

**The Hunt Pt. 11**  
**In Which The Hunter Chooses Violence**  
**TW: Self-Hate, Violence**

I approach the Architect's lair, staring at the two automatons guarding the door, "I am a weapon and I am here for the Architect. I will not harm you if you leave now."

I ready myself for a fight and wait for their response.

...

He said he loved me.

...

"Physical harm will not be necessary. Please remain still for a security check."

I pause to wonder if she is not expecting me. More likely she wants me to think that I am not expected. I remain still.

"Thank you. You may proceed."

I watch as the door opens. No automatons wait inside the tunnels. This is certainly an interesting strategy.

...

He couldn't actually mean it. That's impossible.

...

I go unattacked all the way to the door to her office. I wait to see if I can hear anyone inside but her.

"What are you waiting for, a formal invitation? We are past the stage of formalities, don't you think? Come in, Mr. Dressen," She is alone. For now.

I open the door and throw the shattering knife at her face before she can talk.

...

Even if he does mean it, it's ridiculous.

...

She ducks out of the way, and it shatters part of the wall behind her, spraying the shards into the back of her head. Thin lines of unusually dark blood trickles from the cuts before they close up in seconds.

So she heals.

She reaches for a red button and presses it. "I'm sorry things have to end this way, Mr. Dressen. I had hoped that we could resolve our issues diplomatically."

She deserves no reply. I ready my axe.

...

What does he see in me that I cannot?

...

The door to the office behind me opens, and the sheer number of footsteps behind me reveal a large crowd of automatons that seem unlikely to have fit into the thin hallways.

“I am not here to harm you. Feel free to leave,” I leap towards her desk, ideally cutting her in half in one blow.

She is out of the way before I cross the threshold of her desk. The axe bisects her chair instead. I look up and see her leaning against the wall, her arms crossed.

She has enhanced speed or teleportation. My odds are getting worse.

...

He must be confused. He has only seen the sides of me I let him see.

...

“I could still call off the automata. Surrender and your death will be quick.”

As the first automaton approaches the desk, I use my axe as a lever to smash the base end of it through their head. I throw my standard knife at the second, and remind myself to pick up the shattering knife soon.

The automaton ducks, but that only means the knife slices through its neck instead of its chest. It collapses on the floor. I wait for the third to approach, axe ready, and wonder why the Architect lets them fight her battles when she is stronger.

The third automaton stops in its tracks. It takes a torch off the wall and thrusts it towards me, its grip shaking. It hits me in the shoulder as I try to dodge. I drop my axe and fall to the ground.

I am lucky enough that my shoulder is only slightly burnt.

The automaton lowers its weapon. While this appears to be another attack, it is simply the torch almost falling from their hands. I take the opportunity to pull myself up and grab the shattering knife.

...

He will heal in time. He will find someone better.

...

A fourth automaton approaches, moving to stab me in the chest with a leg from the broken chair. I successfully dodge, stabbing the shattering knife into its neck. As it sputters out code, I kick it into the third, causing both to fall in a heap. The fire from the torch spreads to their bodies, and soon both are still.

Two automatons approach from opposite angles, hands outstretched. I punch the one to my left in the chest, grabbing onto its mechanical structure to swing it into the one on my right and then throw towards the Architect.

The one to my right is mostly unharmed, and it turns to grab a piece of the broken wall, holding it high above my head.

...

He will live a longer life and be happy. I will die here.

...

I sweep its legs and grab the broken stone, bashing its head in as it falls. There are no automatons directly close to me, so I pick up my axe and look towards them, “Feel free to leave.”

An automaton at the front of the crowd speaks up. “We will protect our master. Do not resist and your downfall will be swift.” It looks at the fallen automatons on the ground. “Do not resist *further* and your downfall will be swift.”

I kick the desk towards them, running for the Architect. She calmly walks into the hallway and automatons surround her, wielding assorted weapons ripped from the walls.

...

Everyone will live. The ABF will succeed in their goals. I will die here.

...

I return to the two burning automatons and retrieve the shattering knife, stopping at the doorway and looking at the Architect, "What are you?"

She does not respond, and an automaton answers instead, "I am a Model ZXF automaton. My orders consist of the following: KILL ISSAC DRESSEN. My serial code is 14590867324510980128763921912309627."

I look at the Architect again, "Your serial numbers are too long to serve a purpose."

Another automaton speaks. "Thank you for your feedback. Your satisfaction is important to us. Please wait while we retrieve a representative to speak to you." It walks off into the labyrinthine halls.

I look at the next and suggest that their paint is not adequately shiny.

"Thank you for your feedback. Your satisfaction is important to us. Please wait while we retrieve a representative to speak to you." It walks off into the labyrinthine halls.

Seven suggestions later, The Architect is alone, "That was incredibly stupid."

I charge.

...

I have always been hesitant to call myself this, but that is what heroes do in stories. They fall in a final battle to save the ones they love.

The stories never come out and say because the only love they can offer is violence and the only way they can be truly loved is in the past tense.

...

The Architect holds out a hand, and a wisp of black smoke curls from her fingertips. As she backs up, the smoke solidifies into a wall between us. It breaks easily as I charge through it.

As I emerge through the other side of the wall, she swings a sword at my torso. I do not have time to ask where it came from, as it spears my side wounds from earlier.

"Mr. Dessen, I have a proposition for you. You have knowledge that could be useful to us. If you-"

Through the pain, I grab the right side of her face and crush her eye, "I only wish for your death."

I have other dreams, but they are impossible.

"Unfortunate. Very well then." She pulls the sword out, and the one of the few reasons I am still standing is my grip on her skull. I grab the shattering knife and start to target her ribcage.

She thrusts a hand into my chest, pushing me backwards. Smoke curls from her fingertips once again, this time forming into a thick tendril and pushing me to the ground.

Despite all my effort, I cannot move. Blood pools around my body and she leans forward, removing my still-beating heart and licking it, "I admit I did not want to reveal myself. You have fought

well, Mr. Dressen, but you do not know the breadth of those you have angered. The entire coven will be after you now. All the vampires in this city will-”

I cannot talk and I have no idea how long I can keep myself alive. I sweep her legs, causing the smoke to dissipate and I crush her hand as she falls. She looks at the injury and sighs. “I was afraid that it would come to this. You must think you have won. You must think that you-”

Shattering knife in hand, I start to punch through her chest.

“—that you... that you have won. You must think that you have bested me...”

With every punch, shards of bone fly through the air and her blood begins to mix with mine. I can feel my strength fading.

“And yet... you have no idea... what is coming. You cannot win this war that you have started. You cannot possibly-”

Rifle shot removes her jaw. I try to look behind me to see a blurry view of Lucretia, a wiry man with a smoking rifle, and a woman in an elaborate dress holding a sledgehammer. I can tell instinctively that the last two are of similar make as me. The woman with the sledgehammer smirks, “It took you that long to defeat a vampire?”

My vision starts to go black. I smile.

I went down fighting. A good weapon to the very end.