

Oddball sat on the cold floor of the church floor, knees tucked to her chest, staring intently at her hand.

It was twitching, not trembling, twitching.

She grit her teeth and muttered under her breath. "Okay... Fingers first... Fingers, not claws."

The sound that followed was something between a wet pop and a crunch. Her claw shifted, just a little, a glimmer of pink flesh appearing beneath her patchy fur, before it spasmed and reverted with a sharp snap.

Oddball hissed, shaking her hand. "Ow! Okay, not like that!"

From behind her came Rocket's deep voice, carrying that familiar mix of amusement and patience. "You're thinking too hard again, kid."

She turned around. Rocket was leaning against the doorway, mug in hand, watching her with the same look he always gave when she took apart dangerous tech, half proud, half terrified.

"I have to think.", she said, exasperated. "How else do you... You know... Not rip your arm off?"

Reaper appeared behind Rocket. "You don't think.", he said flatly. "You feel it."

Oddball blinked perplexed. "Feel what?"

"Yourself.", Reaper replied, stepping into the dim light of the room. "You don't force a change. You convince it."

Rocket chuckled as he saw Oddball's confused expression. "What he means is, you gotta stop fighting your instincts. You're too tense. You're trying to turn human by logic."

Oddball crosses her arms. "Well, sorry? I'm not used to rewriting my body on command."

Reaper crouched beside her. His form rippled as his arm began to shift, skin stretching smooth, dark claws melting into blunt nails, the texture of his hand becoming soft. In seconds, it looked entirely human.

Oddball sat up, surprised. "How... How did you do that?!"

Reaper flexed his new hand, knuckles cracking. "Years of practice. Also, hating people helps. Makes it easier to look like them. To lure them into false safety before you..."

Rocket shot him a look. "Reaper."

"What?"

Oddball stifled a laugh. "So you do hate humans."

"I hate most things..." Reaper said calmly. "Humans just make the list twice."

Rocket rubbed his temples. "Just watch what you say in front of her. No need to give her nightmares by depicting your "work" in detail." He crouched beside Oddball and held up his own arm. "Watch closely, kid."

Oddball did. His arm shimmered faintly, as if heat distorted the air around it. The fur retracted, turning into human flesh. The transformation wasn't perfect, faint traces of the fur lingered beneath the surface but it looked... Natural.

He smiled faintly. "You see? You focus on one part at a time. Not the whole body. You talk to it."

"But your's doesn't look complete?"

"Kid, human can have hair on their body too, not just their head. Men often have hair growing from their arms.", Rocket explained.

"Oh... I didn't knew..." Oddball frowned, glancing down at her hand again. "Talk to my body..."

"Exactly."

Reaper smirked. "Maybe bribe it with a snack first."

Oddball giggle which earned a tired sigh from Rocket. "Please ignore him. He's not wrong, but he's not helping either."

"Wasn't trying to.", Reaper said.

Still smiling, Oddball held her hand out again. "Okay. Talk to it. Convince it."

She closed her mouth, trying to calm down her racing mind. To just feel something, anything.

"You are not claws...", she whispered under her breath. "You are hands. Soft... Human..."

The sound of shifting tissue filled the quiet. When she opened her mouth again, to see what she did, her claws had begun to shrink. Uneven, patchy, but changing.

Rocket's expression softened. "There you go."

Reaper nodded once. "Better."

Oddball tried to flex the fingers. One of them twitched and promptly turned half translucent, before reverting back again. "Oh come on!"

Rocket chuckled. "First time I tried that, I nearly gave myself two thumbs."

Reaper grunted. "You still do, sometimes."

Rocket shot him a look. "Excuse me?"

Rocket smiled faintly. "It's endearing, really."

Oddball snorted. "You two are weirdly wholesome for being terrifying."

"That's marriage.", Rocket replied simply.

For the next hour, they practiced together. Rocket guided her thought breathing patterns, small, deliberate transformations that didn't overwhelm her. Reaper, despite his gruff nature, corrected her posture when she tensed too much, his cold hand surprisingly gentle.

At one point, when she finally managed to turn both hands human, Oddball laughed in disbelief. "I... I did it! Holy... Look! Look! Look at those nails! Maybe I should paint them. They look so... Bland... Boring. Not really fitting someone like me."

Rocket's grin was pure pride. "That's my girl."

Reaper gave a slow nod. "Not bad. You look almost edible now."

Oddball blinked. "I'm sorry... WHAT?!"

"What? It's a compliment."

Oddball stared between them, trying to decide if she should laugh or hide behind Rocket. She decided on both. Her head poked out from behind Rocket playfully. She shook her head and grinned. "Okay you got me good. Good joke. But... Thanks for the compliment."

After a while, they took a break. Reaper busied himself cleaning one of his knives, which was oddly reassuring in its normalcy, while Rocket sat beside her, his shoulder against her's. He tried to encourage and lead her through each step.

"You're doing good, kid.", he said softly. "You're getting the hang of it faster than I did."

Oddball tilted her head. "Really? You, the great Captain Rocket, struggled with this?"

He smirked. "Oh yeah. Took me weeks to stop growing skin every time I sneezed."

That made her laugh. That image in her head alone of a bald Rocket without fur made her break into laughter.

Then Reaper's voice cut through. "You're still ugly when you sneeze."

Rocket didn't even look up. "Love you too, Grim."

Oddball grinned, feeling the familiar warmth of their strange, found familiar settle in her chest. That feeling which made her feel warm and all fuzzy.

“Okay...”, she said, stretching. “So... Hands. What's next? Face? Eye? Leg? Foot?”

Rocket hesitated. “You don't have to rush that. It's easier to lose yourself when you start changing the face.”

“I can handle that.”, she insisted. “I want to see what I look like. I just... Have to. I want to give it my all.”

Reaper studied her silently for a moment, then nodded. “Let her try. She's young. Let her make her own experience. It's not like does something harmful like... Drugs?”

Oddball closed her mouth again, heart pounding. She thought of what it ment to be human... How the skin of one felt. The warmth they radiate.

She felt the shift begin, skin crawling, bones creaking softly. Her reflection in the cracked mirror nearby shimmered, and for the briefest moment she saw it. An two skin colored, imperfect face. Still with patches of fur clinging to it but undeniably her face. She was sure of that.

Human... Or something close to a human.

She gasped, trembling. She blinked, testing her new eyelid. “I... I did it... I did it! Guy's look! Look! Did I do it right?”

Rocket's voice was soft. “Yeah, you did.”

Reaper approached, standing behind her. His reflection hovered over her's, monstrous and proud. “Don't overdo it. Wouldn't want you to faint on the ground and carry you to bed... Again.”, he murmured. “Besides that... You're still you, whatever shape you wear. No matter the form, it doesn't change who you are. Not even your taste.”

Oddball met her reflection's eye, then looked at both of them in the glass. “You mean... Even if I can't do it perfectly?”

Rocket smiled. “Especially then, kid. For us you always give your best and do perfectly fine.”

For the first time, Oddball didn't felt broken or out of place. She felt accepted. She felt like it was okay to just be how she was, odd but still free.

She turned, her human hands trembling slightly as she grinned at them. “You know...”, she said. “You two make pretty good teachers. Did I ever told you two that?”

Reaper smirked. “You make a decent student. Still looking eadible, sushi.”

Rocket laughed, throwing a small cloth at him. "Ignore him, kid. That's just his way of saying he's proud."

"Sure it is... He's proud and not planning in which way to cook me.", she said, rolling her eye, and yet... Her grin stayed. She was clearly joking. She did trust Reaper and knew he wouldn't hurt her. He would rather hurt others. Especially people who mocked her.

Outside, the wind howled, inside, beneath the cracked roof and warm light, Oddball practiced again. Her laughter mingled with Rocket's calm voice and Reaper's dry humor.

And when she finally managed to hold her human form for more than a few seconds, both of them smiled with unmistakable parental pride.

Oddball had learned many things since she started to live with the two of them in her home, but this, learning to be herself in every form and accept herself, might have been the hardest, but both never left her side and kept encouraging her.