

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

A/N: The hardest decisions require the strongest of wills!

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The sky is the limit, isn't it? But at the same time... they don't want to go too big or too small. Too small and Alice won't get what she wants, which is recognition on a wide scale. Too big and she'll be targeted by so many outside forces so fast that even Lucas isn't sure he'd be able to protect her.

He has the potential to grow more powerful than anyone else on Earth. But... but he knows he's not there yet. There's still plenty of people out there who could kill him if they got lucky. There's even more who could kill or capture Alice if they wanted to, and there wouldn't be much of anything he or she could do about it.

She needed to do something that wasn't just showy... but also made her somewhat instrumental without making her too dangerous to let live. Something that would be deemed universally good by everyone... finally, it comes to him and Lucas shoots Alice a grin.

"Tell me Alice... do you think you could make bombs that can reverse Gray Boy Loops?"

Both Sveta and Alice jolt at that, the very mention of Gray Boy enough to send a shiver of fear through both women. Lucas doesn't blame them... Gray Boy was one of the worst of the worst.

But then to be fair, he was a founding member of the Slaughterhouse Nine, a roving band of sadistic serial killers who generally had some of the most terrifying powers imaginable. They were commonly considered an S-Class Threat even with constant churn and member turnover, largely because nobody could manage to put down their leader, Jack Slash.

Gray Boy though, could probably be considered one of the main reasons the group had had an S-Class Threat ranking right from the start. His powers allowed him to create stationary time loops. And given he was a psychopath, he had of course used his power to trap hundreds of people in endless, torturous time loops all across America.

The even more terrifying thing was that he'd been largely considered unkillable before he was finally taken down. His powers' effect on himself had been that anything that happened to him almost instantly reverted, like a time loop. Meaning that killing him while his power was active was effectively a crapshoot because he'd just come back, sort of like an overpowered version of that Alabaster guy down in Brockton Bay.

In the end, the only way he'd been neutralized was by an even bigger monster. Glaistig Uaine, aka the Fairy Queen, had decided to claim him as one of her shadows, ending his tenure in the Nine but not the threat of his power. More than that, the Fairy Queen was in the Birdcage now, so even IF Gray Boy's power could be used to undo the loops he'd made, it wasn't likely.

In all the time since Gray Boy's reign of terror ended and the Slaughterhouse Nine had moved on, those time loops had all remained in place. None had disappeared with his death, none had 'run their course' if such a thing was even possible.

Some attempts at breaking them had been made before, but every single one had failed from what Lucas knew. It was yet another depressing point on the graph of how much of a shithole Earth Bet was. It was one of the thousand not-so-little things that had prompted Lucas to do what he'd done in the first place.

If Alice could break Gray Boy Loops... well that alone would be amazing. But Lucas saw no reason to aim low. That's why he'd asked what he'd asked. And he can tell Alice picks up on it after she manages to get over her initial fear at even hearing the mention of Gray Boy. Her expression becomes thoughtful, her tone pondering as she taps her chin with a single finger.

"Reverse... not just break..."

Lucas nods seriously.

“The people inside of those loops have been tortured for years. While ending their suffering would be a feat in and of itself... saving them requires a bit more than just freeing them from the loops. Reversing the time within the time loops all the way back to the start so that for them it never even happened... that feels like it would be best. It would be like they were in a coma of sorts... still life changing, but far more recoverable. Especially since the authorities would have to step in to help them after the fact.”

Part of Lucas rebels at what he’s saying. A small voice in the back of his head says he’s wasting a golden opportunity. After all, if he just has Alice break the time loops rather than reverse them entirely, then he can be the one to offer Gray Boy’s victim succor. Immediately after they’re freed from their loops, he could swoop in and give them relief in their time of need... all for a simple deal.

Obviously, Lucas considers that tactic... and ultimately discards it. He’s not a fucking monster, even if he has already sacrificed an entire other world for the chance to save his own. There are plenty of people on Earth Bet desperate enough to make deals with him without him having to stoop that low though, he’s sure of it.

Besides... Alice is looking more and more excited by the second.

“Yes... yes, I can see it... its doable... I can definitely make something like that! And if I become the first person in history to deal with a Gray Boy Loop... everyone will have to acknowledge my greatness! They’ll love me!”

Lucas grins, finding Alice’s joy infectious.

“They’ll *adore* you, Alice.”

She blushes a bit, even as she returns his grin with one of her own.

“I... I have to get to work right away!”

With that, she whips back around again, looking over her components for all of a moment before suddenly beginning to move quite rapidly. He's heard of things like this before of course. They're called 'Tinker Fugues' from what he knows.

Lucas watches on as this happens, while Sveta moves to his side, leaning in close to whisper in his ear so only he can hear.

"Are you certain that you got all you could out of this one, Lucas?"

Blinking, Lucas gives Sveta a curious look, lowering his own voice so Alice won't hear them. Not that he thinks she will since she's definitely deep in the zone already at this point.

"... what do you mean?"

Sveta makes a noise in the back of her throat, her eyes darting between him and the working Tinker.

"I'm just wondering... what did you get out of this deal, exactly? With me... the transaction was simple enough. My new body in exchange for me serving you for life. But her... you helped her but what did she pay you back in return?"

Ah... Lucas hums, having to consider Sveta's words for a moment. He hears no recrimination or anger in her voice, to be fair. She's not upset about the deal they made... in fact, he can feel her happiness through their connection still. Sveta is still very satisfied to be repaying him with her lifelong service.

But at the same time, he sees where her confusion stems from, because on a very basic surface level... it does seem like Alice didn't give him anything in exchange for what he gave her. There was no clear cut deal at play like what he'd done with Sveta.

That was partially because Alice hadn't even really asked for terms before agreeing to whatever he wanted. He'd effectively taken advantage of her reckless drive to be recognized by the masses, pulling her into his orbit without

her so much as asking to read the contract, let alone the fine print. As such... he'd been nicer than he probably could have been.

Still, it wasn't like he'd come out the other side with *nothing*. He'd gained quite a bit from their exchange, power akin to what he'd gained from Sveta. Specifically, by consuming the part of her power that was destructive in nature, he'd actually gained MORE power from his deal with Alice than he had from Sveta's deal.

More than that, he'd gained so much goodwill with Alice that he was pretty sure he didn't need her sworn to his service to be able to guide and direct her going forward. She wanted to obey him... she wanted to follow his guidance. She trusted him.

All of this fills Lucas with a sense of pride and satisfaction. Of course, the thought of going over and bending Alice over while she worked to dominate her in another way does flit through his mind for a moment... but he discards it. He's not about to distract a Bomb Tinker of all people in the midst of her work, even if he has effectively neutered her from making any harmful explosives.

Besides, as grateful as she might be to him, Lucas isn't just going to assume he wants her to go over there, stick a hand down her pants, and tell her how much of a 'good girl' she is while fingering her...

Ah, he's really getting distracted, isn't he? Turning his attention back to a still curious Sveta, he smiles.

"She paid a lot more than you're thinking, Sveta. I reaped enough power from this deal to continue striving to protect us... or perhaps I can use it to grow in other ways."

Sveta makes a noise of understanding in the back of her throat, easily accepting his explanation without complaint or further question. Seeing this, Lucas smiles and places a hand atop her head, running his fingers along the tendrils of her power expression and making her shudder happily.

At the same time, he finds himself contemplative. After all, that is the question, isn't it? What to do with the power he's just gained from Alice...

He could feel that just the act of making a deal with her had made him a little bit stronger, faster, and tougher. Lucas' body had definitely been changed by the deal he'd made with that eldritch being... he wasn't entirely human anymore. And every deal he made seemed to increase his physicality in some way.

So... he didn't really need to put any of the excess power from said deals into that, technically. If he just kept making deals, he'd eventually have a substantially high Brute Rating solely from that. Of course, it was entirely possible he would be killed before he could make enough deals to be able to rely on that sort of thing... but it still felt like it would be a waste to give himself a stronger Brute Rating right now with his excess energy.

Instead, it felt like he should be focusing more on either improving the Anti-Thinker Stranger Effect he'd given himself earlier... or something else entirely.

Hell, if he didn't want to focus too much on defense, he could do something else, like giving himself a way to more easily find people prone to agreeing to deals. The foray into trying to find people to make deals with on PHO had... well, it had led him to Alice, but beyond that it had had very middling results. Most had not taken him seriously at all.

A power that allowed him to pinpoint capable, powerful individuals who would be willing to make a deal WOULD help him grow stronger faster. It would be like taking a power up in a video game that increased all future XP gain. The sort of thing one could 'invest' into in order to make it easier to 'level up' more in the future.

But was it truly prudent to go that route this early?

As he ponders this question, Lucas' eyes are drawn to Alice again, working on her current project. Specifically, his eyes are drawn down to her hips... which are swaying back and forth somewhat hypnotically. The Asian Coed is humming

to herself as she works, swinging her hips back and forth and drawing the eye to her rear.

Again, Lucas finds himself imagining going right over there and... engaging with Alice in a carnal fashion while she works. Using her to his heart's content, even as she's Tinkering. Only... this time Lucas realizes where it's coming from.

It's not *his* innate desire for him to go over there and have his way with Alice. Oh, he certainly wouldn't mind doing it... but in actuality, the one constantly thinking about it... is Alice herself. The Bomb Tinker is over there, supposedly deep in her Tinker Fugue... and yet, beneath that, her innermost desires are screaming at him through the connection left behind by their deal.

She wants him. She wants to be used by him specifically. She wants him to take her. Lucas' mouth goes dry as he feels her desires made manifest. His pants begin to grow tight in the crotch.

"... Lucas?"

Blinking, Lucas looks over to see Sveta looking at him concerned. Only then does he realize he's not exactly hiding his own arousal from *her* in turn. She glances down to his crotch and blushes before glancing over to Alice and then back to him.

"... Want me to take care of that for you?"

Good lord. He was surrounded by wanton women. Not that Lucas was complaining, mind you. In fact, he rather likes the idea of Sveta submissively on her knees, sucking his cock while Alice continues to work towards saving some people from a truly terrible fate on *his* orders.

... He also likes the idea of going over there and having his way with Alice while she works as well though, even if it might not be advisable.

Hm...

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