

Chapter 47 - Uncomfortable Truth

The relentless beeping of the elevator, moments later, jerked me out of my tearful haze.

Struggling to sit up, I leaned heavily against the elevator's chilly metal wall, my mind foggy as I tried to grasp my current situation. The elevator's monotone command to vacate, accompanied by an increasingly loud series of beeps, drilled into my consciousness, urging me to move.

'I need to address this bleeding first...' A coherent thought finally formed in my dazed mind.

With deliberate, albeit shaky, movements, I tore another piece from my already tattered work-shirt, fashioning it into a makeshift bandage around my profusely bleeding calf.

"That's probably why I'm feeling so dizzy," I spoke to myself, an attempt to stay alert amidst the encroaching fog of unconsciousness. The idea of using [Serenity] to stop the bleeding altogether, had miraculously already crossed my mind, but the elevator's intrusive noise would make any attempt at meditation futile.

Securing the makeshift bandage, I slumped back, each breath a battle against the overwhelming pain and blood loss. I could barely manage to keep my eyes open, the toll of my injuries demanding surrender to unconsciousness.

Suddenly, the elevator's patience seemed to wear thin, its warning escalating to an alarmingly loud decree. "Vacate the elevator, *now*. You will be forcibly vacated in 60 seconds."

Jolted by the elevator's sudden harsh warning, I forced myself up, curious yet fearful of what "forcibly vacating" might involve. The task was daunting, made worse by my fractured ribs and a right arm that was virtually useless.

Barely managing, I staggered out just as the countdown ominously ticked to eight seconds, the doors slamming shut with a force that felt almost hostile, downright vindictive, vanishing behind the sleek black panels that concealed the restricted elevators.

'Mental note: Never pass out in a restricted elevator. Truly horrifying,' I mentally scolded myself, the adrenaline spike lending me a fleeting clarity.

Despite the dire state I was in, a part of me clung to the hope that an extended rest could mend my wounds. I had yet to face injuries as severe as these, but I hadn't lost any limbs or suffered any permanent damage, as far as I could assess.

The game-like logic of the Rest Function, from what I had gathered, suggested a full recovery was possible with enough rest. However, before seeking refuge in my apartment for a much-needed healing sleep, there was the pressing matter of delivering a data shard to a particular individual.

Mr. Stirling's location, conveniently on my path home, logically became my next stop—not because I was on the verge of collapse from overwhelming pain, making rational thought a struggle, but simply because it was the most direct route.

Absolutely, it was just about proximity.

I had no recollection of how long I hobbled through the hallways of floor 43, their width so much more manageable and much less grand than the floors I had been frequenting recently, but I somehow found myself in front of room 43314 when the haziness left me for a moment.

The world around me sharpened briefly from its daze as I rapped on the door repeatedly, my body teetering on the brink, my mind unable to entertain the notion of patience for someone to answer from within.

When the door finally swung open, revealing Mr. Stirling's vexed expression, my legs gave out. Deprived of the door to lean on, my hand swiped through empty air instead of the expected resistance, sending me tumbling forward.

"Ser—Hooo! Careful!" Mr. Stirling's deep voice barely registered as his large hands caught me, suspending me in a brief moment of weightlessness before everything faded...

—

Regaining consciousness, I found myself sprawled out on an antiquated leather couch, the room seemingly rotated ninety degrees from its usual orientation. In my groggy state, I could faintly discern the familiar details of Mr. Stirling's living room—the same armchair I had occupied during our initial meeting and the display cases locked securely across the room.

"Uuggghhh..." The effort to prop myself up into a sitting position only intensified my disorientation, making the room spin more than it settled.

"Oi, oi, oi! Take it easy, Sera," Mr. Stirling's deep voice resonated from somewhere above, as his hands guided me to sit up more comfortably. "There's no rush. Take your time to get your bearings."

Despite the cloudiness of my thoughts, I couldn't help but marvel at his unexpected gentleness, a stark contrast to his cybernetically enhanced physique.

'Dr. Maltrick's "gorilla" comparison doesn't do him justice. Turns out, even the most daunting of gorillas can exhibit a soft touch,' I mused, half-amused and half-awed by the paradox, my mind simply latching onto the first thoughts that I could muster, unable to filter important information from absolute nonsense.

Time seemed to stretch indefinitely before the disorienting whirl of the room ceased, revealing Mr. Stirling crouched before me, his eyes keenly tracking my every movement.

Thankfully, the fog clouding my mind began to dissipate along with the room's illusory rotations.

"Ah... Hello, Mr. Stirling," I offered weakly, my mind scrambling to piece together the events that led to this moment. Memories of the 33rd floor flashed through my mind, the adrenaline-fueled escape with Aki—

"Aki!" The name burst from my lips as panic surged within me, propelling me toward standing. However, I was immediately restrained by two sturdy, chrome arms. "Let me go! I need to check—"

"There's *nothing* you *need* to do right now, Sera," Mr. Stirling's voice cut through my panic, a tranquil force. "Just sit. Take a moment to catch your breath. Everything else can wait."

Despite my urge to resist, his firm push guided me back into the embrace of the leather couch, his directive echoing more forcefully, "*Sit. Down.*"

Exhausted, the fleeting burst of adrenaline and energy quickly dissipated, leaving me to slump back onto the couch, my back pressing against it for support.

Mr. Stirling's voice, a blend of authority and reassurance, commanded my attention. "Now, you're going to tell me exactly what the fuck happened to you and why you're so worked up. Then, we'll work out how to help you, okay?"

The words began to form, but my thoughts were consumed with worry for Aki.

I hadn't confirmed her safety, nor had I seen if anyone had pursued her. Engulfed in my own desperate escape, the possibility of harm befalling Aki had eluded me until now.

"My friend she... she might be in big trouble," I conveyed with as much urgency as my waning strength allowed. "I... I *need* to check on her."

Attempting to rise once more, I was gently but firmly held in place by Mr. Stirling's formidable presence. Anticipating my frustration, he placed a hand on my head, steadying my gaze to meet his.

"Sera, *calm down*. You're in no condition to help *anyone* right now," he advised calmly yet firmly. "This friend of yours, you can contact them, right? Send them a message. If they're in danger, we'll figure out the next steps. Even if they don't reply, that tells us something."

His words rang true in my mind, partially because thinking was hard and partially because they sounded logical.

I quickly pulled up my list of connections in my cerebral interface, only to quickly realise I had never exchanged my details with Aki. A surge of panic and frustration crept up in me, but was rapidly suppressed by my Ego Attribute, which finally had a clear self-set goal to support.

'*I never got Aki's contact info...But maybe Mr. Shori has it,*' I reasoned, promptly sending a message to Mr. Shori.

[{"Mr. Shori, has Aki come back to the stall after our shift? If you have her contact info, could you share it with me or check on her current whereabouts?"}]

Much to my surprise, a reply popped up just seconds later, as I was still figuring out how to breathe in a way that would convince Mr. Stirling to relax his firm hold.

[{"Ela! It's very good to hear from you. Aki returned and looked... like a mess. She asked whether you had messaged me. I will not ask what the two of you have been up to, but I must request that you refrain from any such actions in the future. You are too young to get hurt like this! Aki has left already. She said she was going home, but she will be back in the next few days. I made her promise. You are okay, I hope?"}]

A colossal relief washed over me as I absorbed Mr. Shori's message, a faint smile breaking through my exhaustion, warmed by his consistently kind demeanour, even in such a brief exchange.

I felt Mr. Stirling's hold on me ease, sensing my sudden shift. "Your friend's safe, I take it?" he inquired, his tone suggesting he sought verbal confirmation. Likely more for my benefit than his own curiosity.

"Yeah, she got out fine," I responded, a wave of relief in my voice, as I let my eyes fall shut once more, the room beginning its jarring gyration anew. "Thank you, Mr. Stirling."

I quickly messaged Mr. Shori, [{"All good on my end, but I'll have to miss tomorrow's shift. Catch up soon."}], skirting around the gritty details for now—partially because I had no idea how to frame any of what had occurred and partially because I could barely think straight, still.

Mr. Stirling eyed me with a mix of concern and curiosity. "You think you can give me a quick rundown on what the fuck is going on then? You're not in any danger, are you?" He asked once again, clearly intent on understanding what *exactly* it was that had happened to me and whether he would have to be prepared to defend me, or the rest of the floor, from whatever it was that had put me into this state.

"Yeah, I can explain," I started, pausing to gather my thoughts and take several steadying breaths. It was then I noticed the absence of pain from my injuries.

"Did you... give me any painkillers or something?" The question blurted out more abruptly than I intended, hastening to add, "Thanks, by the way! If you did, I mean." I wanted to ensure my sudden inquiry didn't come off as impolite, especially given his apparent efforts to help.

Mr. Stirling's light chuckle cut through the tense air. He nodded, a hint of relief in his eyes. "Seeing you getting back to your usual self is a relief. Yes, I administered a tiny dose of some painkiller stims, that I typically use for my own work. You were in pretty bad shape. Now, tell me what happened," he urged, his tone firm yet supportive.

Grateful for his help, I began unravelling the events of the last hour, starting from my descent to the 33rd floor. I detailed everything, not omitting Aki's unexpected presence and involvement, as his earlier perception of my concern for her would have made it obvious anyway.

I was careful, however, not to delve too deeply into our dramatic escape from the alley or the specifics of the [Blademaster's Throw] I had utilised, vaguely describing it as a "risky diversion with potentially dire repercussions for the people involved."

This earned a raised eyebrow from him but no further probing.

Throughout my recounting, Mr. Stirling's expression remained mostly unreadable, his focus entirely on digesting every piece of information I provided.

"...and eventually, I ended up in the restricted elevator leading here, to the 43rd floor. That's how I found myself at your doorstep," I wrapped up, fishing the data-shard from the inner pocket of my jacket where I had securely stashed it. "Despite everything though, I secured what I came for."

I extended the shard towards Mr. Stirling, but a crucial thought halted me, pulling it back just as his fingers almost brushed against it. "Promise me something: Don't breathe a word of this... ordeal to Valeria. Are we clear?" My request carried a desperate attempt at assertiveness, hoping to strike a deal of silence.

A momentary pause hung in the air, suddenly shattered by Mr. Stirling's hearty laughter. "You, kid, are one *peculiar* character," he managed to say between his laughter, leaving me feeling somewhat confused, unprepared for his candid response to both my recounting and my plea.

"Why in the world would I involve that headache of a woman in *any* of this? Frankly, *I* was the one gearing up to ask *you* to keep this under wraps from her. Imagine the chaos if she found out you nearly got yourself killed on a job linked to me. She'd be all up in my business in no time," he clarified, still chuckling.

His laughter and frankness shed light on their dynamic, revealing a shared aversion to unnecessary complications with Valeria—whether it was for the same reason, fear, or not, I didn't know.

"Rest assured, I won't say a word to that irritating woman. You have my word on that," he promised, extending his hand in a gesture that sealed our unspoken agreement. I accepted the handshake, a mutual understanding forming between us.

Passing the data-shard over to him, I sank back into the sofa, feeling a strange sense of relief as if the shard's negligible weight had been a tremendous burden on my entire physique.

Mr. Stirling, after a cursory inspection of the shard, voiced his appreciation for my diligence but quickly shifted to a tone of concern. "I value your dedication to clearing this debt, kid," he began, "but you do realise the lengths you went to weren't necessary, and completely out of proportion, right? These shards, while valuable, aren't worth risking your life over. I have other contacts I could reach out to for replacements if need be. You nearly fucking died due to unforeseen complications with that crew, a situation I assure you I'll investigate to understand how they got wind of the exchange. Had you simply informed me the shard was out of reach, we could've avoided this. Why risk yourself like this?"

His words left me momentarily speechless, caught off-guard by the notion that I might have completely overdone it in my attempt to fulfil my obligations.

The thought of messaging Mr. Stirling had occurred to me, of course, but not to tell him I can't reach it, but rather for some advice on how to reach it despite them being there. I had never even considered the fact that the data-shard might not be worth all the trouble.

'Fuck. Am I actually stupid?' I couldn't help but think, trying to come up with a reasonable explanation for why I had risked my life like that.

Sure, I had wanted the System's rewards for completing the task, but it almost certainly would have updated the task based on Mr. Stirling's reply to my message.

After all, the tasks involved collecting the data-shards, in a numbered fashion. If I didn't get this one as the "Collect the second Data-Shard" then the next one would almost certainly have counted, regardless of whether it was this specific one or not.

"I... it wouldn't have turned out like this if Aki hadn't been involved," I confessed, my voice barely above a whisper, feeling foolish. Mr. Stirling's critique was spot on, despite the unforeseen events that escalated the situation.

"Regarding your friend... *Why* was she even there in the first place? You didn't share your plans with her, did you?" Mr. Stirling pressed, his gaze sharpening with curiosity.

"No!" I shot back immediately, a flash of indignation rising within me. "Absolutely not! Why would I *ever* involve her in this?! She's just a kid! She's like 15 or something... I think. It would never cross my mind to drag her into something this dangerous!"

Mr. Stirling's questioning seemed absurd to me.

The idea of deliberately putting Aki in harm's way was unthinkable. She had only just begun to warm up to me, to trust me. If I had knowingly exposed her to such dangers, it would have shattered the fragile bond we were building. And now, with the mission turning out so disastrously, I worried if even that small trust was irreparably damaged.

Snapped out of my self-reproach by Mr. Stirling's quizzical look, I found myself facing his smug grin. "What?" I snapped, my patience fraying under his amused scrutiny. "Why do you look so amused?"

"How old did you say you were again?" He asked, his tone leisurely as he leaned back against the coffee table he had been perched on.

"Fifteen, but I don't see how that's relevant," I retorted, frustration mounting.

He simply raised an eyebrow, offering no verbal response.

A moment passed before realisation dawned on me, the fog of pain, blood loss, and medication still clouding my thinking. "Wait... It's not the same! I'm not... Aki's just... It's different, okay?!" I stumbled over my words, trying to articulate the distinction in my head.

To Mr. Stirling, I was a fifteen-year-old referring to another fifteen-year-old as a child in need of protection, while simultaneously engaging in dangerously reckless behaviour myself. I understood the irony he found in that, but he didn't grasp the complexity of my situation.

Chronologically speaking, I was closer to thirty than anything, and Aki, despite our shared biological age, was just a kid with a troubled background—completely unsuitable for this line of work or these levels of danger.

Mr. Stirling's chuckle faded as his expression shifted to one of solemnity. "Be cautious around this Aki. I doubt they're telling the truth about who they are and why they are hanging around you. They must have followed you," he warned with an intensity that snapped me back to full alertness.

The change in his tone, especially concerning Aki, set off alarm bells in my head.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked, perplexed. "Aki's just Aki. We met her at Mr. Shori's place, and she was in a pretty bad state. We've only been helping her out since then, and she's been assisting at the stall. She probably got curious about what I was doing outside of work and ended up following me to the 33rd floor..."

He rose from his seat with an effortless grace, making no noise as he moved. Circling to the back of the coffee table, he began manipulating something invisible above it, and suddenly, a holographic projection materialised in front of him.

"This is where you said you entered the 33rd floor, correct?" He pointed to a specific location on the holographic layout of the 33rd floor, which I recognized as part of the comprehensive map he'd provided for the mission.

I adjusted my posture to get a better view, my interest sharpened by Mr. Stirling's suggestive remarks and keen to grasp his implication.

"Yes, that was the elevator I came from," I acknowledged, after cross-referencing the map in my brain's interface, noticing all the annotations I had added earlier.

Mr. Stirling continued, tracing the route I had taken on the holographic map. "You ventured directly to your goal, with some strategically planned shopping detours along the way, which I must praise. It's virtually impossible for just any random 15-year-old girl to have trailed you coincidentally, no matter how much she wanted to know. Your route was meticulously chosen to *evade* detection, as per your narrative," he observed with precision, his finger following my exact path eerily accurately, as though he had been shadowing me himself.

"Given these factors, and considering you also monitored the opposing group for a while before moving in, ask yourself this: How probable is it for this "Aki" to have accidentally ended up in that specific alley on the 33rd floor, unless she was following you with skills beyond what's expected of a typical 15-year-old?"

The realisation hit me like a wave, and my eyes widened at the improbability of it all.

Laid out before me, the holographic map vividly showcased my meticulously evasive route—a path *designed* to shake off any followers and keep me under the radar. It was a

stark illustration that left no room for doubt. Despite my reluctance to accept it, the logical side of my brain was unyielding, urging me to confront the uncomfortable truth.

"Aki... she was *tracking* me," I found myself saying, a hint of disbelief colouring my tone. It wasn't the benign curiosity of someone interested in a colleague or a budding friendship.

No, this was the calculated pursuit of someone with a skill set far beyond what you'd expect from casual interest or somebody her age. "She wasn't just being friendly or curious... she was on my trail, and she did it with a level of expertise that... that I didn't see coming," I found myself saying aloud, articulating thoughts I had subconsciously harboured since discovering it was Aki whom I had extricated from that perilous alley.

These were the words I had hoped would never form in my reality, yet the compelling evidence laid out before me left no room for doubt.

As I grappled with the unfolding reality, my thoughts raced, frantically sifting through each memory I shared with Aki. Desperately, I sought any signs or clues that I might have overlooked, any indication that would bridge the gaping chasm between the Aki I knew and the one who had trailed me with such skill.

She had perfectly embodied the role of an abused and vulnerable teenager, someone craving friendship and a semblance of trust. Every moment we spent together at Mr. Shori's stall had reinforced this image. Her fear, her hesitations, the apprehensive glances—they all resonated with genuine emotion, and I couldn't shake the conviction of their authenticity, having been in that position myself at one stage.

Yet, as I sat there, wrestling with these conflicting images, a nagging question persisted, refusing to be silenced: *'How can this be? How can she be both?'*

The Aki I knew, the teenager needing help, and this almost shadowy figure, adept enough to follow me unnoticed—the two images clashed, each at odds with the other, but each equally true based on my own experienced and corresponding expertise and pure, hard evidence.

Could Aki really be living a double life, one as a frightened young girl and another as a spy or perhaps even an Operator, skilled in surveillance and evasion?

It didn't make any sense to me, whatsoever. The two things were impossible to fit together, no matter how I tried to explain away one or two instances of either side.

They simply did not fit.

The confusion and conflict churning within me were evidently plastered across my face, prompting Mr. Stirling to place his sizable hand on my shoulder, jolting me back to reality with his guidance.

"Look, kid," he began, his voice cutting through my internal chaos with an unexpected clarity, "I'm not insinuating that Aki poses a direct threat to you, nor am I suggesting you cut ties with her. What I am stressing is the importance of understanding your *position* in all this."

I found myself nodding, the fog in my mind beginning to dissipate under the beacon of his advice.

"Here's what I think," he continued, his suggestion piercing the remnants of my turmoil, "Confront her, when you feel comfortable enough to do so. There's no way she can lie her way through this, as you've straight up saved her from a bad fate, based on everything you've told me about this mess. Her answer will give you everything you need to make a decision on whether you want to associate with her or not. And, in the knowledge that this might sound surprisingly irritating, like that damn mother of yours: Having such a skilled friend might be a tremendous asset for you, especially considering your ages. So don't be too hasty when passing judgement, alright?"

I let his words ruminate in my mind for a few seconds, until I gave him a determined nod.

Mr. Stirling was right.

The revelation that Aki might be more than what I had initially perceived didn't necessarily cast her in a negative light. It was clear that the chaotic events that unfolded weren't part of her plan, indicating that we were probably on the same side. Considering her apparent skills, as Mr. Stirling had pointed out, she could indeed be an invaluable ally, even though it felt odd to think of her in such pragmatic terms.

With my young appearance as Sera, building connections in the Operator world would be challenging without some kind of existing reputation. But if Aki was as skilled as she appeared to be and willing to collaborate, it could be a significant advantage.

"Thank you, Mr. Stirling," I said sincerely, appreciating his advice and the time he took to assist me. "I apologise for the complications in this task. Next time, I'll inform you if a data-shard seems too risky to pursue. Going through this once was more than enough, even for me," I added with a light-hearted tone.

Mr. Stirling responded with a knowing smile. "No need to apologise, kid. It's unfortunate that this happened, but it seems like you're handling it well. Failures, or near-failures like in your case, are often more educational than straightforward successes. I'm sure you've already thought of ways to avoid such situations in the future. If you're serious about becoming an Operator, these early challenges will be invaluable learning experiences. Just make sure to keep them as 'near-failures,' alright?"

The incoming notification on my cerebral interface took me by surprise.

[(Insufficient Access) has transferred {c}100 to your account with the note: "{Second delivery successful + danger pay.}"]

I was about to object, to tell Mr. Stirling that the extra trouble was my own doing and I didn't deserve the additional credits, but he preempted me with a raised hand.

"Remember this," he said firmly, "never argue about your pay, unless it's not enough. People will exploit your willingness to settle for less."

He then walked over to his armchair, retrieving a small bundle. Coming back, he handed it to me. "Your bandages and knife," he said, a hint of amusement in his voice. "I had to take your knife away—forcefully, I might add. You kept trying to stab me every time you regained consciousness while I was treating your wounds and wouldn't let go of it. Good instincts there. Commendable, really."

His laughter faded, replaced by a stern, inquisitive look. "Say... What exactly is going on with your blood? You should have left a complete bloodbath in the hallway and a mess when I redressed your wounds, but there's not a single speck of blood anywhere...? I've never seen anything like it. I'd be very interested in this tech. Is that... Did that irritating woman do this to you?"

Caught in a sudden whirlwind of panic at Mr. Stirling's question, I felt my heart rate spike.

His innocent query masked a deeper, predatory curiosity about my blood's peculiar behaviour—behaviour caused by the [Lightfoot] Perk ensuring I left no trace of my passage, including blood. It was immediately clear to me that Mr. Stirling's interest wasn't merely academic; it was strategic, potentially something he could leverage in his own operations.

Faced with the potential danger of his curiosity, I chose the path of least resistance: Deception.

I nodded slowly, avoiding his gaze as if to shield myself from the weight of my next words.

"Yes, it's Valeria's doing," I lied, my voice slightly quivering to sell the fabrication. "But please, *don't* approach her about it. It's... not something she wants out there for other people to know about. Not yet, at least. I don't know what she'll do if she catches wind of you knowing..."

He exhaled deeply, a sign of resignation or perhaps understanding.

"I get it. Corporate secrets and all," he said, backing off disappointedly. "That irritating woman has always been tight-lipped. No sense in prying into her affairs more than necessary... If it's her doing, I'll probably find something from within Ether Labs at some point anyway. Especially if she's already doing some trial runs on her children..."

His acceptance of my explanation, whether fully believed or not, signalled a full retreat from the topic, much to my relief. It was a clear reminder of the delicate dance between curiosity and discretion in the corporate shadow wars—a dance Mr. Stirling clearly knew all too well.

"Well then, if that's all, you better get going, kid," Mr. Stirling said, offering me one of his hands to help me get up from the couch. I was still severely anaemic and weak, so I gladly accepted his offer.

"Thank you once again, Mr. Stirling. I probably wouldn't have managed to make it all the way home. I'm very thankful for your assistance. I'll be sure to repay this favour," I said with a deep bow, that nearly made me stumble and fall, if it weren't for the hulking man's steadying hand. I clearly mentioned repaying this favour myself, this time around.

'I learned, Valeria! No NeuroCorpse this time, okay?'

I left Mr. Stirling's apartment and made my way back home, albeit very slowly. I was still hobbling on each step, although the painkillers he had administered were the real deal. I felt absolutely nothing, as if my body was in perfect health—albeit a bit numb.

But I knew better than that, thanks to my [First-Aid] and [Slicing] Skills, which had told me in no uncertain terms that my leg was utterly messed up.

Mr. Stirling had similarly mentioned that he doubted I'd be up for any tasks in the next weeks, but I had requested him to message me whenever the next data-shard was available either way.

After all, I knew that I would bounce back fairly quickly.

Finally arriving home, the first thing I did was take a long, hot shower—the wounds on my body having already been properly dressed by Mr. Stirling with some form of high-tech gauze that seemed to be completely water-retardant after a few careful tests.

Last thing I wanted was to bleed myself out, mere moments away from my much needed, and honestly quite deserved, Rest.

I was just happy that everything had worked out, more or less, in my favour at the end of the day. I had gotten the data-shard, finished the second task and Aki and I were still alive.

Whatever issues we had caused on the 33rd floor were likely to be forgotten about fairly quickly, as nothing but an unknown level of corporate espionage had happened. While they might be more cautious and on the lookout for potential moles in the future, that wasn't any of my concerns—procuring the information for the data-shards was not my job, after all.

As I was about to step out of the shower, however, a sudden System Notification popped up, jolting me out of my post-mission haze with a shock so profound, it chilled my blood and erased all coherent thought.

The message was unexpected, casting a shadow far beyond any mission complexity I had braced for, instigating a panic that gripped me tight.

My breathing turned erratic, the bathroom walls seeming to spin around me, and before I knew it, I had lost my footing, tumbling onto the cold, hard floor of the bathroom, the shock of the fall barely registering over the turmoil in my head as my eyes were wide in terror and glued onto the interface inside my mind...

[System]: *[Murder] Skill unlocked.*

[System]: *300xp gained for [Murder] Skill.*