back at Bubbles, not with a heat beam but with words that were worse. Furious and losing control with herself, Blossom shot up to her feet and kicked their tower with a manic shout, sending the wooden blocks scattering all over Bunny. Feeling all kinds of strong emotions all at once, an overwhelming sensation that she still wasn't used to, Blossom ran away and swiftly got out through the door.

Bubbles had gasped upon hearing Blossom's all-too-true accusation, what was fast becoming a taboo subject. Bunny had wanted to cry, too. She didn't expect Blossom to treat her so badly as to throw wooden blocks at her, but seeing Bubbles so devastated had spurred her into action. But what was so frustrating was that all she could do was to hold her closely and hope for the best.

"What was that about?" Bunny asked Bubbles, who was still too busy fighting back tears to give any kind of coherent answers. Bunny, on the other hand, was shocked beyond belief; she'd never imagined her sisters would be like this when she first laid eyes on them, back when she still had trouble deciphering their words.

"It's a long story. A big yawn I don't wanna talk about," Buttercup said nonchalantly. She had been watching and she did not care enough to intervene. If she had popcorn to begin with, she would have eaten through the whole bucket in a matter of minutes. When the show's over, however, she got up to leave Bubbles and Bunny alone when it became too boring to watch.

A/N: Decided to stick this down here to avoid ruining the reading experience. Boy, editing this was a tough one! I had to delay the release of this piece by a couple of days because I just couldn't get it right. If you guys have any feedback and suggestion on how to improve this chapter, let me know!
Stay nice and awesome, and happy impending new year!
Chapter 75: Homecoming (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

An unexpected guest appears in The House during Bunny's first night home.

A/N: Anyway, happy new year guys! (GMT +8) This is the last chapter I'll be posting for 2019!

Chapter 75: Homecoming (Part 2)

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 2102.

The doorbell chimed. Then again, and again. It'd chimed for a minute or two while Professor Utonium and Selicia had to scramble out of their room and down the stairs, still trying to throw on whatever fresh clothes they could get their hands on in haste.

"Who could it be in the middle of the night?" Professor Utonium uttered in open wonderment.

"At least we know for sure it isn't some dictionary salesman," Selicia commented.

"I'd rather have a dictionary salesman at this point," the professor said. The answer was instantly recognizable when he opened the door to a huge man taking up much of the door's dimensions. General Blackwater, except he was dressed in his general's uniform rather than the usual SWAT gear he was found in most of the time. To the professor, who had known the man for many years even if much of their relationship was characterized by cold hostility, constant disagreement, and reluctant cooperation, it was very uncharacteristic of the man, who tended to be very practical with everything he did, right down to his attire. Now, he was decorated in a uniform with shoulder marks denoting his rank, award bands, of which there were many, decorating one half of his chest and all sorts of silver insignias pinned on his collars. The formal uniform of the USDO was of a shade of dark gray, something which the professor never liked. It'd reminded him of the confederates from the civil war from whom the Foundation could trace its ancestry to.

"Professor Utonium," the huge man greeted the relatively smaller one.

"What are you doing here this time?" the professor 'greeted' the general cautiously. General Blackwater took off his beret. He was searching behind the professor for... something.

"I'm here to check in with Bunny. I want to know how she's been settling in," the general declared his intentions openly. "And while I'm at it, I will be briefing the Girls in person."

"Briefing them on what, sir?" Selicia asked. She was still buttoning up her shirt, a small detail the general caught, and it'd teased nothing but a frown from him.

"Now wait just a second," the professor insisted on stubbornly standing in the way of the general when he tried to get into the house. The general had stayed out, which was another unusual move;
generally, he'd get his way, whether by the force of his authority or his muscles. "Just what the hell is going on, Blackwater? Why do you even care if Bunny's settling in at home? You sure didn't give an atom about Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup when they first moved in!"

"I'm not sure if you're even aware of this," the general said whilst pointing fingers at the professor. "But 'your' Bunny is now a full-fledged soldier, promoted to private at the end of her training. Did you know that?"

"No, but-"

"No? I guess that speaks volumes about how good a father you are," the general accused before giving the professor the benefit of his answer.

"Says the man who canceled my Girls' psychiatric session today," the professor countered. "It was supposed to be Bunny's first."

"Bunny does not need a shrink. Everything she needs is right here. She's my soldier, my responsibility. I don't know what you think is going on, Utonium."

With that, General Blackwater forced his way into The House, shoving the professor aside. At the same time, Blossom was running down the stairs, towards Dad and Mom, looking rather troubled. It was the worst time possible to be troubled.

"Blossom, go up to your room!" the professor said, pointing her back up the stairs.

"But Dad, I really need to talk to you!" Blossom protested, looking worst after being turned away - again.

"General Blackwater wants to talk to you first. All of you," the professor explained, his voice lowered, but Blossom could hear him well because of her sharp ears, second only to Buttercup.

"But I really need-" Blossom insisted, and the professor insisted harder:

"Go up to your room, Blossom!" the professor raised his voice at her. The look on her face made him regret it, but there was nothing he could say as she'd already flown away, back to her room. Although it was Blackwater who'd unbalanced him, he could only blame himself for his mistake. He soon found himself on the couch, with Selicia beside him.

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

**01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 2106.**

When Blossom returned to her room, she had to face up to what she had done. Both Bubbles and Bunny were looking at her like she was a car accident, while Buttercup was sitting in their bed, snacking on nuts meant for a tea party that never came into fruition while she continued to watch with an unsightly smirk on her face.

Seeing Bubbles cracking under what she had said minutes ago had melted her. Bunny was still holding her, and she was crying into her shoulder.

"Bubbles… I- I didn't mean it. I was just mad and- I'm sorry," Blossom apologized, knowing full well that it wasn't the first time she'd had a little accident with her anger problem.

"But why were you mad? I was just trying to- trying to-" Bubbles cried, still trying to snatch up
"Yes, but- I-" Blossom tried to come up with something, anything. But it was hard to do so when she knew she was in the wrong. Yet at the same time, her contempt for Bunny and anger at her apparent arrogance hadn't left her.

"I'm sorry, Blossom," Bunny apologized, even though she didn't quite understand what she had done. "I won't do it again."

Blossom stared at the brunette, trying to read her.

"But you didn't do anything…" Bubbles cried, her voice muffled as she continued to cry into Bunny's shoulder. At first, Blossom was glaring down at Bunny, seething mad, but her demeanor began to soften, surprisingly. Even she didn't want things to turn out the way it did. It hadn't been her intention. Things just went out of hand, and her anger got the better of her.

Blossom sighed. "I'm… sorry too. I just…" an excuse eluded her, for all her 'superior' intelligence. But rescue came from the unlikeliest of source. The door leading into the Girls' room opened and in stepped General Blackwater. Bunny shot up to her feet, standing at attention. The others turned around, surprised to see him.

"At ease, private," the general ordered Bunny to stand down. "Blossom, Bubbles, Buttercup… and Bunny. We need to talk."

"It's good to see you, sir," Bunny greeted the general enthusiastically. Next to the disappointing and harsh encounter with her sisters, the general was a huge relief, a warrior angel even before she returned to her family. At the very least, Blossom was too confused by Bunny's demeanor towards General Blackwater to be mad at her for being, essentially, a suck-up. The elder trio had always been afraid of him and informal in his presence due to their lack of military training. It didn't sit right with Blossom because of that.

"How are you settling in, Bunny?" the general asked the youngest of the quartet first."Is everything alright?"

He could sense that something was in the air, though he couldn't quite put his finger on it - his aptitude in parenting had undergone a slow decay over the years, with his own children grown up a long time ago, even his grandchildren too, not that he'd spent much time with them. There was a kind of smell in the air, and the Girls didn't look right to him, as if they were hiding some dirt under their carpet, and the kind of dirt wasn't very obvious.

"Y-yes, General Blackwater," Bunny answered simply that it seemed suspicious. The general knew her well enough to know that something wasn't right. Blossom rolled her eyes at the way Bunny addressed the general. 'Teacher's pet' was the closest term she would use to describe Bunny, even though Blossom herself had been suffering from the term in Miss Keane's class.

"Right. Now…" the general decided to let it slip regardless, as it didn't seem like something worth pursuing. "First order of business. Blossom, I'm promoting you to lieutenant."

"But… What does that mean?" the leader of the Powerpuff Girls asked, confused by the term. Bunny thought her lack of knowledge in military tradition was peculiar, but she didn't mention it out of both fear of Blossom's reprisal and respect for the general.

"It means that I'm making it official that you're a leader," General Blackwater explained.

"You are?" Blossom was surprised. She stood up when the general was pulling something out of
his pocket. A batch of rank patches. He picked several from the selection and handed them to Blossom.

"Provisional lieutenant, just so we're clear," the general clarified. "Do you know what that means or do I have to school you again?"

"Pro…visional?" Blossom wondered about the meaning of the word.

"It means you'll have no authority over anyone or anything other than your unit - in your case, The Powerpuff Girls," General Blackwater explained, then grumbled in a low voice, mostly keeping it to himself: "That team name still sounds stupid." Buttercup could hear it very well owing to her enhanced hearing, and she secretly agreed.

"That includes Bunny. As for the two of you…" the general went on, before dispensing the other rank patches to Bubbles and Buttercup. "Congratulations, you're now both privates."

"The same as Bunny? Seriously?" Buttercup complained, attraction a sideways glare from the general, which was so fierce that it'd made her thought twice about her comment.

"Now listen here, the three of you!" General Blackwater bellowed all of a sudden, making the Girls, including Bunny, jump. "I know the three of you don't think too highly of the newest addition to your team."

"That's not true…" Bubbles mumbled. The general was just a hair-trigger away from giving her a smack in the face when she interrupted him, but he merely went on:

"-But she is a part of your unit - your family now. I'm sure even your father will agree with that," the general went on. "That leads me to my next point. The three of you will train Bunny to use her powers. I want flight capability and ranged attacks within a few days. Is that understood?"

"Yes…" the Girls echoed their reply one after the other, almost simultaneously, with their heads bowed in submission.

"Very good," the general praised them emptily. "Now Bunny might be young, but she has already achieved great things under my training program. In fact, I'd say that she might even have greater potential than the three of you when it comes to law enforcement." In other words, the general was basically saying that Bunny was better than the three of them. It'd incensed Blossom the most, vacating her mind of all thoughts of coming back together with Bunny. "Any questions?"

"No…" the elder Girls said in unison. Blossom's face was practically twitching by this point.

"Well, at least the three of you have learned when to shut up. Now if you'll excuse me, I would like to speak to Bunny alone. Bunny?" the general gestured for the youngest of the quartet to follow him out the door. She obeyed without question.

---

The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.

01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 2124.

General Blackwater had taken some time to speak to Bunny, more so than the kind of time he'd spend in The House otherwise. Even the professor knew it: the general wasn't behaving the same way he used to, though the reason was beyond him, though he theorized that it could just be time doing its work on a mere human being.
When the huge man was finally descending down the stairs, with Bunny watching from above, the professor could almost breathe a sigh of relief. Almost. He didn't like having the general over, not after what he'd done to Bunny, and what he might have done to her. Just when he was ready to let bygones be bygones, like water under the bridge and all that.

Without even acknowledging Professor Utonium or Selicia beside him, the general went for the door before stopping when he was nearly there. He turned around.

"By the way, professor, Wiggums is dead. I just thought I should inform you out of courtesy," the general said in a rather cold and unfeeling manner. The professor didn't expect any empathy from the general, but neither did he expect the news. It'd hit him like a brick, and he could feel it in his knees; it was a miracle that the professor could still stand. "He was trying to defect to the FBI, for the lack of a better term, and was executed on charges of treason, dereliction of duty, abandoning his post, attempted dissemination of top-secret data and the endangerment of USDO agents."

With that, the general left, slamming the front door shut behind him. Professor Utonium went to the glass door overlooking the backyard after that, just staring out, just thinking. Just being shell-shocked. He lit his pipe and began smoking it. Selicia hugged him from behind when she noticed that he was distressed. Well, more distressed than usual. She kissed him in the back of his neck. The professor held her caring arms with his free hand. They stayed that way for a while before there was anything verbal being exchanged between them.

"I called him a worm the last time I spoke to him. A cowardly worm who's afraid of the light. I said that that would be an insult to worms," the professor finally said, his voice shaking with so much emotion. Selicia tightened her hug. "He died with that in his head and I know he was trying to do something for the Girls and he died-"

"Thomas, stop," Selicia comforted her other half. "It's not your fault he died. You couldn't have known he would have. You were just trying to help Bunny as a father should, and you were mad that you couldn't. You're the nicest, kindest man I ever know… surrounded by terrible people. It's not your fault."

"We were friends for eight years. Nine years, now. He's a smart man, could've… been my equal in the sciences but he chose supply chain management. I kept bouncing ideas off of him right from the start, and he listened… back when no one believed in me, not even half the damned science team. In a way, the Girls owed their creation to him. They owed a lot to him - he was there every step of the way for them, even when they didn't know it most of the time. Curse of being in logistics, I guess. You get taken for granted."

"Oh, Thomas..." Selicia said and wished she could say more. The professor succumbed to tears fully after that, and the two hugged. Meanwhile, Bunny was still sitting at the stairs, and she'd heard every word her Daddy had said. Even peeked at them a few times. It was easy to spy on them when her adoptive parents were so emotionally affected. Before they could see her there, however, she'd gone back up to her room, where her sisters were waiting.

---

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

**01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 2129.**

When Bunny was back in the Girls' room, Bubbles was suspiciously quick to take her by the arm and lead her out of the room again. Bunny, however, was trained to be observant, and she knew why her sweetest and kindest sister (by far) would do this - it was all in the eyes of Blossom and Buttercup, who looked nearly identical in their glares and crossed arms that had it not been for the
color of their hair, eyes, dresses, and skin, they would have been indistinguishable.

Bubbles dragged Bunny to the balcony on the second floor. She had floated along the way to make it easier, but it had also worked to hold Bunny's attention as she had always wanted to be able to hover and fly like her elder sisters.

"Bubbles, what's going on?" Bunny asked one of her three elder sisters. She was beginning to like her more than the others. To her, Bubbles was the picture in her mind when she thought of sweetness, kindness, and love - right up there and next to Dad.

"Blossom and Buttercup are mad at you," Bubbles whimpered. The two most timid of the quartet looked out into the Suburban horizon, filled with snow, streetlamps and similar houses. Out in the corner, the husband and father of their only neighboring family, Mister Smith, had practically run back into his house upon noticing them. "You should give them some time to cool off. It's what I do when they're mad."

"Why did Blossom yell at you?" Bunny asked, finding it unthinkable that she was shaking in fear of the most extroverted of her sisters. "She wasn't like that before…"

"It's my fault… I did something bad. I was a bad girl," Bubbles admitted, and then and there, she told Bunny the story of how she nearly killed Dad and Blossom, just to get herself her next fix of His Secret 2.0.

Bunny could empathize. Bubbles might not know, but the youngest of the quartet knew that she wasn't the only one to have hurt Dad. She had yet to tell anyone, but it was something she would like to keep that way. She couldn't imagine what Dad would do - what her other sisters would do if they found out.

"You're not a bad girl…" Bunny tried her best to cheer Bubbles up. "You're nice to me. But Blossom…" she couldn't believe she was about to talk about Blossom this way. She knew what tough love was, but it didn't seem to connect that way to Bunny. General Blackwater had hurt her to teach her, but Blossom had gone off without a reason. "Blossom's being mean to you and me. She's the one being bad."

"Don't talk about Blossom that way," Bubbles snapped at Bunny, but gently, more worried about Bunny than angry. She didn't want the relationship between Blossom and Bunny to go down that road right from the start. "She's really, really nice. Well, usually. She just gets really angry sometimes."

"I guess things will be better tomorrow…" Bunny muttered lowly, as if afraid that saying it too loudly might jinx it.

**The City of Townsville. Suburbs. The House.**

**01 MAR (Wednesday) 1989. 2203.**

To let Blossom cool off, Bubbles and Bunny had steered clear of their room for the past half hour, instead of spending some time in Mom's gym instead. Although the room wasn't exactly built for comfort, they were able to nest themselves in a cozy space between two machines. Bubbles would teach Bunny all sorts of hand games - clapping games and concentration games - and it was surprisingly fun and Bunny couldn't believe that so much could be had without toys or equipment. The closest analogy to this she had was empty-handed martial arts. One does not need a weapon to do damage - especially when it came to Girls like them.
They would have kept going. They were having so much fun that half an hour had gone by like five minutes. The only reason they'd stopped was because of Dad, who'd called for bedtime the moment he found them in the gym.

"There you are! Awww, isn't that sweet? The two of you are already so close!" the professor would praise them while Bubbles leaped into his arms. Bunny, however, was keeping her distance for some reason, something that didn't go unnoticed.

"What's wrong, honey?" he asked with a worried tone in his voice; Wiggum's death and Bunny's abuse at the hands of General Blackwater were still fresh on his mind. "You can come closer you know, I don't bite."

Reluctantly, Bunny came up next to him, and after shifting Bubbles to his left arm, the professor put his arm around Bunny and pulled her up next to him while they were walking towards their room. He could feel resistance, but it didn't last very long. He simply laughed. "Aren't you the shy one. Looks like someone's stealing your job, Bubbles." Both he and Bubbles laughed at that, and Bunny followed along, albeit nervously.

At bedtime, Bunny and Blossom were lying down in bed next to each other. Both of them found it awkward, and Blossom had to resist pushing her away really hard. It didn't last by some miracle, however, and that miracle was Professor Utonium.

After switching off all the lights except the table lamp, fetching a book from the kids' library along the way, he'd sat down and opened the book and read to them a very interesting story, unlike the others.

It was the Greek mythological story of how Icarus and his father, Daedalus, came to be stuck in the latter's labyrinth of his own making, all to appease the tyrannical King Minos, who threw him into the inescapable maze with a murderous Minotaur for his troubles. After much misadventure and false starts, the father had crafted wings for both of them to escape…

It was a long book, despite being the story being rewritten for a young audience. After all the reading, questions and interruptions, Bubbles and Blossom were already drifting off, while Buttercup hadn't even been listening, and was just trying to get some sleep whilst tolerating the storytelling. That left Bunny wondering. The story seemed familiar somehow, even though she had never heard it before. Her escape into a fictional world, however, didn't last as her worries were too great.

"Dad, am I like Icarus?" Bunny asked. She saw herself in the teenage boy. In the refashioned story, there were scenes showing the familial love between the two Greeks, how they comforted each other as they tried to come to terms with King Minos' betrayal and the Minotaur's threat, how they worked together to build their feather-and-wax wings.

The professor had to sit for a moment and think about it. Bunny thought it strange that he had to.

"Yes, yes you are," the professor finally said, before planting a kiss on her forehead. "Welcome back, Bunny." But there was more he had to say, and he wasn't sure how to say it. He had to sink back down to his chair for a minute to think.

"Girls…" he started, and now even the drowsiest of the Girls were awake enough to wonder what he was thinking. "I'm sorry I'm not a better father."

"But you are," Bunny was the first to defend him, though she wasn't sure who Dad was talking to. She assumed it was all of them.
"Will you spend more time with us?" Blossom took the opportunity to ask.

"Yes. I'd love that very much. I've just been-" the professor went on, but he couldn't go on because his rambling had taken him on a difficult tangent. "I've been selfish."

"You're not, Dad," Bubbles said. "Stop saying things like that. You're the best Daddy in the whole world."

"Yeah, you were there when I need you," Bunny added, to which the Dad laughed.

"Well, I wish I could be there more, but I guess the past is past," the professor said, thinking that Bunny had got to be the most forgiving Girl of the lot, right next to Bubbles. Blossom and Buttercup wouldn't have let him off the hook so easily, he reckoned. Without knowing it, he'd reckoned right, as even now, both of them were resenting him in some way. "Well, from tomorrow onwards, I'm spending more time with the four of you."

"Thanks, Dad," Blossom said.

"Alright, I think I've rambled like an old man long enough. Good night Girls," the professor said before switching off the table lamp and leaving, remembering to leave the door open for the timid Bubbles, so that it wouldn't be totally dark.

Bubbles, being exhausted from the emotional rollercoaster of the day, had fallen fast asleep within minutes. Had it not been for Blossom, Bunny would have followed:

"Hey Bunny," Blossom addressed her younger sister.

"Yes, lieutenant?" Bunny acknowledged Blossom. It was then that they both realized that they hadn't really introduced themselves to each other properly, on equal terms, ever since the former had returned from training a more mentally fully-formed Girl.

"Can you not call me that?" Blossom said, a little irritated by the new term, which she didn't quite like as it was too formal, and it'd reminded her of General Blackwater, whom she couldn't really like because of their history and the distance between them.

"Yes, ma'am," Bunny corrected herself.

"Just Blossom will do," Blossom said, a little exasperated.

"Sorry, Blossom," Bunny corrected herself once more. "I was told to talk to superiors that way."

"That's better," Blossom said. "I'm sorry about what I did today. I feel bad about it."

What Blossom had said brought tears to Bunny's eyes. Bubbles hadn't let her down. She was right all along about Blossom. She could never believe that one of her sisters was someone she could come to hate, and Bubbles was right.

"It's okay. I've gotten mad before too…" Bunny said. "I'm sorry for making you mad."

"Don't be, Bunny. I just… get that way sometimes and I couldn't control myself," Blossom said. "Miss Alice is helping me with that and she said I'm going to be all better. I'll teach you how to fly tomorrow and it's going to be fun."

"I just think spending time with you would be fun," Bunny said, and while she did, Blossom had slipped an arm around Bunny's. With the past being put to rest in the past, they both soon fell
asleep with smiles on their faces.

Things, indeed, will be better tomorrow.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!