

Eye Of The BeholdHer
A Mercynaries Story from SinComics.com

Doctor Slate hunched over in his chair, glaring at the results on the monitors before him. Another day toiling away, his work station in disarray, one step closer to depleted funding, and yet only failure stared back at him from the screen. The experiment was slipping away from him. The compounds just wouldn't hold!

The Doctor fidgeted with the glass canister sitting, ever-present, at his work station. Inside was an undulating sphere. Bone white and glossy. The most perfect sphere the laws of physics would allow you to craft with the building material of human cells. All suspended in a clear liquid as perfectly translucent as it started those many years ago. It was his first successful attempt at the concept of genetic surgery, the ability to reshape the human form and create genetic changes from within the person to mold their body without the need to ever go under the knife. This glorious blank mass that was his proof of concept. What led to the University giving him a lab, his funding. And an assistant that had to work for credit on her thesis. But here it sat. Floating. Judging. Mocking his failures.

“Dahlia,” Slate probed, “Have we tried varying the levels of light since the latest viral tests? There could be UV interference with the-”

A bored voice sighed, with extra emphasis for good measure, from across the small lab. “Yees. Last week. After the extreme cold trials. Bringing us down to just two viable canisters of liquid nitrogen and another requisition order that stays unauthorized.”

The Doctor went back to fidgeting with his canister in moody silence. Dahlia came cheap, but it showed. Her respect for his lofty goals waned quickly. No regards for the prestige having her name on his research paper would bring. They had started optimistically. Dahlia seemed so eager to join the lab. Slate had been told in private that she pulled many strings and had friends in notable places that helped her get the position. They had bonded, two scientists against the world, institutions, and established medical knowledge, ready to change the face of it all. Literally. Faces would be changed! Their early camaraderie and jokes of the University giving the team this lab hidden away, a small building, and just one assistant because they feared he was a mad scientist now stung. After the last playful jab ended in stony silence, the situation was no longer joked about. Dahlia seemed to grow more passive-aggressive over time, needling the Doctor. Her tales of other professors and their advancements. Their publications in peer reviewed journals. Their funding... While he never explicitly told her to stop, Dahlia knew it hurt the Doctor's feelings and was a drain on his motivation.

Reaching a breaking point in frustration, Slate pushed away from the desk in a huff and sought coffee. As he passed to the back of the lab, he felt a pang of guilt and remorse at seeing Dahlia practically horizontal leaning back in her chair. Absentmindedly staring at her phone and tossing a ball into the air. He felt no malice towards her. He'd probably act the same way if he was 25 years younger and stuck in the lab on a Friday night for somebody else's project going nowhere. She looked like the living dead.

“Dahlia!”

“Eh?” She didn't even look away from her glowing screen.

“Go home.”

“Uh...”

“It-It's fine. Go home for the weekend. Enjoy yourself.”

Dahlia righted herself and gave him a wary glance. “You okay, Doc?”

“Everything is good. We'll pick it back up on Monday. Go do... whatever brain cell killing thing young people do these days.”

Dahlia chuckled. It raised Slate's spirits to hear that sound again. “It's still drinking, Doc. Same as when you were young and dumb. And same as when your great-great-great granddad was young and dumb.” She gathered her things, dumped them into a backpack, and headed towards the exit. On the way, she gave Slate a hearty pat on the back followed by a gentle circular rub. “Doc... It's a dead end. Don't do this to yourself.”

Monday morning, Dahlia's key easily slid into the lab's lock and she didn't hear the typical thunk of the bolt opening. She cautiously entered, peeking through the doorway, “Hello?”. With no reply, Dahlia came in and immediately wafted her hand in front of her nose. “Guh! It stinks in here!”

Hunched over at the desk, Doctor Slate was engrossed in the readouts on his monitors. His hair was disheveled and greasy, Dahlia had found the source of the lab's funk.

“Ohmygod! Did you not change your clothes since last week? Why do you- Uh, when was the last time you left this room?”

“D-Dahlia! I'm on to something! It wasn't environmental conditions. It was food!”

Dahlia straightened up and ignored the Doctor's lack of hygiene. He continued rambling at a fevered pace.

“The artificial starter cells and the genetic virus require vastly more energy than normal cells to start the process! The tests all failed because they starved!”

Over the course of the week, Doctor Slate started making progress on the project. He built the processes to saturate the starting cultures with nutrients and then to supply them with a steady flow during maturation. Finally, results were coming in. Good results! With Dahlia to occasionally kick the Doctor out of the lab to force him to sleep, eat, and shower, the project was taking off.

Slate was frustrated any time he came back to the lab to not see any new progress, so he found himself taking over all aspects of the work. Dahlia was too hesitant, too many excuses about not wanting to burn through funding at this early stage of promise. Throwing caution to the wind, Slate had to make her little more than a caretaker around the lab. He would apologize later, this work was too important to have any delays over something as trivial as funding.

The next Friday, Doctor Slate cackled around the extractor. Cradling the small tube like a child, he beamed. "This is it! The first stable sample also capable of demonstrating stable changes in the test cultures!"

Slate celebrated at his work station. Snapping back to reality, he wheeled around to notify Dahlia, but found her immediately behind him. He hadn't heard her come over, but the Doctor again raised the tube and started to speak. He was cut off rather abruptly as Dahlia jammed a needle into the side of his neck. He felt a burning pain for only a split second before his eyelids grew heavy and he slumped down onto his desk and passed out.

The Doctor came to groggy and disoriented. He remembered sleeping, but painfully so. He was standing up straight, but when he tried to move, he couldn't. As his vision swam into focus, he could make out that his arms were tied with cables to something wooden. The legs of a table... He tried to walk forward but felt the same tug and the heavy resistance and thud of wood against the hard laboratory floor. Slate was tied to an overturned desk propped up against the wall.

Stuck in place, the Doctor focused on the disarray of the room. Tubing snaked all across the floor and ran under him. Had he left the lab in such a state after the week's hectic work? That was highly against protocol, but the sound of shuffling feet snapped him awake.

"Who's there!?" Slate burred.

Paying him no heed, Dahlia walked by his eyeline. She had her back to him, holding something up. Her phone! Slate occasionally heard the snap and click of the device taking photos and the red recording light would pop on as she scanned around some of his custom-built machinery. Dahlia walked from station to station, taking photos and making recordings.

"What's going on?! Is this... espionage? How could you, Dahlia? Who!? Who are you selling the data to?"

Dahlia looked over at her professor with nothing more than an acceptance that he was now awake. She continued her last round of photography before walking over to his desk and connected her phone to his computer through a short cable. She dragged the contents of his research drive to her files and nodded in confirmation as the device started to download the Doctor's work.

"You still had some work to do, Slate. You started the process but it wasn't truly stable. You actually have to make it self-replicate. You can't prevent it from breaking down by just increasing the food supply. That's not scalable and the cells would turn against themselves or the host. But you were extremely close and would have discovered this before the season was through. You'd have been there by the end of the year..."

Slate just stared at her. Confused, angry, but also going over her words and seeing the reasonable logic to them.

"How did you know that? None of your notes or research showed any work towards... Not even my work had found..."

As her phone beeped to indicate that the downloading process was finished, Dahlia started

work formatting the lab's computers and filling the drives once more with junk data to prevent any recovery. With a few strokes and clicks, the back-ups were in the process of being destroyed and Dahlia slipped her phone back into her pocket.

“You've drawn the attention of a secret society. My boss... She doesn't want this process getting out of this lab and I have my orders.”

Dahlia dragged a chair over in front of Doctor Slate and sat down, calmly crossing her legs and smoothing her skirt before continuing.

“This procedure has actually been discovered, oh... A dozen times before? Sorry to rain on your parade and thoughts of your genius, Doc. Buuut, Daisy wants to keep it out of society's hands, so they got me sent here and established as your assistant. I really thought I could get you to give this up... Anyway, the society just doesn't want man to abuse the technology. The same as other medical advancements. Just regular plastic surgery has been perverted from helping people to now giving them nose jobs and bigger boobs. Can you imagine what your work here would be used for? Plus, it would kind of make Daisy's subjects stand out less and lag behind in desirability. And Daisy would rather do things her own way. The controllable way. Now, Doctor, the process is painless and easy. I've not once heard even a professor complain.”

Without another word, Dahlia stood back up, pushed her chair away, and turned the nozzle on a metal canister to Doctor Slate's side. As the tubes about him juttered and filled with gas, Dahlia gave him a stoic nod and turned away.

Slate felt a building pressure in his arms and neck as the gas flowed through the tubes. He felt a sharp prick for just a moment as the gas first reached the needles connecting the tubes to him, but that gave way to the feelings of the gas pushing its way into him. There was a general tightness in his body, his organs churning, and his skin growing taught. As the thing now inside him built to where he wanted to shout, Doctor Slate lost consciousness once more.

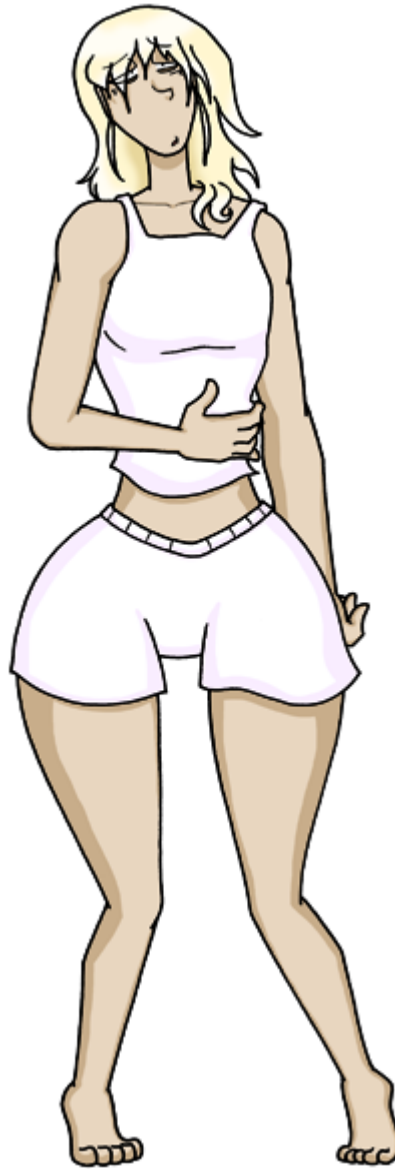
The Doctor recovered and passed out repeatedly over a period of time he couldn't identify. He was briefly aware of two large women untying him from the table in the lab but then his mind rapidly shifted to being strewn across the backseat of a vehicle where just as quickly, he was propped up in some kind of chamber. Time seemed to stretch forever even as the scenes before him hopped rapidly and characters came in and out. He was vaguely aware of movement, lights changing, and always pressure. Pressure filling him. Pressure trying to push its way out of him. Pressure against his clothes. Pressure against the chamber he was trapped inside. His body seemed content to give in to the pressure and bend to its strength.

Slate awoke minutes before he regained his senses. Vaguely aware of being but unable to see, hear, or move. Slowly, the fog lifted and the world came back to him as if he was underwater. As his vision gradually refocused, he stared up at the calming blue of the ceiling above him. Beige curtains were at the sides of his vision and the blobby brown strokes and green splotches gradually refined into palm trees decorating the fabric. The soft, almost silken, bed sheets under him caused his bare arms and legs to tingle as sensation returned and he finally gained the strength to sit up.

The Doctor looked down and marveled at the way his legs curved and his feet pointed daintily

inward and down. He shifted and could feel his thighs pressed against the bed and the soft flesh spread against his weight. Now sitting upright, Slate was suddenly overcome by a horrific nausea and he stumbled to his feet. Ignoring the weight shifting on his chest and the long white hairs gracefully wafting in front of his eyes, the professor quickly surveyed the room and bolted towards the open door to the room with the pale green tile. His hand clutched to his mouth, Slate barely managed to wobble his way to the bathroom, uneasy on his feet, his body swaying and shifting in bizarre ways. Squinting against the bright lights of the bathroom, he identified the sink and retched in a way he hadn't in years. Gasping for air, Slate gripped the marble countertop and panted heavily. A thick, gray goo lazily slipped off the sink's siding and gurgled as it passed down the drain.

Slate looked up at the strange feminine face quizzically returning her gaze. Her eyes were heavily bagged and tired and she looked like she was recovering from the worst hangover a person could experience. The Doctor touched his cheek and watched the young woman do the same, gently pulling away at the feeling of her delicate fingers gracing her soft, flawless cheeks. She bared the slightest resemblance to him in his college days, younger, free from wrinkles and worry lines. This woman could have been his sister, if he had one. Looking down, Slate stretched out his white tank top to see two budding breasts pushing from his chest. He stared, transfixed, almost convinced that they were continuing to expand with each heavy breath.



The Doctor wearily shuffled out of the bathroom and surveyed his confinement. There wasn't a phone on the table and the only other door had a metal box over where a lock and handle would go. Slate grabbed at the tropical curtains and dragged them to the side, stumbling and following them before catching himself on the bed and standing up once more. The window was locked and looked out onto a view of a beach. The professor glared and rubbed his eyes. No, the palm trees and water were completely still... It was a, a photograph. A large poster blocking the real world outside. Slate could barely make out a brighter spot where the real sun would be so he must be close to freedom. He tugged at the window but it refused to budge. He limped over to the room's desk and just barely managed to raise the chair and thrust it at the window, but the panes simply flexed and the chair dropped to the floor with a thud.

Doctor Slate collapsed to his knees and plopped onto the carpet. He was confused, tired, angry... But most importantly, hungry. So very hungry. He clasped his now taught stomach and moaned. In a few seconds, Slate weakly slumped forward and collapsed into a fitful sleep once more.

Slate jolted awake and was jerked forward by the momentum and heft of his chest. He looked down to see two globes straining against a strapless orange sundress. The doctor wobbled forward, uneasy with his new curves and the way the body swayed and pulled him in different directions. The woman in the mirror, he, had a body born of science, not nature. Platinum blonde hair flowed from the top of his head down to his hips, displaced by the rise of two breasts that would have blocked him from seeing his new hips if they weren't so wide and rounded. The sundress was tight against his chest but fluttered gracefully around his thighs with each turn. The hints of a purple bodice revealed themselves as Slate tried to heft up the dress to cover more of his considerable cleavage.

A shout outside the window immediately drew his attention. Slate bounded back to the window to find that the obstructing picture was gone and that he was now looking out at an actual beach. Crystal clear waves lapped at sparkling sandy beaches as palm trees swayed in the gentle breeze. It was suspiciously idyllic and disconcerting. Probing the room, Slate found food containers in the waste basket, an assortment of lingerie and dresses filling every inch of the closet, and the metal box blocking the door was now missing.

The doctor cautiously left the room, peering down the hallway, but not seeing another person. The hallway was lit up brightly, a cheery yellow paint scheme with blue carpeting. The corridor was lined with rooms like a hotel, but they were all closed. Making his way out into the building, Slate descended three floors and pressed himself against the metal door.

Bright sunlight caused him to squint and look away from the paradise before him. Immediately out of the building, his bare feet stepped out into warm sands that spread under him and through his toes, relaxing and peaceful. Another shout and a dull thud rang out, so Slate headed towards it once more, letting the door shut behind him.



Down a path leading through dunes and palm trees, Doctor Slate saw a white ball pop up into the air and over a net. A well-tanned woman shouted out joyfully as she rushed under it, popping up the ball, before another woman hopped up and bopped it back over the net. As the woman landed, her long dreadlocks splashed up around her and the bouncing of her considerable curves looked like they'd pop her bikini top off in an amazing show.

Looking up from a book, a woman with a swirl of raven hair smiled at the game, her foot lazily tracing through the water pooled around her beach chair. As she turned back to her reading, the woman caught a glimpse of Doctor Slate and waved him over. With trepidation, Slate eventually found himself heading in her direction. Two redheads off to the side looked up from their chess game to give him a polite nod, but immediately resumed scowling at the board.

As he approached, the raven-haired woman put her book down and rose to greet the doctor. “Oh don't mind, Ernst and Marie. They play every day and they'll be at it for hours. I'm Gale.”

Slate looked around in confusion, glancing back at the two women, one now cautiously putting a finger onto a bishop before quickly yanking it away and glaring back at the board.

“You must be the new girl. We saw the plane drop you off and the usual flurry of activity when the hotel gets a new guest.”

Slate gestured around in confusion and worry. “What is this? Where am I? Who are you- Why do I have...” He motioned to his sizable new assets.

Gale motioned for Slate to sit on her chair. “It's safe to say you're another biologist or geneticist? Another learned member of society hidden away on this island to keep a secret. Marie there was my lab tech before a mysterious fire at our facility. That night, somebody broke into my house, I was knocked out, and I woke up here. And like this.” She motioned to her hourglass figure. “It's a story you'll hear many variations on from the island's inhabitants. Better than being assassinated, I suppose.”

Slate shook his head in confusion, his blonde hair bouncing around bubbly. “But where is here? How do we get away? Who is doing this and how do we stop-”

Gale placed a finger to Slate's soft lips. “Questions that will drive you crazy if you dwell on them. Learn to accept the luxury around you. That's the only answer anybody here can give you after all these years. I know your mind burns with questions, mine did too, but please, don't drive yourself mad. Come, come, there should be some snacks at the clubhouse. What do you say to grabbing another plate of sweets and meeting the Committee? That's our name for our little crew.”

Slate rubbed his stomach, still feeling a few pangs of hunger, and nodded. There were worse ways to retire than on a tropical island surrounded by beautiful women...

The heavy, metal doors to the office building slammed shut as Dahlia made her way through the empty lobby. She reached the dark, dusty elevators and scanned the back of her phone, causing the elevator to slowly open and the blue lights inside to flicker on. She entered and without pressing any buttons, the door closed and the elevator made its way up six or so floors before slowing and finally opening out onto abandoned office space. Her heels clacked and echoed on the hardwood flooring as she followed the blue accent lights to an empty meeting room that opened at her presence. Dahlia scanned down the line of rooms, checking the other doors for signs of activity. Were they likewise in use by other agents for Daisy or she the only one here. Dahlia liked the idea of this being her own personal front but smirked at the idea of whether that was an enormous show of inefficiency or an enormous show of power.

In the room, Dahlia sat in the leather chair and touched her finger to the tablet waiting on the desk. It flickered to life and the hazy outline of a woman on a hazy background bowed slightly.

“Thank you once more for your work, Dahlia. Your records and transfer have been received on our end and your involvement with the project has been purged.”

Dahlia nodded, not certain if the woman could see the gesture but fairly sure she was being heavily monitored in the building. “The scientists are finding the process faster now. We've had to speed up the infiltrations and extractions. I used to have several years to work on containment before shutting these down, but now I'm doing multiple-”

The figure on the tablet bowed slightly again and Dahlia was silenced. “We thank you for your concern and the organization agrees. Daisy has decided it is time to release the process to this world under our terms. You will be placed in the research program of a facility of our choosing with the interest of this time advancing their work and making sure the process proceeds along our specifications. The updates will be transferred to you shortly and your itinerary delivered by the normal means. Our additions will be helpful for the worlds that require more long term thinking. Thank you.”

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