

If looking up to people like this was like looking up to a single tree, looming high over me, then looking out to the convention floor was like looking at a dark forest that my tiny body had to brave. I noticed the new console being shown off, noticed the different stands and cosplayers milling about. But most of all I noticed the bodies standing high above mine, practically every single one dwarfing the little blonde girl I'd become. I barely came up to their shoulders and some were so tall that I barely made it to their chests. I froze then and there, realizing why some girls wanted to cover themselves so much that they practically became invisible.

But I wasn't invisible. I was in booty shorts and pigtails, with a body where both of those things seemed almost fitting.

Left foot, right foot, one after the other was the only answer I had at the moment. Even that was difficult with the heels but I advanced all the same. I hadn't come all this way just to hide in my room. I'd come to make an impression and so I walked into the crowd of nerds, struck equally by their size and multitude as I was by the smell. But I was CutieClutch69 and I wasn't here to be offended. I was here to network and create content. So I took out my phone and lifted it up in selfie mode, starting to shoot a video.

"Hey, it's yagirl CutieClutch on the floor of the biggest gaming con on the planet!" I said, making a peace sign and sticking my tongue out. I wasn't sure why guys liked the peace sign but some part of my male lizard brain certainly found it cute, so I always liked to throw it in there.

"I'm going to be here all weekend, competing in the tournament, taking part in some very special, super secret events and keeping you updated on everything!"

I was making sure to powder each word with sugar, spice and everything nice, laying the cuteness on thick as could be in my trademarked way. I always felt a bit silly doing it, but silly in a fun way. I made sure to add a little extra adorable teasing into the last sentence, wanting to make sure they stayed hooked.

“And keep an eye out for my own cosplays. I wouldn’t want you to miss One. Single. Look.”

With a wink, I closed out the video, thinking I’d done a pretty good job-
Until I looked around.

I’d never had an audience outside the ones online before and I could now see firsthand the way that people looked at my persona. Some guys scoffed. Some girls did the same. Others gave me a lot of derision that was entirely new and yet struck me to the core, a look as if I ought to be their sister but was too ridiculous for them to look at me as such. Some guys had even worse looks, looks that looked at me without seeing me at all. They saw the costume, the fame, the face they had been fans of...

But there was something in their eyes that made me want to scurry.

So I did, putting my phone away and walking past a girl holding up a “Cosplay is Not Consent” sign as she gave me a friendly smile. It was the kind of polite kind of smile that you gave to someone who’d just looked at you, when you didn’t want to be caught giving them a more serious expression.

Whatever. I could do this...

“Heya, Puddin!”

I turned to see someone cosplaying as the Joker, breathing out a sign of relief when I realized why he'd called out to me. At least he cared about the costume and not just how skimpy it was.

"Hey, Mista J" I smiled, putting my hands on my hips.

"Nice costume. It's missing one thing though" he grinned, looking it up and down. Maybe he was just using that as a pretext to look me up and down but at least he had the pretext. Everyone else was just oogling me. Dozens and dozens of new eyes every second, in a room with thousands...

Yeah, I could enjoy some fandom based joking around.

"What's that?" I grinned, looking down to it. "A really big hammer?"

He leaned in and smiled.

"My c— in your a—."

My face went whiter than his.

He just stared at me, as if waiting for me to tell him what a good line that was, to laugh or somehow react to his boldness. Slowly, as if worried that any second he might get tired of waiting, I backed up my 5ft2 little self until he scoffed and walked off. The way he left in a huff, you'd have thought that I'd said something wrong.

I breathed a bit easier then, but not by much.

As I stood lost in a sea of taller, stronger bodies, glancing eyes and indeterminate intentions, I realized I needed a bigger baseball bat.

Short of that, I shuffled into one of the product stalls, trying to hide there as the workers showed off a new console. There was already someone in both seats but a firm

shoo from my hand was all one of the shocked guys needed to get up and give his seat to me. Leaning towards the screen, I just tried to breathe.

“Hey, you’re CutieClutch!” said the guy sitting next to me, picking his fighter as his friend stood off to the side. As soon as I picked mine I started glancing backwards, so on edge that I couldn’t even pay attention to my favorite distraction.

“Occasionally...” I muttered.

“It’s so weird to see you here. I mean, actually here. Not in...”

I was used to awkward guys that couldn’t finish their own sentence. Heck, I’d been one myself. But there was something about the way he trailed off that told me there was more than nervousness to it. And if it was nervousness, it was justified.

“Not in where?” I asked, raising an eyebrow.

The guy just blushed.

“...RemixAI” teased his friend.

I raised my eyebrow higher.

“It’s...um...it’s just a program that lets you remix voice and physical models to basically...”

I gave him a look that told him to finish the f—ing sentence.

“...to make AI videos or chatbots of famous girls.”

I glared.

Hard.

A quick glance to the screen was all I needed to beat him and end his character in a very graphic fatality, and after the five seconds that took, I looked back to him.

‘What *kind* of videos?’

He got up to stand and I grabbed his arm.

“Well...um...you can...uh...imagine.”

I could. That’s why I was hoping he’d say it was something else.

“You’re one of the most popular girls on the site” said his friend, who was enjoying this way too much. Well at least he was telling me. I released his friend’s arm and sat there as they both went off, realizing just how much of my own brand I had willfully ignored. Sure, I knew guys...were guys about me. I knew it well enough to let them go and look the other way, I just hadn’t expected that there’d be so much weird stuff when I finally did look! I mean, they were using me as their AI girlfriend!?

BZZ

BZZ

I grabbed my phone, seeing a message notification. I had blocked most of my message, save for those from verified accounts, but this one was more than legit. It was from SugarAndSpike, one of my fellow gamer girls. She had seen that I was here and wanted to collaborate in her hotel room.

Perfect.

I was making connections, increasing my reach and, most importantly, getting off this nightmare of a convention floor.

Getting up, I gave braving it a second attempt. Who knows, maybe that guy was just an outlier and things were going to be a lot easier. Sure, it made made me feel tiny and helpless and pathetic and vulnerable and silly and stupid and weak and...

Sure, it made me feel all those things to be here but I might as well give it the college try!

So I walked on my heels, waved to those who gave me kind looks and tried to show my face. With a bit more confidence it was actually starting to go well. I was feeling good enough to pay more attention to the displays and actually found a lot of the games and products really fascinating when it came to the-

SMACK!!!

I jumped, half propelled by my shock and reflex and half propelled by the upward spank of the strong arm behind me. My bubble butt jiggled as I turned around, only to see a wall of people walking with me, so thick that I couldn't tell who it was. My jaw just hung agape, scandalized and indignant shock hitting me in an absolutely feminine way as if every cell in my girlish body wanted to squeal out a high pitched "How dare you!?"

The thing was, I couldn't disagree with it. Someone had slapped my a—! If anything called for me to give a woman's response, it was that! How dare they!?

I looked around a bit more, trying to catch a glimpse and see if they were running away, before seeing a figure that was moving against the current of people. That had to be him! I stepped to go after him-

And then stopped myself.

What was I going to do? There was no way I could prove it and even so, my heart fluttered with sheer terror at the thought of going back into that throng of people. I couldn't even retaliate or respond if someone smacked me in there. So I just moved along the sides of the crowd, finally making my way back to the place where I started.

The girl with the sigh was waiting there and as I read "Cosplay is Not Consent" I leaned close to her.

"Are you selling those signs or-"

She handed one to me. “On the house” she smiled.

“Thanks” I said, holding it up like some sort of protective talisman as I made the rest of my way back towards the hotel.

“Minnie?”

Zara...

“Hey” I said, looking up to her as she entered. Even in these heels, I was too f—ing short!

“Leaving already?”

“Yeah, well...” I leaned in. “Somebody slapped my a—.”

I expected some of that indignant rage from last night but instead she just sighed.

“I remember my first con...”

“Anyway, I’m going to meet another content creator.”

“Alright. Tell me when you next want to walk the floors. I’ll look out for you.”

“Thanks...” I said, walking out of the hall. She’d protect me...

I couldn’t take care of myself. I needed girls to protect me. I felt my heart beating so hard in my chest just because I was nervous someone was going to get too handsy and I had pretty darn good reason for that...

This f—ing sucks!

I had dreamed about this con for my entire life and I didn’t get to enjoy the games or look at the cool stuff or interact with the cool people because Minnie didn’t get to do that. Minnie was pretty and that was it. Being anything more would have been too much for this place and I felt my fear slowly turning to rage with every step I took from the hall.

But I would have Zara by my side next time. They weren't going to ruin this for me. I wouldn't let them. Nothing was going to ruin this for me...

BZZ

BZZ

Huh.

I saw my dad calling and let it ring, heading up in the elevator to the floor that SugarAndSpike had given me. I got out, thinking how much her audience would help me grow mine. Maybe my dream of getting so big that I could backdoor normal old Cade into fame wasn't totally ridiculous. If I got huge, then anything was possible. I was going to win the tournament and from there, nothing could go wrong.

BZZ

BZZ

...okay.

It was my dad again and I stopped by the door to check what was up. I couldn't exactly talk to him like this, since my old voice came from my old vocal cords, which had been majorly changed along with the rest of me. I'd also told him that I was going to the convention this weekend, even if he didn't know *who* I'd be going as.

As the ringing stops, I looked and saw a text appear on my screen.

Dr. Dad: Cade, I need to talk to you immediately. It's about the lab.