

I really should have just let the program run while I waited and made sure not to hog the wifi. They'd done their best to accommodate but this place was crawling with gamers, so the internet wasn't great and me using my laptop for something else wasn't going to speed anything up.

But there's that old saying about curiosity killing the cat, one which seemed a bit ironic as I watched fake AI videos of Minnie dressed up with ears and a tail.

That was the least of it, to be honest, and the internet continued to surprise me with how craven guys could be. There were fake nudes, although none of them were as hot as me, and videos of me doing all manner of things. There were JOI videos with my voice, which I thought were disgusting until I realized that there were also audios of me calling people good boys and saying how much I loved them being my boyfriend. That was *much* worse.

I finally decided that enough was enough when I saw a totally faked livestream, staring my image, that was doing a pretty terrible impression of me. It wasn't the violation that really struck me, but the proud thought that these fakes were nowhere near as hot as me. They were mediocre imitations, soulless AI that lacked my fire and creativity. But instead of comforting me, that idea just made me shudder. Why was I so proud of my boobs and my flirting and my cuteness?!

I closed the tab and sat there.

I just needed to get back to Cade's body, where my brain belonged. No, not Cade's body...*my* body! I'd been using third person all this time but all the confusion made it especially unnerving to hear my own inner voice refer to things that way.

I was Cade!

I'd always be Cade!

Minnie was just a detour, one that had a lot more bumps in the road than I'd first had in mind.

Finally, I was broken out of my existential crisis by a ding from my laptop. The program was ready and after a bit of tinkering and coding, it was in my phone. The mic would pick up my voice, translate it to my usual voice and send that audio to my dad's phone. I double checked my work a few times, realizing that I might not be a supergenius, but I was really, *really* good when it came to tech. The fact that I was living with someone whose brain dwarfed my own and focused on stuff like video games just made me forget it sometimes.

So, sitting in a fuzzy white bathrobe, I finally called him.

"Hey, Cade, how are you?"

I took a beat and hoped this worked. "Good. You?"

I waited, cringing at the idea it didn't work, before he simply answered. "Good. At this conference at CERN. Pretty basic stuff, but sometimes even basic stuff can unearth new data."

"So...why did you need to call me?"

"What? Oh, right! I was just a little bit worried about something. Might be nothing but I thought I'd be safe. Have you been in the lab?"

Hopefully the AI wouldn't translate the fact that I'm not a great liar...

"What? No. Why do you ask?"

“Well, I decided to install a door sensor for a bit of extra security. Overkill, I know, but I detected the door opening and wasn’t sure if I forgot to lock it or not. I might have even left it open, maybe. I was worried that the dog might have gotten in.”

Oh thank goodness.

“Nope, the dog is off at the sitter, remember?”

“Oh, right! Sorry, I can be a bit of a space cadet sometimes.”

“But!” I interrupted, too curious not to. “If our dog did get inside, is there anything I should know? In case of emergency?”

“Not unless he knows how to press buttons and turn knobs with his paws” he chuckled. “Like I said, I think I was just paranoid.”

“Paranoid...but why be paranoid? I mean, if something did happen...what’s the worst it could be?”

“Oh, well...I shouldn’t really say but there’s a machine in there and if the dog got inside and it turned on when he was in the tube...well, I suppose it wouldn’t be a problem if you undid it soon enough.”

“Soon enough?!”

There was silence on the line, as if he was surprised by how loud and frightened my exclamation had come.

“Well, yes. The longer he or...*they* went without the effects being reversed, the more symbiosis between the body and the brain. But nothing would be permanent unless they went 3 or 4 days...”

“And if they went three or four days without everything being reversed?”

His silence on the other end of the line was maddening, and I was gripping onto my phone so tight that if I still had my male hands, I might break it.

“Theoretically. It might even have a larger margin of error or more leeway than I’m thinking but I’m not sure. And you wouldn’t want to risk anything.”

“Right...” I muttered. “Wouldn’t want to risk anything.”

“Anyway, I have to get to this lecture. I hope you enjoy the con. Don’t have too much fun!”

As I sat there, listening to the line go dead, I realized just how stupid I’d been. Not only stupid but reckless. This was my life, my body, my existence!

I didn’t even bother to pack my things as I got dressed.

I put on some awful outfit onto this awful body, thinking how my golden ticket had turned into nothing but trouble as I hurried out of the room. The half shirt barely covered the top of me and the shorts barely covered the bottom, but I wasn’t going to be Minnie for much longer anyway. I’d get home and turn back and apologize and finally put this whole insane business behind me, along with any thoughts of neural and biological symbiosis.

Symbiosis?

The word made me shudder with discomfort as I stood in the elevator, thinking about everything it meant. My brain was adapting to my body. It was taking ownership of it, rewiring itself to better function as the brain of a petite girl with boobs and a very specific set of hormones. It was like my mind was riding a bucking bronco, trying to kick off its maleness with strong and constant thrashes. I couldn’t hang on forever...

Even as I got out of the elevator, the girls walking by reminding me of what was happening. They were in hot superhero cosplay, cleavage out for my eyes to instinctually dart to. But instead of stopping myself from staring at that, I had to stop myself from looking to their shoes and hair.

I practically ran to the checkout.

I just needed to get my keys, and who cared if I left all my stuff in my room? It wasn't like I was going to need any of the girly clothes again after this. I'd been scared straight and no amount of money would ever get me back in this-

"You're gonna run and hide, huh?"

I stopped dead in my tracks.

Not because of money, not because of my career, not because of anything that small. I stopped because of spite and righteous anger, all directed at the man hanging out in the lobby.

"RigRanger..." I muttered, looking to the door and then back to him. "Don't you have some MeToo accusations to rack up?"

"What, still mad I took your panties? I could give them back but well...you might not want them after the fun I had" he grinned.

If nothing else had been an indicator of the feminine and possessive feelings this body had instilled in me, then the sense of disgust I felt then was. "Gross!" I squeaked, an authentic squeak that came straight from the core of me, where I thought there were no squeaks to give. Well, now there were.

"Oh, come on. What do you think guys do when they watch your stream? Listen to your chest codes?" he scoffed.

“Whatever they do, they don’t brag to me about it after! And that’s nothing to brag about! Don’t you have any girls who, I don’t know, would consent to spending time with you?” I asked. “Or do you just like harassing women who don’t want anything to do with you?”

“Don’t want anything to do with me? You’re saying you went out in that outfit and didn’t want attention?” he asked, pointing towards my bare stomach and bare legs.

“You’re saying you went out with that face and you didn’t want girls making fun of you?” I shot back. “If you want my advice, use shampoo and soap. Then the only disgusting thing about you would be your personality.”

“Hey, if you want to give me a bath, then my room is upstairs” he shrugged.

“I’m not your mother. What kind of weirdo says something like that. Ugh!” I said before turning to walk on.

“But you are leaving though?” he interrupted. “I scared you too bad last night. You know how tough real gamers are.”

...just walk, Cade. Just keep walking and go home and go back to your old body and laugh about this someday when enough girls get together and expose this weirdo. Don’t engage. Don’t get angry...

Okay, you’re getting angry, that’s fair.

But you still have to go. Don’t let this guy get to you. He’s not worth it. Your male life is. Your body and your mind is. Are you really going to throw that all away for-

“Just send me another pair of panties when I win the tournament. It’ll be as close as you ever get to real winning.”

...okay.

“Listen here, dips—!” I said, thrusting my index finger at him like it was a knife that I use to threaten losers. “I’m a better gamer than you, a realer nerd, I’m going to make you wish you had never picked up a controller! I’m not leaving! I’m staying right here and come Sunday, I’m going to beat you so bad that it’s going to knock you back down to Angry Birds! And everyone is going to thank me for getting rid of the smelliest, ugliest, most abrasive douchebag in gaming!”

With that I turned on my heel and stormed off. Not towards the doors, or towards the valet, but towards the elevator and my room. I was staying and that was that. My words had come with the reckless and entitled anger that only a man could feel socially allowed to muster and Ranger just stood there, dumbstruck to see it from such a small girl. I was shocked at myself too, only realizing as I got into the elevator why I’d done it.

First off, my hormones were all out of wack, which most likely had some part to play in my intense fears, worries, emotions and outbursts. My anger was even more angry than usual and as the estrogen bombarded my brain, it just made each and every indignity more annoying.

Second was the sense of selfhood and identification with Minnie that being her this long brought, and the defensiveness I felt when he insulted her.

Last and most importantly was Cade, the person I’d always been, the person who hated toxic fans and douchey gamers. Even before becoming a girl I would have hated RigRanger. He was everything I didn’t want to be when I booted up my PC or console, everything that gave people like me a bad name.

Simply put, every part of my fractured sense of self, everyone I was and am and could be, wanted to put that a–hole in his place.

I got back to my room and started to get some reps in, looking at his videos like they were gametapes in order to prepare for whatever he'd throw at me. My dad had given me a window and he wasn't sure anyway, so maybe I could win on Sunday and get home in time. Maybe he was just paranoid. He usually was, testing things a dozen times when he only needed two or three experiments to be sure. I'd be fine and even if I wasn't, I could back down. I couldn't let Ranger live the rest of his life thinking he'd beaten me into retirement.

KNOCK KNOCK

Time had gotten away from me, and I had been so deep in my prep that I didn't realize it was dark outside. I'd gotten through one day of this, which was most likely going to be the hardest. Tomorrow I was going to help unveil the game of the decade onstage to a packed hall. The day after I was going to show the world that CutieClutch was the best gamer alive. Right now?

Right now I answered the door and looked up to see Zara.

"I heard you freaked out on Ranger in the lobby?"

"I wouldn't say freaked out-"

"Well then that's a shame because someone needs to freak out on him" she snorted. "Can I come in?"

'Uh...'

I had no reason not to, but of lot of confusion that her presence was only going to make worse. Still...

"Sure" I shrugged, stepping aside for her.

"So, you think you're going to win the tournament?"

“Yeah, that’s what I said” I told her, watching as she closed the door behind. This should have been a dream, but I should have had a penis and a few inches of height on her too.

“I think you might” she agreed. “How was your first day other than that?”

“Good, I guess? Well, not really. SugarAndSpike got me in her bathtub.”

“Ugh. Yeah, she can be a bit...catty” she offered, her tone telling me that catty was probably nicest term she could use for it.

“Why? She’s way more popular than me!”

“Yeah, but for how long. She’s *twenty eight!* For an E-girl that’s like being a cougar. You’re young and threatening and she probably wanted to knock you down a peg.”

“She can’t be that shallow.”

“No, but her fans are. She’s trying to milk the last of this before the next crop of eighteen year olds totally pushes her out of fame. Aren’t you worried about aging? I mean, what’s your skincare routine?” she asked in a half joking way.

I didn’t really have one, since I just zapped myself into Minnie without much need for moisturizing. “Umm...some cutting edge stuff. But there are some older gamers and streamers-”

“Yeah. *Men*” she countered.

I thought for a moment, trying to prove her wrong. But she wasn’t that far off from the truth.

“Right. Well maybe that’s the tradeoff. We can blow up the second we show some skin and but they have a much longer time...if they keep at it.”

“Maybe. But I have to admit that I didn’t really come to talk about careers.”

“Why did you come then?”

I watched her hand go down, in rapt and clueless suspense as to what it was doing before feeling it cup around my chin and-

She kissed me.

She kissed me, firmly and confidently, like I was far from the first girl she kissed. I stood there, more shocked than anything else as my muscle mommy crush pulled her lips from mine and sighed.

“You’re straight. Thought so...” she muttered. My body hadn’t reacted the way a lesbian’s would have. I didn’t give her any of the small responses she was used to, didn’t have the spark or connection that always told her the truth. I opened my mouth to argue but then I realized she was right. My eyes were open. I was surprised and just let it happen, without leaning in or expressing my attraction in even the most tacit tones.

“Wait, I am!” I promised her, reaching up and pulling her head down for a second attempt. But it was like kissing someone in a play, all awkwardness and no heat.

“Honey...” she said, helping me down. “I’ve seen plenty of girls that wanted to try out girls because they’re adventurous or rebellious but that’s not for me. You don’t like girls. I do. That’s okay...”

I looked up to her, realizing my problem now as it landed hard atop my already existing mountain of issues. My crush only wanted me when I was a girl, but I didn’t want her when I was one. I only wanted her when I was a boy and she didn’t want me when I was one.

“S—” I muttered.

“Hey, no hard feelings. We can just be friends and I can keep showing you around. I got a vibe from you before but...it seems like it's gone now” she shrugged, heading out and leaving me alone in my room.

I should have gone home. That should have been the straw that broke the camel's back and made it too much for me to put off any longer.

But as I stood there, one of RigRanger's videos played on my tv, and one look at his stupid face was enough for my stubbornness. If two days as a girl was enough to do this to my brain then two days as a boy should be able to reverse it. This body liked guys but mine didn't so whatever magic it was working would soon be undone.

I hoped so, anyway.

I went back to training, trying not to think about literally anything else in this bristly, embarrassing existence until sleep finally came. Tomorrow I'd unveil Crime Lord 6, the most anticipated game ever made. Tonight, hopefully I could avoid any more nightmares.