

She plastered yet another layer of suffocating cosmetics on her face. It had been a good six hours since she had entered the bathroom and at this point, she couldn't remember what she used to look like. She could barely remember what she used to look like just a few layers ago; her memory was severely impacted due to their attempts to give her superhuman intellect.

Still, she powdered her powder and slathered glossy balm all over her lips. There was a very specific image in her mind, and she wasn't going to stop until that image was achieved.

Another layer went on. She found herself having to brush around her eyes, as the makeup was starting to obstruct her sight.

Another layer. Another layer. Another layer. A bit of brushing away. Another layer. Another layer.

Finally, she was perfect.

Sure, her face appeared to stick out six inches more than a normal person's and her nose was laughably small, but it was as close as she was ever going to get to realism.

Overflowing with unwarranted confidence, she strolled outside and made her way to the marketplace, not to browse any wares, but to simply show off.

And then the clouds came.

At first, she was too busy staring at an especially handsome farmhand to notice. Then, a thick water droplet fell on her head.

Within seconds, it was pouring. Her face drained of color; she had completely forgotten to check the weather predictions for today.

The cheap powder dissolved, the glass eyes fell from their artificially constructed sockets, and her hands shot straight to the smooth, blank area that was left behind. Beady black eyes located near the top of her collarbones scanned the area, searching for a getaway.

Alas, it was too late. People had seen her facial features wash away, and several had already called the police.

* * *

The hauler wheeled in a metal gurney with the faceless young woman strapped to it tightly. She laid there, her two tiny black eyes unblinkingly staring at the ceiling, hoping that they would deem her worthy of freedom. Surely, she displayed two of the Six Highly Desirable Traits,

perhaps even three or four or six. Yes, surely, she displayed six. Or some aspects of them, anyways.

She made a man laugh last week when she knocked over a carton of tomatoes, so that could count for Humor. And she gave an old woman the book she left on the subway a month ago, so there was her Kindness shining through. And one time, she stopped and put a dime in a beggar's hat, even though she was supposed to report him because the Pracurian Government would never allow an upstanding citizen go hungry or homeless, and that was clearly an act of pure Compassion. And whenever she went to the market, she picked the cheapest foods to save money, making her Rationality quite obvious. And there was one day where the cash register malfunctioned and even though she never said it aloud--but that's because she couldn't have even if she wanted to-- she merely did the math in her head and came to the correct total before the cashier did, proving the evidence of her Intellect. And sometimes when she read sad stories, she cried, meaning she was as Empathetic as any other human being.

Yes, surely, she would be freed. She was a good person, unlike all the other Bootleg Babies. Truly, it was a pity that they had been born such evil beings, but she had been lucky enough to have a misguided kind soul as her Godplayer. He had carefully crafted every bit of DNA or RNA or XNA or however that worked and made a loving, affectionate BB just as human-like as the Legals.

He should've been a Person Engineer, she reflected, for he had adored his work. He created BBs for lonely unmarried people in need of a son or daughter, and did his best to ensure that they went to good homes. He had even gone so far as rescuing and raising himself one child who appeared to be in danger--herself. If the law were a bit better about discerning intent, he would probably be a hero.

The law is silly, anyways. She knew she was a good person, and she knew he was a good person. That was the truth, plain and simple. And to protect her dear, sweet Creator, she would be careful not to link herself to him.

Unfortunately for her, that dear, sweet Creator was sitting at a rounded plastic table across from a sharp-looking scientist. He wore handcuffs and was chained to the floor. He didn't raise his eyes from the surface of the table he sat at.

The scientist turned to the gurney she had come in on. "And which one is this, Bellamy?"

He weakly raised his head, made eye contact with his beloved BB, and immediately slammed his head back down on the table, his body lurching with every painful sob. Through tears and mucus, he managed to cough out, "Jade."

Jade began struggling to free herself from the bite of the coarse straps. She would've cried along with him if her simple eyes had only allowed it.

The scientist turned back to her Creator, letting out a weary sigh. "Mr. Kiel, I understand that this is difficult, but it's imperative that you remain rational while we question you. Would you like us to take Jade to the Cages so you can calm down?"

"You fu-fu-fucking monsters," he howled. "She never did anything, not a si-si-single thi-hi-hi-hi-i-i-i-i..." His voice trailed off as he pounded the table with both fists, wheezing and bawling as Jade continued her attempted thrashing about.

The scientist bit the inside of his cheeks. "Jeremy, please take Jade to the Cages."

Jade wanted to scream at the top of her lungs, but Bellamy's template didn't include a mouth; he used the ever-popular 'advanced skin' that allowed her to 'eat', 'drink', and breathe. Even in this regard, she held tightly to the idea that she was lucky: some BBs weren't even given eyes or ears.

While she hadn't been given a mouth, she had been given limbs, and she was using those limbs to their fullest extent as she managed to shake the gurney slightly. They had been built to receive all sorts of blows and shakes; all she was doing was exhausting herself. The scientist winced in pity as she was wheeled away.

* * *

Bellamy wiped his nose and managed to upright himself, breathing heavily. Mason, the scientist, gave him a sympathetic smile. "Don't worry. She's going to be fine, I promise." He immediately regretted saying it; even he didn't believe it. He knew how they were treated, how he was supposed to treat them in accordance to the strict policies he worked under.

And the scowl on Bellamy's face told him that he had a fairly good idea as well.

"You say that about everyone, don't you? The psychos, the prostitutes, the degenerates. You're going to treat her like one of them."

"We do our best to treat everyone equally. Special attention is only given under circumstances of overly negative behavior." It was the only honest answer he could think of that wouldn't cost him his job.

"So the answer is yes."

"Well... yes, we do say that about everyone, because we do our best to keep everyone comfortable." The last ten words made him feel sick.

"Fine. How can she be set up for a Freedom test?"

The scientist swallowed nervously and felt his stomach churn. He hated questioning Godplayers, especially when they believed they weren't doing anything wrong. It was both sickening and heartbreaking. "First of all, we need to discuss the traits you gave her. I know you said aggression was present in most of your creations--"

"Circumstantial aggression," Bellamy snapped.

"All aggression is circumstantial, Mr. Kiel. The circumstances you selected for do not require violence to be satisfactorily resolved."

"So? It's not like any of them are actually dangerous."

"Mr. Kiel, we just established that your creations are inherently aggressive in inappropriate situations. That would make them ineligible to take the Freedom Test. As long as we don't find this trait in Jade, she'll be able to take it." He hoped desperately that Jade had it present; the inevitable failure of the Freedom Test would be far more crushing.

Bellamy's nostrils flared. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

"No."

"There was a stabbing at a concert last month, y'know. Managed to kill four people before anyone caught her. She was a Legal. You know what you shitheads did to her?"

"Yes, I'm well aware that she was committed to a mental facility. This has nothing to do with--"

"It has everything to do with it," he spat. "You're only afraid because you didn't get to control her conception. You didn't have control over every little aspect of her being."

"We never have control over every aspect of someone, Mr. Kiel. Nurture plays a very large part in how people turn out." Mason felt his blood begin to boil. Bellamy was trying to shift the blame now, when he was the one who doomed his creations from the start.

"She'd never hurt anyone. She's a good girl. Let her take the test."

"After the analysis, we'll see if she's--"

"Let. Her. Take. The. Test." Bellamy's eyes turned cold and cruel, locking directly onto Mason's in a pathetic attempt to intimidate him.

Mason couldn't help laughing in disbelief. "Mr. Kiel, you have no power in this situation. You're a felon. You're lucky you aren't going to be euthanized, quite frankly. You've produced at least fifty-seven BBs in the last thirty years and two of them have gone on to kill Legals."

"It was in self-defense, you fucktard."

He snorted a little at 'fucktard', but sobered quickly when going over the details of the killings. "The first one murdered its--"

"His. His. He, the human being you're talking about, is a he. He, him, and his pronouns apply. He is a person, whether you made him or not."

"Please don't interrupt me. The pronouns aren't crucial information."

"You--I--" Bellamy was sputtering in pure rage. "Yes. Yes, they are. You only say 'its' because it dehumanizes them! It makes it a little easier for you to sleep at night! 'Oh, I didn't kill her today, I killed it. Who cares about an it?'" Once again, tears welled in the Godplayer's eyes. "I care. I care about that fuckin' 'it'! I love that 'it'!"

Mason snapped momentarily and responded with, "Not enough to leave out violent traits, apparently."

Bellamy stared at him for an eternity of five seconds, then burst into animalistic screams and howls as he pounded and kicked everything he could touch. Mason let out a sigh and pressed a red button on the communication device. "Security, retrieve 104 from the questioning room."

Half a dozen people in bullet-proof vests(he had always thought that was overkill) soon came in, restrained Bellamy, and removed him from the room, taking him back to the Hold Rooms.

Mason got up and stretched for a bit. He'd be written up for the inflammatory comment, but at the moment he felt it was justified. The Godplayer was a selfish ass and he had specifically warned his supervisor, Eliza, that he didn't handle the job of questioning well. She didn't care, of course, because Felicity needed to be trained how to properly analyze a BB.

As he walked through the sterile corridors, he thought about Jade. He'd been around so many faceless BBs, he could read their emotions quite well, and Jade was no exception. She was terrified. And it seemed that she genuinely believed the bullshit about love Bellamy was spewing.

It was disgusting, really. The criminals were the Godplayers, not the BBs. They shouldn't be held captive indefinitely, he thought, they should just be euthanized. An apology for the fact that they ever had to exist. As for the Godplayers, it seemed that no punishment could be extreme enough, especially for people like Bellamy. To understand one's own degeneracy and then revel

in it was one thing, but to try and convince others that you're doing something commendable was a new realm of repugnance altogether.

The supposedly energizing orange of the break room assaulted Mason's eyes as he walked in, heading directly for the coffee and merely drinking from the pot. There was less than two cups left and he didn't exactly feel like making an effort at the moment.

"Really, Mason? The cups are fifteen centimeters away." Felicity, his coworker, tossed her white lab coat over a chair and keeled over onto it, sighing. "Wipe off the lip and make a new pot, please."

Mason's face turned bright red, but he finished what he started and did as Felicity asked. Within seconds, it was full of hot(but not scalding) coffee. He poured some into a cup and handed it to Felicity. "I, um, didn't expect you to be done early."

"The hell are you talking about? I'm an hour late. I was supposed to be done at nine, but the frickin' machine malfunctioned and Eliza made me fix it instead of calling the repair guy. As in, the one who gets paid to fix the broken machines."

"I, uh... I'm gonna be honest, I was just looking for an excuse. Sucks to hear about that, though... at least you're done with analysis training, right?"

"Not yet. I still need to learn how to save and organize new sequences properly so I can use them later for comparisons."

"Oh, that's really easy to do. You'll have to go out of your way to screw up." He gave her a teasing grin.

She rolled her eyes and lifted her head slightly from the row of armless chairs she lied across. "I hope they delay it. I'm so much better at questioning."

"I agree completely. I'm so bad at it, I made a guy flip out. Eliza's probably gonna rejoice to have you doing it again."

"Christ. How'd you manage that?"

He sat down on an unoccupied chair. "He's one of those asses who thinks he treats his BBs really well and that there's nothing wrong with them. The guy even told me he was studying to be a Person Engineer, but dropped out because all the regulations made it feel impersonal or something. So of course, he thinks all of them have a chance to take the Freedom test and gets all pissy when I tell him that the inherent aggression he specifically went out of his way to give them prevents them from being able to take it.

"And then, he has the audacity to claim he loves them just so much, he cares, they're so important to him... all I did was point out that if he loved them so much, he shouldn't have made them violent. He didn't take it too well."

"Dude, you're gonna get written up."

"I know, but this is the first time in years and I just can't bring myself to care." He tapped the electronic scheduler on the wall. In five minutes, he'd need to run four analyses, one of them being Jade. Mason let out a groan and turned to Felicity. "Do you want any more coffee before I drink from the pot again?"

"Ugh, seriously? Just get a goddamn cup."

"Fine." Wearing an exaggerated scowl, he got up and pulled a cup from the stack, then proceeded to down half the pot anyways.

Felicity threw her half-full cup at him. He flinched, but managed to keep his composure.

Today wasn't going to be a fun day.