

January 18th 2016, Mental Recovery Bay, The Watchtower, Space, 12:00 PM EST

"So,,,that was my grandpa," I said to Aunt Bonnie as she sat curled against the medical bed, looking pale. "Did he always look so...evil? Like he was very obviously a bad dude. Nobody noticed that shit? Like how did he grow up looking like a fucking monster? His eyes are pitch black with yellow pupils. He looks like he eats fucking puppies for breakfast."

The others had taken the goon to get checked out by an ACTUAL doctor, leaving the two of us alone to talk. Dinah had looked upset at leaving, clearly wanting to stay, but hadn't done so in the end. I appreciated that. This would be a difficult enough conversation as it was.

She snorted. "That only happened once. And it was lunch." At my horrified look she smiled weakly. "Sorry, bad joke. I'm just...this is a lot."

"I'm so pissed at my dad," I spat. "How could he just leave you like that. Blame you for being the one who that bastard targeted. I mean, you stayed for HIM, and he thinks you're, what? Some kind of monster? Where the fuck does he get off?"

Sighing, she just shook her head. "You didn't see all of it. Just that one memory. You have to remember that Archie wasn't that much older than me. Just a few years. Not to mention he didn't have any talent for the family magic. The old man didn't like to antagonize my mother. She was...difficult. In her own way. But also very intimidating. Hard to describe."

Her voice was changing as she spoke, a bit of an Irish brogue bleeding into her words as they quickened. "But just because he left Archie alone doesn't mean he didn't torment him. He just didn't do it himself. He made ME do it. He'd arrange things so that he'd get hurt and it would look like I did it, or steal his things and leave them in my room. I never blamed him for hating me. Not really. From his perspective, I made his life miserable. I'm the next best thing to demon spawn."

"But it wasn't your fault," I protested. "None of it. That sick motherfucker." I was gritting my teeth so hard I thought they would crack.

I'd resented my mother before. Not much, I understood her, but some part of me had railed at her controlling behavior, had raged when she'd kicked me out. But all of that felt so...stupid. So hollow. I'd grown up loved, with siblings who cared about me and parents who wanted what was best for me. I'd grown up safe from...HIM.

And as much as I wanted to punch my dad in the mouth for what had happened to Aunt Bonnie, I knew that wasn't on him. He'd been a scared kid whose brother had been murdered, and been manipulated by a sociopath.

But the old man. He was to blame. Garrett fucking Smythe. The black banshee.

I'd heard of him. Not much, dad didn't like to bring him up for obvious reasons. But I knew he hated him. And now I could see why. What kind of person could do that to another human being? A child? THEIR child? The joy on his face as he stared down at her, burying her own brother. It was like a kid on Christmas. He didn't just hurt people. He LOVED to hurt them. He gloried in it.

And that wasn't even the worst of it. "He's getting stronger, isn't he?" I asked her quietly. "The Bliss is making him stronger."

She let out a hollow laugh. "Oh yeah. You bet your ass it is. And honestly I don't know why I didn't think of him right away. Well, no, I do know why. I thought he was dead. Prayed he was. It happened not long after my powers awakened. Not long after I met with HER. The house burned down. I was glad to see it gone. Mother wasn't home when it happened, and we found a body. It was too badly burned to identify, but it was wearing his signet ring. It just seemed so...easy. And right. After all, I always knew he was going to burn."

I put a hand on her shoulder. "You couldn't have known. But if he's really getting stronger...this is bad, right? What can he do?"

"A lot," she said emphatically. "Not just sound waves. He was always better at this than I was. I can weave sound, but the psychic aspect of our powers was never where my gifts lay. I can read others, influence them a bit, but him...he's an artist. He climbs into your brain and takes it apart, strips you away piece by piece until there's nothing left but misery and pain."

I flinched. "Mind control?" I asked in horror. "Like he tortures you with visions of your nightmares or something?"

"No," she said shakily, her head jerking back and forth. "It's worse. He doesn't...he doesn't MAKE you do things. Or think them. He just kind of...cuts out the parts of you that should get in the way. He doesn't make you worse. He makes you make YOURSELF worse. He makes it your fault. He makes you turn yourself into a monster. And he does it slow. Little bits at a time. He eats away at you over months or years."

She was crying, wheezing too. I think she was hyperventilating, and I leaned down to pull her into a tight hug, holding her as she sobbed. "He won't hurt you." I said firmly. "Won't hurt anyone if I have anything to say about it. He's wary of us. Scared of what we can do. Or else he wouldn't be in hiding."

That same broken laugh came out again, wet and garbled with tears. "You don't understand. He doesn't LIKE confronting people. Doesn't like to fight. If he hurts you it's not painful enough. He wants his enemies to tear each other apart. He wants to watch us rot from within. He'll find someone on the outside. Someone who won't be noticed, and he'll twist them. Then use them to leapfrog to someone else, until he has us all tearing each other apart."

“No,” I said bluntly. “He won’t. You’re a master of this kind of magic. You broke his spell, you found him out. He wasn’t expecting that. Which means he doesn’t really know what you can do. He underestimated you.”

And he underestimated ME. This bastard was a threat. Not just to me, or my family, or my friends. He was a threat to the WORLD. He made the planet worse just by being on it. Honestly, I wanted to kill him. If he was here right now I might have tried. I was a little ashamed of that. I was being trained by a fucking superhero. Using my family issues as an excuse to commit murder...Dinah would be ashamed. She didn’t teach me to fight so I could kill people with my bare hands. Even if it would feel amazing.

That wasn’t important right now. I’d deal with the moral questions later. I had to fucking FIND Smythe first. And stop him from hurting any more kids. Murder was a step further than I was sure I could go, but I would smash his fucking larynx like a glass paperweight. See how good he could sing people crazy when he couldn’t even whisper.

For now though, I had other fish to fry. Hopefully Zee and M’Gann could use that fucking nightmare to start trying to track him down. I assumed we were going to be doing a full court press with the League to get him, so that should help. But I had a very traumatized Aunt sobbing into my coat, and I didn’t think just taking her home and cooking her breakfast was going to fix things.

“You’re coming back to my parents house with me,” I said after a moment. “Their security is top of the line, private army level shit, and we’ll bring Rose and Artemis and your boyfriend too. My mom will get over it, if she even complains, which I somehow doubt.”

She looked horrified. “But Archie...”

“Will shut the fuck up and listen to what you have to say if I have to HOLD him down and shout it into his ears.” I said bluntly. “I’ve had enough of this shit. I respected your nonsense when I was younger because I didn’t know the whole story. Figured he must have his reasons, especially since you didn’t seem too eager to patch things up. But now I can see that you bought the bullshit that old bastard fed you. That you blame yourself for a bunch of shit he did because you were young and forced to take part in what was basically fucking PSYOPS on your own family.”

I pushed her chin up, forcing her to meet my eyes. “Whatever you did, for whatever reasons you did it, Garrett Smythe wants you and my dad to hate each other. And my new fucking CREDO in life is to make sure that son of a bitch never gets what he wants ever again. Forget his fucking plans, Even if you don’t think you deserve forgiveness, you know you can agree with that.”

I stood up, and she laughed again as I pulled her to her feet. This one wasn’t hollow or brittle though. It was bright and happy, and I shot her a confused look, wondering if she’d somehow cracked in the last few seconds.

“Sorry,” she snuffled out between giggles. “You just sounded a lot like Archie. Back when we were young. We were actually pretty close before everything. He was always so protective before...” her smile fell. She didn’t need to say it. I’d seen it. Seen the way she’d been isolated, and she’d told me herself about how he’d twisted her up into hurting my dad.

And I didn’t believe for a second that was all them. Not even as kids being manipulated. Not after what she told me about the things he could do inside your head. I was betting he’d been tinkering with both of them the whole time and she hadn’t noticed. She’d already said that was how he liked to operate. I wondered if my dad would be able to throw it off himself or if we’d need M’gann or Zee to help fix it.

We walked to the door, and it whooshed open. I laughed as I saw Rose and Artemis fall over, backpedaling as they fell on their asses. Rose looked a little guilty. “I just...wanted to make sure she wasn’t like...murdering you or whatever.” She said stiffly as she climbed to her feet.

Artemis shrugged. “I was just eavesdropping.” We all looked at her. “What? Bonnie knows me well enough after a few days of girl time. I’m not gonna pretend to be some disaffected badass like Tsundere Suzie over here.” She jerked a thumb at Rose. “Dinah is with Zee and M’gann checking over the goon. She wanted me us to take you home. I take it that’s NOT where we’re going?”

“Sure it is.” I said with a smile. “Just not the one you’re thinking of. You got any of those beamy tubes near my folks place?”

She pulled out her phone, checking an address. “Closest is probably Gotham Academy. There’s one in the basement. We have them trained not to question people going in and out. We’d need to get a cab or something though.”

I shook my head. “Unnecessary.” I pulled out my own phone, which SOMEHOW had a signal up here, and dialed a number. It rang twice then picked up. “Hey, Izzy. I need you to come pick up me and some friends. Bring the big car. You can pick us up outside Gotham Academy.” After I hung up, I smiled at my Aunt. “Now, let’s get you home.” I had a reunion to orchestrate, and then after that...I was going to grind. It was about time for me to hit Iron.