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As always, thank you for reading.

[line]

“Dammit! Where’s that fucking encryption key?!”

For what feels like the millionth time in the last few weeks, Renamon wonders if her instincts have led her astray.

Wait, scratch that. *Tessa* wonders if her instincts have let her astray. She has a name now, as her new tamer insisted. What a bother, a name is. Digimon don’t need such things, for how can they miss the ID signals other digimon emit? Other digimon don’t use such asinine pseudonyms.

Then her tamer found her MAC address alias and changed it to *t3ss4*, or Tessa.

Looking away from the tinted window, where the sun has long since set, Tessa crosses her legs and inspects the room once more.

Her tamer’s home office is paradoxically sparse, yet cluttered. It takes her a moment to puzzle it out, but she comes to realize that the feeling is from the lack of personal effects. The room feels sterile and uninviting.

A server rack in the corner doing who-knows-what hums away merrily, and next to it are a number of plastic totes bearing sticky notes that say “do not open!” On top of the stacked totes, a 3D printer is busy making a half-formed bracket of some kind.

A short distance away is a bookshelf, half filled with books of every subject imaginable, while electronic storage media takes up the rest of the space. From hulking solid-state drives, to hard disks, to tapes, to floppy disks, there must be whole *petabytes* of data stored there, and the labels are written in some type of cipher that Tessa has never seen before.

An entire wall has been divided into a corkboard and a whiteboard. The corkboard is filled with newspaper clip-outs and printed pages with seemingly no correlation to each other, and the whiteboard contains a detailed drawing of some kind of circuit array. At least it *looks* like a circuit array.

Finally, there is the scuffed and dented desk along the wall, upon which Tessa is sitting. The desk plays host to a monstrous frankenstein of a computer, a two-by-three monitor array, held up only by the rust in

its hinges, and a keyboard so used-up that the keys no longer clack, and the lettering on each key is merely a suggestion.

Sitting at the helm of said computer is one Lars Martel, Tessa's tamer, and the town's notorious conspiracy theorist.

"Fucking..." Lars grunts, removing his glasses for a moment to rub at his eyes and unshaven face. Replacing his glasses, he hands Tessa a USB cable with the metal bracket upon the end peeled away. "One more time."

Rolling her eyes, Tessa takes the cord and holds it lightly between her teeth, before raising a hand. With a flex of her will, a glowing, razor-sharp gemstone flashes into existence above her three-fingered palm.

Diamond Storm. The signature ranged attack of Renamon as a digimon species.

The lower, central monitor on Lars' computer flashes with numbers, and a program that Tessa vaguely recognizes as a resource monitor quickly nabs all of the variables that changed when Tessa charged her attack. Lars' fingers flash across his keyboard, and all of the captured variables are copied to a neat table with the captured lines from the last test.

Both of the tables are completely different.

Lars sighs and rubs his forehead.

"You know..." Tessa begins aloud, flicking her tail and letting the floating diamond dissipate. "When I felt the pull to find a tamer in the human world, this isn't what I expected."

Her tamer looks up at her with tired eyes. "Oh? And what *were* you expecting?"

Oh, Tessa is well aware of the kind of *admiration* some humans have for her sort, and she hesitates to say it aloud.

Natural tamer pairs are rather rare, as only one in ten-thousand humans will have a digimon gravitate to them, and of that fraction, 99% are pure hearted children. The other 1% of tamers are adults.

The odds of a female Renamon being partnered to an adult man? Absolutely astronomical.

Despite the odds, Lars Martel *couldn't* care less. Tessa will always remember the look on Lars' face when she tracked him down and presented her digivice to him. It wasn't surprise, or happiness, or even shock.

It was *annoyance*.

"...Just... Not this," Tessa finishes weakly, her eyes moving to hers and Lars' digivice, which sits on a cradle wired to the computer.

Lars turns back to the computer monitor, hunching forward and squinting as if the code before him will reveal its secrets if he looks harder. "If you're fishing for compliments, don't. You're nice, you're funny,

you look good, your ass doesn't look too big and-slash-or too small, yada yada," he waves a dismissive hand. "Is there anything else I missed?"

'A tone that was halfway sincere, maybe,' the Renamon thinks with an inward sigh.

The conversation lapses into silence as Lars resumes his work. Eventually, though, he grumbles aloud to himself. "Where the hell is that encryption key? The MP value for digimon attacks can't be calling to something external for decryption, can it? The entire room is wrapped in a Faraday cage, so the key has to be stored locally..." He continues scanning the numbers on his screen. "If we can freeze or replace the value representing your MP, Tessa, then you should be theoretically tireless. It would be a fantastic proof of concept, and there could be big bucks in it for us if those digimon fighting tournaments ever get off the ground."

"This room is *wrapped in a Faraday cage*?" Tessa ignores the admission that her tamer is trying to create some sort of godmode for her, instead looking at the walls. The paint *does* look rather fresh compared to the rest of the house. It would certainly explain the vague claustrophobia she always feels in here...

Lars nods, still not taking his eyes off of the computer screen. "I tore down the walls a few months ago and put a couple layers of copper mesh and lead film up to isolate this room from wireless spying methods, and I *know* I'm being spied on, especially since becoming a tamer." He growls and hisses under his breath. "I'm on to you, Farly, you fat, dishonest fuck. I know those citywide rules on tall fences were added just to get at me. Just you wait, we'll see if that stupid politician smile of yours holds when everyone knows how much charity cash you blow on golf and cocaine."

Sighing, Tessa gives her tamer a flat look. "Should you be antagonizing the city council? If they really are 'out to get you' as you say, then perhaps you shouldn't be escalating matters? If the *government goon squads* you talk about are real, what if they came to get you? I wasn't always here to protect you, you know."

The lanky man smiles nastily and reaches under his desk, his hand fishing for something. Tessa hears the sound of something metallic being pulled off of a magnet, and when Lars pulls his hand back to reveal a handgun with the serial number filed off, Tessa can't muster the energy to be surprised. "You act like I wasn't ready to rock before meeting you."

For what feels like the million and first time in the last few weeks, Tessa wonders if her instincts have led her astray.

[Line]

Below are the names of some patrons who got to view this short early and felt like signing it. A huge thanks to them and everyone else who supports this story and everything else I write.

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