

A sleepy murmur escaped Hannah's throat. Something that didn't really mean anything besides her being half-awake before she twitched. She kicked one of her legs, just the once, and made a go at burying her face in the couch cushions; pulling the sheet she'd found herself covered in up to her chin.

The process she went through to make both things happen was surprisingly awkward. And difficult. There was a lot more flailing of feet involved. Some rolling. Those weird little caterpillar jumps that people did when they were trying to get at something they were lying on top of but couldn't be bothered to get up. She'd drooled on herself too. A lot. Loads even.

Rubbing her face into the seat as she had might have been a bad idea. Hannah could feel it drying in her hair right now, actually...and the smell of food being made a room away wasn't helping with her problem. Not hurting, but definitely not helping as spit started to build up in her right cheek and the urge to get up and do something about it started to poke at her.

She was hungry...but she'd also just got up from the best sleep in her life. The nap she'd just taken, way ahead of her annually scheduled eight hours, had been completely dreamless. It didn't sound like much, not dreaming, but when closing your eyes came with a blow-by-blow account of just how you got your trigger event - things changed. She'd 'forgotten' just how much fun sleep could be... what real sleep actually was. What it was like to just... rest. Free from all those memories and able to slip off into impossible worlds whenever she liked.

Also, sex. She'd had sex. Dirty, kinky, toes still tingling hours later sex. Yet another first in the last decade and the entire experience had been...something else. Her powers, her ability to remember everything she'd ever seen, heard, or done, was just overkill. Even without it, she'd have never been able to forget.

She'd thought he was unnatural the first time she'd met him. This just proved that her suspicions had been true all along. His Trump rating needed an update, asap...after she pulled herself together. And thought about whether that update was worth the Master/Stranger lockup while things were like they were.

She'd think on it.

Hannah made another limp-muscled roll, this time towards the edge of the couch, and fell out of it with a solid, carpet-dulled thump and a groan. She laid there for a second. Sighed. Forced

herself up to her knees with a sheet around her shoulders and the eternal question of bathroom or food in her head; like a college morning without the lingering headache. Another experience she'd never be able to forget, if only because of just how often her and the toilet bowl had gotten acquainted.

Colin might have been the one to burn out in a never-ending bender, but she'd had her fun as well. She wasn't boring. Katherine had no idea what she was talking about. So what if she didn't think that riding motorcycles into pools was fun? That didn't make her boring. That made her safety conscious.

Getting up and off her knees and onto her feet was a much quicker process than the last. It was all about the momentum in this case...really. If she stopped moving, the chances of her just falling where she was and taking another nap were pretty high right then, and only movement could save her now.

She shuffled along like the living dead, her dilemma resolved as she quickly and quietly made her way to the bathroom while rubbing at her eyes. Taking care of herself was a quick affair, and a moment later she was fumbling around in the medicine cabinet for a box of morning-after pills. There was no telling if she and Moss could even...but it wouldn't hurt to take some basic precautions. Throwing the pill in and downing it with water straight from the tap and a shudder thanks to the metallic taste that came with it, Hannah blinked blearily at her reflection and then frowned.

Naked as she was, or as good as, there was nothing hiding the mark that had appeared on her abdomen - an elegant, swooping design over her mound that rolled over her hips. Thin, wispy bands of ink-black and grays, twirling and swirling in an elegant, smoke-like design. Her hand brushed over the mark without conscious input and a shiver ran through her...and her eyes widened. She gripped the sink, bit her lip. Counted to ten and forced herself to remember certain facts and figures, attempting to sort her personality out as she checked for holes or things that should have never been.

... Nothing. The field Master-Check didn't do anything. That didn't mean the mark was *nothing*, only that her preliminary check here and now indicated that she wasn't affected...or that whatever had been done to her was hellaciously subtle. Something that had already put its hooks into her perceptions... Right. Enough of that. It was starting to get hard to breathe.

Dealing with that last issue was easy. She let out a breath, took another and looked back up at the mirror; simple, the mark on her stomach still in the corner of her eye the entire time she did so.

Whatever the case was, she couldn't do anything about it right then. Not without getting into a fight that she was in no way prepared to handle if he was more of a problem than she'd ever thought; He was making her breakfast, or so it smelled like, and she was starving. What was done had been done. Worrying about it wouldn't help her keep a clear head or get the taste of sleep out of her mouth.

After winding the sheet into a pretty decent toga, Hannah found herself pleasantly surprised when she recognized just what was being made.

Pancakes. Pancakes were what it turned out to be. Not that it was all that hard to tell, thanks to the sad sight of a hill made of nothing but instant-mix boxes and butter wrappers sitting on the counter... She could also see a bowl of sliced fruit already sitting out, the coffee pot percolating away... Really, it was more than she could have expected to see on a good day, to be fair.

Three MREs a day, and office coffee so strong that it was almost a solid did not a homemade meal make.

Moss, somehow hearing her over the sizzling of bacon and the hiss of pancake batter, glanced over his shoulder and gave her a smile. "Morning," He rumbled. "Hungry? I know I am."

She felt herself clench slightly in response, and hid the wince as she realized just how *sore* she was. It was like a jackhammer had just gone through her legs...in a good way. Still, she returned the smile with a murmured 'morning', took a ginger seat at the table...and wondered where all the food had come from. Just a little. She already had a decent explanation for it.

He must have run out and gotten the mix while she was asleep, given she'd never got it herself. Unless someone had been refilling her pantry when she wasn't looking, that was the only option there was. As it was, she had a box of survival rations that were good for the next decade in the closet and some other long-lasting things. Most of her time was spent at work, after all.

She wasn't home all that often. Or at all. Honestly, this place was only under her name because of tax reasons. She'd needed a place of residence to slap down on the paperwork and they wouldn't allow her to write 'office 212, PRT ENE, comfy cot in the supply closet' like she'd wanted to the first time they'd asked. She'd gotten the home for a song though, so it wasn't all that bad.

Owning things, being able to say she owned something that she could fall back on if she had to, was nice.

Moss hummed as he worked over that hot stove, a calming, relaxing sound that tickled at parts of her in all sorts of pleasant ways. Not the raw ecstasy of last night. More of a lullaby, coaxing her back to sleep. She closed her eyes for a moment, just to enjoy that. It was nice, to just sit there and soak it in for once. To relax.

Her eyes opened up again as she heard a plate clink down in front of her, and her lips pulled into a more genuine smile as she saw the stack of fluffy, sweet-smelling pancakes with small pieces of fruit sprinkled over the top and drizzled with...strawberry syrup. Welch's... Maybe Moss liked it on his own, but a part of her suddenly wondered if she should have forced Katherine to be more forthcoming about where she was living and what she was doing.

She'd been quiet lately. That the Nine had been confirmed to be in her area, thanks to the scattered corpses of Ravager, Shatterbird, and Mannequin being found at the scene after Legend had bombed the area, had really shaken her up. That Legend had handed her the relevant bounties hadn't seemed to help either. Hannah would have to give her a call later. Today. Tell her that a bottle of strawberry syrup had been Hannah's reminder to do so.

Kat would get a kick out of that. That, and a good five minutes of material if Hannah knew her as well as she thought she did... The sex could stay a secret though. There was always such a thing as too much of a kick. That would probably be it, yes.

"Thank you," She offered Moss a smile of her own as took the offered silverware and started in on the, also, offered breakfast...and she had to say. He made good pancakes. Hannah's standards when it came to pancakes weren't exactly high or anything, but these were *good*. Nice and airy, fresh from the skillet and with no crunchy bits.

She couldn't even taste the eggshell in it. Madness. Sheer, beautiful insanity. What kind of pancake didn't have bits of eggshell in it? Or weren't slightly slimy? Where had they been all her life?

Moss, looking proud as she dug into her meal like a starving woman, turned back to the stove and continued to add to his own rather tall stack of pancakes. There was also an even larger bowl of fruit next to it, larger than hers, as well as a mixing bowl sitting next to a family-sized box of Lucky Charms...god damn it.

It was like everything was reminding her of Katherine today. She was going to have to call her after breakfast. And maybe a nap. Definitely after breakfast though - these pancakes were *really* good... No. She knew this game. If she didn't call now she wasn't going to call at all. Or, at least, not anytime soon... This whole thing with the gangs that was currently going on wasn't going to help with that either.

She'd been busy. A weak excuse for not giving her friend a call when she didn't sleep, but true.

With one last loud slurping noise and a chuckle from Moss that brought some heat into her cheeks, Hannah picked up her phone. Dialed a number she knew by heart (from it blowing up her phone every day for the better part of half a decade.) and readied herself for shenanigans and tom-fool-

The dulcet tones of the eighties hit parahuman band, 'Dragon Sound', started playing right behind Hannah's head and she nearly had a heart attack. Not that **Mouse Protector** cared as she slipped by with a yawn. Shuffled around the table with a pair of Hannah's slippers, a bathrobe, and her *fucking helmet* to steal Moss's mixing bowl while he looked on with bemusement; His mixing bowl, the entire box of Lucky Charms, and a gallon of milk before Kat slipped back around them and towards the stairs without acknowledging either of them.

... She must have been really tired.

"You've got a roommate, I take it?"

Hannah groaned at Moss's question. That explained where all the food had come from. Damn it, Kat. "Yeah. Yeah, I guess I do. She...likes to do cosplay."

“Cosplay,” He replied flatly, this time with a clear undertone of amusement to it. “Really, Hannah?”

“She’s super into it. Obsessed.” Hannah sullenly pushed another piece of pancake into her mouth after a short silence. It could have been worse. She had to remember that. “Just let me have this, Moss. Please.”

“Heard nothing, saw nothing. God’s own truth.”

“I’ll hold you to that.”

Her phone, the one she’d forgotten (as much as she forgot anything) was still making a call, chose right then to make a clicking noise. The music, which had moved to somewhere just above their heads, turned off.

“Yeah, hello,” Kat answered, her trademark pep nowhere to be seen so soon after her waking up. “Sup, hola, bonjour. This is the House of Mouse, no relation, please don’t sue, how may the Mouse help you today?” The yawn that came through the ceiling, mirrored by the one that escaped from Hannah’s phone, made Moss crack up out loud. Hannah just wanted to strangle someone. Most likely herself. She should have expected this. “If it’s to get a cat out of a tree, you should probably wait for Scion or your local firefighters. The Mouse don’t play like that and you should be ashamed of yourself for asking. Species dynamics, have you heard of it?”

Hannah shot a well-practiced glare and point at Moss. The universal ‘Not a fucking word’ gesture, practiced to perfection by working with Ethan and Dennis for longer than was healthy. Moss only nodded back to her and popped a hunk of orange into his mouth, not bothering to keep the smirk off his face as he did.

“I was just calling you about how breakfast was ready, but you literally walked by me,” Hannah said lamely, picking up something or other and tossing it at Moss when his shoulders began to shake; the muscles of his back tensing and coiling in all sorts of interesting ways under his shirt as he did... And there went her keys. A worthy sacrifice. “Long night with your friends? You were still wearing the helmet and you’re still in character, so I’m just assuming...?”

“... Long night? Friends. Helmet.” Kat paused, her tired brain audibly latching onto the last word as she did. Her switch to overenthusiastic cosplayer was nearly instant. Not that there was much difference between that and her Mouse Protector persona, but there was a difference. Sort of. “Try longest. Had a lot of fun last night with the guys. They really didn’t want to let me go and you might not have seen me come in. I kind of just dropped when I got back. Sorry about that.” Another yawn erupted from both sources, the second much closer to the stairs. “By the way...when did you replace your fridge? I didn’t know that 70’s Avocado green was back in style... Oh well. Now you can’t give me crap about my 80’s things anymore.”

“I think I’m more of an emerald, actually,” Moss said, playfully miffed.

Now it was Hannah’s turn to stifle her laughter when Kat walked back into the room with her trademark early morning shuffle; her phone still at her ear and a gallon of milk under her arm as she clutched her mixing bowl tight to her chest. The cereal box though was nowhere to be seen. Acceptable losses...and if Kat had taken her helmet off, which she hadn’t, Hannah had no doubt her eyes would have been *huge* as she heard the ‘fridge’ talk for the first time.

“Mr. Sexy Voice? Is that you?”

Moss started at that question while in the middle of flipping a pancake and, with a loud cry of ‘shit’, dropped the cast-iron skillet on his left foot and fumbled the pancake onto the burner. The short sizzling that sounded after, and the even louder swears as the pancake began to smolder, was the most alarming part of the whole thing...if it hadn’t been for the questions that Kat had just brought up.

Moss would be fine. His Brute rating was high enough for him to walk that off without much of an issue... If there was anything to actually worry about here, if there was anything to worry about at all, it was him slapping at the small fire that had just started up on her stove.

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‘Morning Sickness and in-depth character reflection were never meant to mix.’ Lisa thought to herself as she hung her sweaty head over her wastebasket. A wastebasket that had become her constant companion over the last couple of days as the less comfortable parts of an ongoing pregnancy started to take their toll. Thankfully, the cleaning staff around here were rather thorough in their jobs. Discreet too, just as they should be with how much she was paying them.

The lack of not-so-mysterious stains and ancient chunky bits as she stared into the abyss was deeply appreciated.

“Fuck you, Burger King breakfast. You’re shit compared to McDonald’s,” Lisa groaned out as her mind started tentatively turning back to navel-gazing... And she instantly regretted doing so as that caused her stomach to rally its forces in the worst way possible. With dry heaves and foam and low-key simmering anger that Amy wasn’t there to make it all go away. Stupid New Wave, needing her help... That Moss wasn’t around to hold her hair back either, at the least, wasn’t helping her mood either. “Oh god - it tastes like cancer...”

Shaking it off, Lisa gave her stomach a pat. Right on the slight bulge that was starting to show just above her pelvis, the surest sign there was that new life was growing inside of her. It was alien, strange, but...comforting, somehow. Stupid hormones and soppy feelings... She chuckled. It was a watery, weak thing that was closer to a gurgle than laughter, but it was still a chuckle.

“You’re going to deserve all the hell I’m going to give you as you grow up, you ungrateful little shits. Let me just get this last one out and—” The somewhat tangential thought of Fugly Bob’s doing anything like ‘breakfast’ *seriously* started the beginning of the end. A short experience of what Hell might have been like before there was relief and she could finally put the much heavier basket down. “—I’ll get back to work.”

Planning the hostile takeover of Medhall wasn’t easy. Neither was realizing that you were kind of, sort of, somewhat, a total fucking bitch and that you should probably tone it down a bit before you found yourself alone while paddling up Shit Creek. Doing both at the same time was just impossible...and that was why she was dealing with the easier of those two problems first. Or trying to.

Relationship problems had a disturbing tendency to pop up when you were in the middle of doing anything else. Especially criminal things.

That Moss was starting to get sick of her shit, of her using him to cement her hold over the Bay while helping with her now pretty much defunct (by necessity) hobby of harem feeding, wasn’t exactly the easiest thing to handle. That she actually felt *guilty* about that wasn’t either. Moving millions of dollars around to pad the couple thousand shares of stock and blackmail that Moss

had picked up for her was easy though, in comparison... She was going to have to internalize this though. Work it out. Eventually. Giving a shit about people and what they thought sucked.

The things you did to make sure your kids grew up better than you did and... Man. She was learning all sorts of things about herself today, wasn't she? ... Being an adult also sucked. As did the data that she'd given over to her power to mull over while she was thinking deep thoughts.

"Fuck me with a cactus, why don't you? It would be the same fucking thing," Lisa hissed as she reached for her phone and started texting like mad to everyone she knew. "What the fuck is *wrong* with people?"

What it had come out with was nothing good. A 'welcome' distraction from her problems, but nothing good.

Collectively, the forces of 'Good' in the Bay had overplayed their hand. Gesellschaft was leaning on the Empire like a ten-ton weight, Moss and her had been hitting them where it hurts far too often; the other gangs were nipping at them and now they were desperate. Beyond desperate. Like cornered rats with rabies. All it would take for them to go all out on burning the city down was an order from on high, an order that Max was all too willing to give if it meant he got to stay out of one of his patron's reeducation camps for another day.

It was only a matter of time before the powder keg exploded. Days at most. Hours at the least. Her workload had just tripled in seconds. If her plans when it came to cutting this off at the pass didn't work out, quintupled... Lisa had been observing and adhering to the fiction of the Unwritten Rules up to this point, mostly to keep her hold on her image as the innocent party in this mess firm, but this was far too much.

Lisa lived here, damn it, and she wasn't going to let a bunch of sore losers shit all over it as a last hoorah. They'd started this. She was going to end it... A couple inches off the top should do it.

Now texting one-handed with no appreciable loss in speed, Lisa hit the intercom button. "Mrs. Vickers?"

"Yes, Ma'am?"

“Can you send the list I just messaged to you to the PRT in - three hours or so? You’ll be getting another in thirty minutes. Send that one first at the two-hour mark. Anonymously. Be ready to send them out early if needed.” With a final click on her phone, she dropped it on her table like it was a brick and started rubbing anxiously at her cheek. “Tell the men to suit up and open the Endbringer shelters as well. Things are going to heat up and they’re about to earn their pay.”

“Of course, Ma’am.”