

To say that it was skimpy implied that there was enough of it there to contain a whole adjective. It was too small to be skimpy, too thin and wispy to be *anything*. It was more so the negative space of a bikini than a bikini itself, serving only to make me imagine how much of me would be visible if I could possibly wear it. But I couldn't possibly wear it. That wasn't clothes, that was kink-wear! It was the wet dream of a dirty mind and there was still enough of my natural straightness left in my brain to see just how ridiculously objectifying it would be for someone to be seen in it.

I didn't have enough left to hook up with my female crush, but I had enough left to know that. It was that bad. And the guys were standing next to the mannequin that it was hanging from, smiling as if I should be happy about the surprise.

"CutieClutch!" said a man with grey hair and grey suit, looking like he ought to be on the cover of 'Midlife Crisis Monthly.' He extended a hand and I sheepishly shook it, trying to look at him and not the swimsuit looming ahead of me. It wasn't even a swimsuit. It was a 'laze around the pool' suit. If you tried to swim in it it would just come right off.

"Minnie" I told him, so freaked out by the outfit that I didn't think to be freaked out by how naturally that name left my lips. At his sides were two other dudes, only one of which I recognized. He stood there with short, curly hair, looking a bit younger and more hip but still having the almost innate vibe of someone on the tech side of things. He was Trevor Willis, their lead dev on the project.

I went to shake his hand and caught him by surprise. Clearly he wasn't used to someone like me wanting to meet him without an introduction.

“Oh, Minnie. This is our lead Dev. You won’t be working much with Mr. Willis though. You’re-”

“I was really impressed with the gameplay I have seen. Which engine are you using? Or is it true you developed a new one in house?” I asked eagerly, as all three men looked down at me in confusion.

“Um, Minnie...my name is Clark, by the way. And leave the tech to him. He has to help with the presentation and so do you.”

I looked back up to the executive, figuring that my tech talk could wait for later. But I wanted desperately to delay or deflect from whatever they had in mind, since I had a strong idea of what it was.

“This is Dean. He’ll be the moderator” he added, gesturing to the other man there.

“Wait, I thought I was the moderator?”

“Is that the word they used?” asked Clark with faux confusion. I wasn’t the best actor but I knew how to see a bad one. “You’re the *special guest*. Don’t worry. It’s less stress this way. Just be your normal, bubbly self.”

“Right...but they said-”

“I’m sure you misread the email or something. Blonde moment” he joked, looking to his watch. “Well, we have to get ready. Soundcheck, final prep on our talking points...and you have to get dressed.”

I gave one last terrified glance to that atrocious and miniscule fabric and shook my head. “But...I am dressed?” I gulped.

“You’re dressed for a cold day in Alaska” he snorted, looking down at my sweats. “You’re here to help the brand. You know that girl on the cover of our last game? The one in all the commercials?”

“Maribel Maxiwell” I murmured, like a good little nerd.

“Whatever her name is. She’s our brand, like that thumbs up guy in Fallout. And what better way to reveal the new game than to have you cosplay as her! She’ll be onstage for all our fans.”

“She’s a stripper-”

“Listen, I don’t really handle the story stuff. But I know branding. So do you! I’ve seen your stuff and I know you know how to play to your base. You know how to be a thirst trap and we’ve built our brand on jiggle physics and letting incels use controllers to go to the strip club. So, get dressed. Smile. Wave. Be pretty. Who knows? You might even end up modelled into the game. We can talk about licensing your likeness if this goes over. Now, why don’t you get dressed and me and the boys will get everything ready-”

I opened my mouth but he walked past me with a deliberate speed, as if his steps were meant to show me how little he needed my response.

I stood there for a moment, realizing now that this outfit had appeared in one of the games. It seemed absurd then, even on a CGI body in a heightened game. That’s why so many Rule 34 artists had fixated on it.

And now they wanted me to wear it.

Correction: you couldn't wear something like that. You could only use it as plausible deniability in case someone tried to arrest you for indecent exposure. It was so...

Ugh!

I walked out of the room and down the hall, deciding that I had to put my foot down. I could take a lot in the name of fame but there were some things that I'd rather be unknown without than famous for. I caught up with them as they neared the backstage area where we'd go out for the fans, grabbing Clark's sleeve.

"Hey!" I said in a somewhat bratty way. Stupid voice from this stupid body! I couldn't even be confident or angry without it being filtered through the less serious, female term for it.

"Oh, Minnie. Need my help with the outfit?" he joked.

"I'm not wearing that!"

He looked to me for a moment, then back to the others, shooing them off to get ready. The dev and the moderator left me there, looking up as the executive put his hands in his pockets.

"Honey, I don't know what your problem is, but I wasn't lying. I've seen your streams and this should be easy for you. Just tease, giggle, give them a show and you'll be the most famous E-girl in the world. You're young. You'll have two or three years at the top, an Onlyfans with enough money to finance a small country."

"I- I'm not going to do an Onlyfans!" I hissed.

"Well then you're just leaving money at the table. You could make an Onlyfans with nothing on it and some simps will subscribe just to give their goddess money."

“I- that *thing* is degrading! It’s tiny! It’s nothing! I’m not going to wear it in front of people!”

He sighed, putting a hand on my shoulder that I certainly didn’t want there. Whether or not he got that signal, he didn’t take it off. “Now? Really, now? You let being a teasing bimbo get you right to the edge and then don’t take the next step? This is fame. Real fame. Not just some loser gamers on the internet. Every guy in the world is going to want you. You’ll boost our algorithm and we’ll boost yours. A bikini girl will be a stunt that makes the game go more viral than it already would and you...you’ll be set for life.”

Finally, I reached out and grabbed his hand, taking it off my shoulder. “I am a loser gamer on the internet. And I don’t want to set as a bimbo for life.”

He scoffed. “Fine. Then go.”

“Good” I huffed, turning to leave.

“I’ll give you ten minutes to pack before you’re kicked out.”

I froze.

“What, you thought we’d keep paying for your room? You thought you could just keep enjoying the con? No, if you leave then you’re out. Out of the con, out of the *tournament*. Banned. From all tournaments.”

I clenched my little fists.

“There she is. Remember all those forms you had to sign to get here? A million picture and image release form, all that? Well, part of those contracts was the agreement you do this, or else you forfeit everything.”

“I...I just want to play in the tournament” I whimpered, turning back to him.

“Well” he shrugged, lifting his hand to point to the dressing room. “Get ready then.”

I hated everything.

I hated myself and this body and this tournament and this convention and most of all, I hated this bikini. It was pink, but so small that you might not notice. You might not remember what it looked like when you looked away, since your brain was too busy absorbing all the places that it wasn't. I was showing underboob, overboob, sideboob, boob from literally every angle except straight ahead. It covered my nipples but little else and the bottoms felt like someone was flossing between my buttcheeks. It was all so terrible that I didn't even mind the heels, since I might as well be wearing terrible footwear to match my terrible swimsuit. They were right about one thing though: I loved like she did. The nerds who'd looked up her R34 art with one hand typing would eat this up, and that thought made everything worse. It wasn't just judgement or nerves. It was a heat, burning me from the inside out, weighing me down, compressing me like the walls were pushing in from all sides. Each second made it worse. Each thought made it feel more and like I was going to collapse. But even with that in mind, I looked up to the mirror. I had to make sure I wasn't at risk of a wardrobe malfunction, had to make sure it was at least legal.

It was.

Barely.

I took a breath or at least tried to. It only half worked, and I still felt light headed. I was a Barbie, a bimbo, a doll and a fantasy. I wasn't a person. I was a persona. This

was who Cutieclutch was. No matter how many games I won, how many metas I invented or how much I worked to prove myself, it was too late.

KNOCK KNOCK

“Time to go!”

I threw my hands over my face.

He was right. The amount of attention this would bring would mean that I’d never need to work again, ever. I didn’t even need to make new content. My backlog would sell so much that I could live as Cade without a worry in the world. Then I could win the tournament and salvage some respect.

I told myself that, but I didn’t believe it. I couldn’t even blame the female hormones anymore. I think Cade would have cried if he felt how I was feeling.

KNOC-

“I’m coming!” I shouted. I put my head down and minced to the door, walking out without looking up. My long blonde locks made for pretty good blinders and I tried to pretend like there was no one else in the world. No eyes. No judgements.

But there were still mine.

I was clenching my fists so hard that my nails were starting to hurt my palm and I could hear the crowd rumbling the place. The moderator was getting them all riled up. It felt like an earthquake of stomping feet and shouts and finally-

“The CEO, the chief Dev and, cosplaying as your favorite character, CutieClutch69!”

My legs felt like jelly. They wouldn't move. I just stood there, until the hand of one of the event works gently found the small of my back and pushed me forward, towards the bright light in the curtain.

I stepped through and-

The crowd changed.

They didn't stop making noise, or make more noise, but they needed a second to know what they were seeing. The sounds they made changed, first in confusion and then in glee. Some hooted. Some hollered. Some whistled or called out lewd things I tried to block out of my mind. There were thousands of people here, and I felt the wave of their eyes and shouts hit me with enough force to knock me down. I nearly staggered, my legs feeling so weak as I withered beneath the collection attention of the massive hall. Deer in headlights doesn't begin to describe it, but luckily red cheeks and big eyes were practically part of my brand. People took pictures and each flash made me want to curl up into a ball. The symbiosis of body and mind had reached a point that I thought of this body as mine, and was pretty darn protective over it. I was keyed into every nerve, hyperaware and feeling fight or flight going haywire with neither one winning out.

I was Minnie.

And Minnie was freaking out.

I took a seat, feeling eyes roaming over my skin, practically groping me with their stares, making me want to tremble as the others took their seats and the panel began.

"CutieClutch?" asked the moderator as I realized he'd already asked me a question. I'd missed whatever it was, but hadn't disassociated enough to miss it when he prompted me again.

“Um...I’m just glad to be here” I offered into the microphone, figuring that was a good answer to just about anything.

“We love you Cutie!” came the far too enthusiastic voice of someone in the crowd.

“I’m just confused because we told you to come in business casual” he joked, as if I’d picked this stupid cosplay. The crowd burst into laughter and I wondered how long it’d had been since I’d last breathed.

“Um...yeah” I offered weakly, feeling like I was getting smaller with every moment. He went over to talk specs and development with Willis as Clark gave me a hard stare but to be honest, I didn’t notice. Everyone was staring at me. What difference would one more douche make?

I tried to hide myself, to position my body and my arms to make sure they didn’t get to see too much. But I was sheepish even there, worried that one wrong move would make something pop out. This was already a nightmare but the thought of a boob peaking free...

I thought that it couldn’t get any worse until I made the biggest mistake of my life. I looked to the crowd. I looked up because I was tired of looking down and seeing the body of a vapid blonde who’d sold out and let a big man boss her around. I couldn’t bear to look down at this bikini one second longer, so I looked up to the crowd and saw-

Dale Diberts, looking a bit crestfallen as he watched me. The worse part was how dull the disappointment seemed, as if he hadn’t let himself get his hopes up too much to begin with.

The men talked as I felt each camera flash burning me, adding to the heat and feeling like the world was falling down. This was being livestreamed. It was being recorded and live tweeted and retweeted and posted everywhere for all time and-

“Cutie, why don’t you stand up and give us a little spin? We want to show the fans that our models are basically lifelike” said Clark, looking up to the screen where Maribel’s model was being turned about.

I slowly stood, barely able to find the strength in my legs or will. If I had more of Cade in me, I would have punched him in the face, regardless of whether or not it hurt. I didn’t care about it accomplishing anything. I just wanted to lash out and remind the world that I wasn’t just a toy to be posed and dressed. I wasn’t just a doormat that would apologize when you were the one harassing me. I wasn’t...

I wasn’t CutieClutch69.

I was Minnie. And Minnie was finally a real, full person.

“Sure...” I said, standing up and walking to the center of the stage, making sure that every eye and camera was on me. Most had been anyway, but I wanted everyone’s attention.

“I’m not going to spin for you because I didn’t want to be up there in this degrading outfit. I drove for hours, dealt with a-hole pro gamers and finally got here just for them to threaten to ban me from gaming unless I wore this demeaning thing. I thought I had to because-”

Clark lunged for my mic but I managed to keep it away from him.

“Because I don’t care if they ban me. I know I’m a gamer, not a piece of meat. Just because I’m a girl doesn’t mean-”

He lunged again, this time grabbing it from my hand.

“Well, that’s a very active imagination she has there” he said, looking out to the hushed crowd. A minute ago, you couldn’t have convinced me they were capable of being so quiet.

I walked offstage, my buttcheeks moving up and down around the taut string of my bottoms, not caring as I made my way back to the greenroom. I put on my sweats, getting dressed just in time to see security at the door.

Yeah.

Figured.

I walked out with them behind me and back into the hotel, hoping that the ten minutes to pack was still in effect. I’d given up my fame, given up my spite, given up everything...

But man had it felt good. The look on that douchebag’s face!

As I walked towards the elevator, however, I was the one with a surprised expression.

Dale was behind me, as were tons of other interviewers, bloggers and big names. They were trying to catch up but I was still buzzing with anxiety from everything, and I just wanted to finally put this chapter of my life behind me. So I hurried towards the elevator. No more interviews. No more-

“You really wanted to get away from me, huh?”

RigRanger07 was waiting in the elevator, looking so smug that I wanted to slap him just for standing there.

“Come on. We all know you love bikinis and showing off. You just wanted to get banned so you didn’t have to face me.”

“Shut up” I muttered, going to wait for the next elevator.

“Or do you like me? You couldn’t bear to play against your crush?”

“Shut *the f—* up.”

“It’s good for me though. With you being banned, your underwear is going to be a collector’s item. I could sell them like selling the art of some painter that just died.”

“I have ten minutes before I have to leave!” I finally snapped, glaring at RigRanger as everyone caught up to us. “So do you want a rematch?”