

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Sveta makes her decision.

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Standing there on two feet that she didn't have two minutes ago, Sveta stares at her computer, the more 'real' connection she has to her new 'master'... and as much as she wants to let their metaphysical connection whisk her away to be at Skywalker's side, she knows she can't do it. Because first... she has to do things at least a little bit by the book. But more importantly, she has to keep Skywalker safe.

Moving back to the computer, Sveta once again hunts and pecks out a message with her unfamiliar fingers. The annoyance of how long it takes to type now is completely and utterly overshadowed by the sheer joy of having actual human hands. Because of her amnesia, this is the first time in living memory that she HAS actual human hands... and yet, it feels so much better than her previous circumstances that it's not even funny.

Crazy how her memory loss had kept her from feeling just how bad her body dysmorphia was when she didn't have a body. She knew she was miserable, she knew she was depressed, and she even knew that being a floating face with organs and tendrils floating behind her was part of why.

But knowing something was different from actually experiencing that thing. This was literally night and day... but Sveta knew now wasn't the time for reveling. Now was the time for action.

GstringGirl: It worked. I have a body now. Unfortunately, we need to keep you safe... which means I have to destroy my computer and cover our tracks. You should delete these messages on your end as well just to be safe.

Skywalker: Wait what? Gstring, what are you talking about? Destroy your computer? I don't understand.

Sveta isn't surprised by that... after all, she's never told him the truth. Until now.

GstringGirl: My real name is Sveta Karelia. I am a long term/permanent patient at Asylum East, an Asylum for Parahumans located in Pennsylvania. I was a Case 53 until you helped me... and my situation was bad. Very bad.

She hesitates before pressing send, almost adding on 'I've killed people'... but in the end, she can't quite bring herself to do it. She'll tell Skywalker eventually, he deserves to know everything about her all things considered, but she just can't bring herself to type the words out...

Skywalker: Okay... I think I understand. You're worried they'll confiscate your computer or read our private messages once they find out what happened to you?

Sveta smiles, pleased at how quickly he grasps the situation.

GstringGirl: That's correct. There's no cameras in my room thankfully, but it's only a matter before someone comes and checks on me. I need to 'accidentally' destroy my computer and then ask for help before that happens so we can control the narrative. One way or another though... I promise to be at your side within the next twenty-four hours. Alright?

Skywalker: Alright. Don't risk yourself though, Sveta. And... my name is Lucas, just so you know. I'm looking forward to meeting you in person. I'll delete our messages from my end within the next minute...

Lucas. Sveta turns the name over in her head for a long moment before deciding then and there that she likes it. It's a good name. A strong name.

GstringGirl: Goodbye for now, Lucas. I'll see you soon.

After sending that message, Sveta spends another few seconds staring at the screen, staring at the name. Lucas. That was the real name of the man who had

just changed her life... who had saved her from an existence Sveta had sometimes felt was worse than death.

Letting out a shuddering sigh that expels from full-sized lungs contained within her new chest, Sveta's smile grows... even as she leans in and does what needs to be done. On her end, she begins to delete her Private Message history with Lucas, starting from the latest and working her way back. She doesn't go all the way because if they do make it into her account later on, it would be suspicious if Lucas wasn't in there just talking about normal stuff like her other private messages.

Once she's done with that though, she makes sure to logout of her PHO account entirely. Then and only then does she lean back, staring at her computer for a moment... before letting her 'hair' flow out from behind her and move forward. Wrapping the powerful black tendrils around the computer, Sveta grips it for a second, marveling in the control she now has over her power.

No more destroying things accidentally. No more hurting anyone involuntarily. But in this moment... Sveta squeezes. She's rewarded with a somewhat satisfying crack as the computer, monitor, keyboard, and mouse; despite being reinforced in case of accidents, all shatter under the purposeful force of her power, breaking into a bunch of pieces. A bit of plastic smacks against her cheek, making Sveta flinch... but only from the contact. She doesn't actually feel any pain from it.

Staring at the pieces of her setup for a moment, Sveta repositions her tendrils and grips down hard again, tearing up the larger components that have escaped destruction the first time due to their sturdy materials. Only once she's confident everything has been 'smashed to smithereens' does she step away.

Moving over to the locked door of her room, Sveta reaches out with her fingers and presses a heavily reinforced button there. A crackling noise sounds out, letting her know she's connected to the Asylum's help desk.

"Um... hello? Something happened to me. I need help."

There's a momentary pause before a voice comes back over the comms.

"Sveta? What seems to be the issue?"

Looking down at her naked form and then back at her destroyed setup, Sveta makes sure to carefully wipe the smile from her face as she answers, putting on her most bewildered expression.

"... I don't know. But... I'd like some clothes please. Also... my computer is broken. Sorry."

"Clothes... the hell?"

Sveta refrains from chuckling, even as she steps back from the door and waits for people from the Asylum to arrive to figure out what was going on. This was going to be quite the shock for everyone and Sveta already knew they weren't actually going to let her go in under twenty-four hours.

But if she played along for now, they would at least give her clothes and also probably let her see Dr. Yamada, which would allow her to say goodbye. Then... she would be at Lucas' side. Right where she belonged.

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Sitting in front of his computer, staring at the sanitized PM history with GstringGirl, or rather Sveta, Lucas tries to process everything. On the one hand, he was feeling pretty damn good. He'd already made his first deal and the power that had come along with helping Sveta was... not insubstantial to say the least.

Not only could he feel the connection between him and his first contractor lingering in the back of his mind, but he could also feel a whole lot of 'potential' swirling around inside of himself at the moment. Potential power he could turn to any number of things, from enhancing himself to giving himself abilities to... well, it felt like the limits were his imagination and nothing else.

He'd probably be grinning like a madman right now, and he *had* been initially after helping Sveta and seeing her message of 'I'm ecstatic' staring back at him. However, his grin had dropped the moment she'd revealed more about herself and it was hard to bring it back now, knowing what he knew about her circumstances.

Lucas had known her situation was bad, but he never would have guessed that his online friend was in a damn Parahuman Asylum and a Case 53 to boot. That was... well, he just hadn't made that logic leap at any point. It made sense now why the cost was so high though... Case 53s were notorious for two things. One, being monster capes... and two, to a lesser extent, they were type of cape who often didn't have control over their own powers.

Some Case 53s did to be fair. Some were just a little monstrous but could still control themselves and their abilities. But some were... well, it was like their powers had turned on them or something. That was the leading theory about their origins, that they were just all normal people who had trigger events go wrong, resulting in both their memory loss and their powers being funky in some way.

Of course, that ran into two problems. First and foremost, not a single Case 53 had ever been identified. Even changed as they were, someone should have been able to connect one of the hundreds of monster capes to a missing person case on Earth Bet by now. Secondly was the Omega Symbol tattooed unerringly on each and every one of their bodies. That was a bit too uniform, something that connected all Case 53s to one another.

Regardless, Sveta being a Case 53 and being stuck in a Parahuman Asylum was... a revelation. Her worries over Lucas being hunted down by the authorities were not unfounded. After all, while he was confident he didn't Master the young woman... he had just technically enslaved her.

Willingly and with enthusiastic consent maybe, but still... Sveta was his now. He could feel that in his very bones. She was his in the same way that the computer in front of him or the shirt on his back were his. And she would be at his side soon enough, given her promise.

... But twenty-four hours wasn't enough time to get the authorities to release Sveta properly and Lucas knew that. She would almost certainly be kicking over an anthill when she finally did depart and they would be hunting her as an escaped fugitive. Which meant they might connect them together even with the destroyed computer and deleted message history and start hunting *him*.

Lucas could have told Sveta to just sit tight and play ball until they were willing to let her go free, but he'd read enough horror stories about what went on in those Parahuman Asylums that he wasn't about to do that. Especially not when he could feel through their connection how badly Sveta wanted to be at his side. Hell, he wanted her at his side as well.

Still, this was a situation he shouldn't let fester... this was something he needed to get ahead of. And luckily, he had all of this potential power swirling around inside of him from his first deal.

As tempting as it was to start making himself the next Alexandria so he could fly around and bust some skulls in the name of saving Earth Bet from itself... Lucas knew what he really needed right now and it was something far more subtle.

And so he turns the potential from his first deal towards making himself a power of his own... specifically, the power of anonymity. Hiding from the authorities would be a lot easier if nobody knew to look in his direction in the first place, right? He didn't want to become the next Nice Guy or anything, no fucking thank you, but he did want immunity from Thinker Powers and surveillance and a general 'notice me not' effect going on.

He feels the potential within him coalesce as it rises to grant his desire. He feels it become something more 'solid' in a metaphysical sense and also feels it 'slot' into place within his soul. And no sooner does he feel his new power of anonymity click on... then a portal opens up in his room and a woman wearing a fedora wielding a pistol in her hand steps out.

Lucas' eyes widen and he freezes in place as the fedora-wearing, besuited woman pauses mid-step, standing there in his room with her pistol raised in the

air. She stares right at him for a long moment, eyes almost glazed over, face blank of any emotion. Frankly, it doesn't feel like she's looking at him if Lucas is being honest. It feels like she's looking *through* him.

Then, she steps forward, speaking crisply.

"Door Me, Los Angeles."

Lucas watches, mouth agape, as the woman in the fedora strides across his room, the portal she came in through winking shut behind her while another portal entirely opens up on the far wall. Through it, he catches a glimpse of what looks like a dirty alleyway in some city somewhere (presumably Los Angeles) before she steps through and that portal closes as well.

If he wasn't already sitting down, he's pretty sure his legs would have given out on him right about then. As it is, he fully collapses back into his chair, his body feeling like a puppet with its strings cut as all of his tension flows out of him and his thumping heartbeat starts to settle down.

That was... that was the fucking cape boogeyman. He'd seen mention of her on PHO a handful of times. Just enough to assume she had to be an urban myth. It was the kind of thing Lucas figured a sad sack of shit like he'd been might come up with. After all, someone who could never get powers would like the idea of a woman in a fedora and a suit, walking around with nothing but a pistol, scaring the ever-living bejeezus out of even the most powerful and violent of parahumans.

But that was no urban myth. That was very, very real. And Lucas got the impression that if he hadn't used up his potential from the deal he'd made with Sveta to give himself protection against Thinkers and general all around anonymity from people searching or hunting for him... he might very well be dead right now.

"Holy fucking shit..."

Swallowing harshly, Lucas shakes his head and slowly rises to his feet. He's trembling, an extreme case of the jitters spreading through his body as he forces himself over to his bed and collapses into it.

... He was going to take a nap. Because at this point, doing anything else before Sveta was at his side felt... foolhardy at best. Once they were together, it would be fine. They would be unstoppable; he was sure of it.

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!