

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

**A/N: Emily catches an eyeful~**

**-x-X-x-**

She should ask. While there was an argument to be made about not biting the hand that feeds her, especially this early in their relationship, Emily didn't get the impression that Lucas was the kind of man who would get angry at her asking questions anyways. He didn't seem like the sort who expected her to just sit quietly and do as she was told... or at least, she hoped so.

With her mind made up, Emily puts as much determination into her stride as she can muster and goes looking for Lucas and probably Sveta as well. The Case 53 was practically glued to Lucas' side from what she'd seen so far, after all.

Only, she can't seem to find them anywhere in the apartment. That is, until she starts opening doors. And then... she gets quite the eyeful.

"A-Ah! Sorry! I'm so sorry!"

Emily immediately closes the door on the scene she's accidentally barged into, but the damage is already done. Even as she retreats back to the living room, her face ablaze with embarrassment and shame, she can't get the mental image out of her head. Sveta was on the bed, bound and gagged in what looked like her own power... and Lucas was looming over her, naked and looking positively scrumptious as he played with Sveta's body.

She should have known that would be a bedroom... she really should have known better than to try to disturb them when the door was closed like that. It's just... it's been a while since she had a roof over her head and a place to live. It's also been a while since she's lived with other people too. Clearly her social skills have atrophied to a frankly unacceptable degree...

Emily has never been more mortified, truth be told. She's never been more horrified either. Here she was, having the best deal she could imagine dropped in her lap, and she might have just ruined it with this shit. Lucas would be well within his rights to kick her back out onto the streets for not respecting basic privacy...

Except that wasn't part of their deal, was it? He'd offered her a year of his protection in exchange... in exchange for her power. So he couldn't very well kick her out now, that would be breaking their deal... right?

... Maybe she should just go herself then. Save him the trouble, save him the headache. She didn't necessarily need his protection. She didn't need his help getting back on her feet. She could maybe make it on her own, she just needed to find a way...

Before Emily can truly decide to rabbit, the door to the bedroom opens and she flinches, hearing it from all the way in the living room. A moment later and Lucas and Sveta both walk back out, fully clothed. Sveta looks a little disgruntled... but Lucas gives Emily a reassuring smile.

"Hey, sorry about that. Didn't mean for you to walk in on us... really, we should have been more mindful of your presence in the apartment."

Emily shakes her head rapidly, even as Sveta pouts a bit at Lucas' easy-going attitude.

"N-No... it was my fault! I shouldn't have started opening doors. This place isn't *that* big... when I realized you guys weren't anywhere I could find you; I should have just waited until you came out."

Lucas hums and inclines his head.

"Let's agree it was at least partially all our faults, yes? And frankly, it highlights a problem that I think we'll have to discuss before it can become too big of an issue going forward. But first... what did you need, Emily?"

While she's a little nervous about what sort of problem he could be talking about, when he asks her directly with such a reassuring and concerned tone... she can't help but be honest with him.

"I've just... been feeling a little strange. Ever since we made our deal it's like... I don't know, did you um... do something to me when you took my power?"

She braces herself, tensing up in case he gets angry with her for sticking her foot in her mouth. But thankfully, Lucas just smiles.

"Ah, you caught onto that fast. Truth be told, I wasn't sure what form it would take... tell me, how are you feeling exactly?"

Squirming a bit in her seat, Emily bites her lower lip as she considers the question.

"W-Well... I feel good? I feel healthy, for one. I don't think I realized how weak and malnourished I was until now, because I feel better than I have in... years, really. It's more than that though. I feel stronger... tougher too."

Lucas nods along and then looks around for a moment at the rest of the apartment. She doesn't fully understand what he's doing until he goes over and picks up the coat rack near the door of all things and brings it over to her. Emily accepts the empty coat rack from him, holding it by the metal rod that makes up its body. Then, she stares between it and him rather blankly, feeling... baffled.

"I want you to try to bend that, Emily. Just as a little test. Don't strain yourself too hard if you can't do it or anything though."

Bend it? Bend a metal rod? Was he suggesting that he'd made her a Brute or something? Biting her lower lip, Emily rises from the couch still holding the coat rack awkwardly in her hands. Then, gripping down firmly, she does as he said and tries to bend it.

To her shock... she only has to apply a decent amount of effort before the metal begins to give way before her. Given she was skinny as a twig and definitely not

athletic, Emily is astounded when she's able to bend the metal rod further and further, until the coat rack is unrecognizable, the top and bottom interlocked together.

Looking up into Lucas' smiling face with open mouthed shock, Emily licks her lips.

"You... uh... you m-made me a Brute?"

Lucas tilts his head to the side as he contemplates that for a moment.

"Mm... sort of. What I really did was even out our deal a little bit. You might not have liked your power very much, but it was a lot for me... that is, a lot of the energy I get from making such deals. I wanted to give you something back in return, so I used a small amount of that energy... to make you like me."

Emily blinks as Lucas reaches out and takes the coat rack from her. Then, she watches as he slowly straightens it back out, not looking like it's very difficult for him either.

"If I had to put numbers to it, I would say we're both somewhere between a Brute 1 and 2 at the moment. Also likely a Mover 1 at least, though I haven't really tested speed yet. I guess I would personally have a higher Mover Rating just because I can teleport myself to people and also seemingly teleport people to me."

He glances at Sveta at that last bit, even as Emily can only stare owlshly. He could teleport?! No, that wasn't important... well, not as important right now anyways. More importantly, he'd given her powers... better powers than she'd had before, that's for sure! Emily would love being a Brute over... over a Striker or whatever they would have classified her napalm spit as. Fuck yes she would!

"T-Thank you... thank you so much..."

She tries not to blubber. Really she does. But the tears start to come and suddenly Lucas has set down the coat rack and is wrapping her in a warm hug.

Emily melts into it, sobbing into his chest. Not out of sadness, but out of overwhelming happiness. She truly hasn't felt this good in a *long* time.

That said... when they finally do pull apart, the first thing Emily does is turn to Sveta, meeting the other woman's eyes.

"I really am sorry about walking in on you both earlier. I apologize from the bottom of my heart for interrupting like that."

Sveta looks surprised to receive the heartfelt apology... and after a moment, she nods her head up and down mutely, looking less upset about the whole thing. Emily feels relieved at that... if she's going to stick around for at least a year, the last thing she wants is for Sveta to be holding a grudge against her the entire time. Even if Lucas is cool about it, Emily has no desire to be on the other woman's shit list.

Lucas just chuckles.

"I won't keep harping on about how it wasn't your fault, Emily. But really, it is something we need to discuss. Put simply... I don't intend to keep operations small. We're a 'start up' of sorts right now... and I fully expect to recruit more disenfranchised individuals like you. Helping people like you with my power... well, it's the best use of it, I hope you'd agree."

Emily bites her lower lip at that. She notes the use of the word 'recruit'... but she doesn't push back on it, truth be told. Even if she's technically only supposed to be sticking around for a year, even if the deal was only for Lucas to protect her and help her get back on her feet... she would be lying if she said she wasn't interested in helping him right back.

Put bluntly, she already wanted to support his efforts, so instead of complaining or anything like that, she just nods.

"Sounds good to me, yeah. But I think I see what the problem you were talking about is now. Space, right?"

Lucas grins and Emily feels a happy little flush as he nods in acknowledgment.

“That’s exactly right, good job. Yes, this apartment... is already too small for the three of us, I’d say. We need a bigger place. More than that though, we need money to buy a bigger place and get us all set up somewhere.”

Shrugging, Lucas spreads his hands.

“With my power, that shouldn’t be too hard. I just need to find someone who is willing to pay out the nose for something... maybe a cure for an incurable disease or something, I think I could probably manage that much.”

Emily’s eyes widen at the casual boast. He sounds serious though, so maybe he can indeed make it happen. Still...

“You need a rich, sick person then.”

Lucas nods along, humming.

“That’s right. I do have an ability that leads me to people who want to make deals, I should clarify. That’s how I was able to track down you, for instance. However... it’s a little rudimentary and doesn’t exactly discriminate. I suppose we could take a trip to the nice part of town and see what I sense there, but the sort of person who has the money we need will probably also have security, which could be an annoyance. Hm...”

Emily doesn’t know why she says it, only that she does... but it slips out of her mouth before she can second guess herself.

“What about Uppercrust?”

Lucas blinks and looks back at her, a little surprised.

“Uppercrust? From the Elite?”

Squirming, Emily nods.

“H-Haven’t you heard the rumors? They say he’s dying or something and everyone is trying to figure out what will happen once he’s gone.”

It was kind of a big deal, but to be fair it was just a rumor. Something Emily had heard in passing somewhere and it just stuck with her. Probably because Uppercrust had built numerous defensive systems along the West and East Coast at vital port locations for local authorities as part of his Tinker Ability.

But they said those systems were all starting to degrade because he was dying and couldn’t keep up the maintenance on them.

“Huh, now that you mention it, I think I do remember hearing something about that. The rest of the Elite are all jockeying for positions to prepare for the upcoming power vacuum or something, right?”

Yeah, and there was that too. The Elite were a rather strange group. They were villains for sure, running organized crime across the entire West Coast and a couple of states on the East. Uppercrust, for instance, operated out of New York.

However, the Elite tended to operate a bunch of legitimate businesses as well, based on what branch of the overall organization you were dealing with. Uppercrust, again, was one of the members that was generally considered the most professional and therefore left alone by the authorities.

Once he died though, nobody quite knew what the future of the Elite would look like. Would the more violent types like Bastard Son gain further prominence? It seemed likely given they’d already been doing so in the Elite for years now.

Still...

“I think you’re onto something, Emily. Uppercrust is exactly the sort of rich fucker who would be able and willing to pay out the nose for treatment. And he’s even the type of person I wouldn’t mind living a while longer, even if he technically might be a villain.”

Emily perks up, feeling another spread of warmth through her body at being praised by Lucas.

“Of course, there’s still the question of how exactly we’re going to get in touch with him. Hm...”

Ah. Yeah. Emily winces at the thought. It likely wouldn’t be easy...

**-x-X-x-**

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