

A Little Off The Top
A Mercynaries Story from <https://www.patreon.com/SinComics>

Brill leaned against a street lamp and wheezed for breath. He was exhausted from running, despite the frequent breaks. He used to have stamina before all this... this extra weight. His shirt was stretched tight against the new mounds on his chest. Brill wrapped his arm around them, trying to stop their wobbling. It was all their fault. He tugged at the straps on the accursed bra, but like always, it wouldn't budge. It was all this thing's fault! He was at least able to kick off the heels, even if it meant he had to run barefoot through the town. Anything to get away from that damned house.

Brill's rest was cut short by the sounds of heels on the parking lot's pavement. They were back! He peeked around the pole and caught sight of the fiery red hair of his stalker with that... thing on her arm. The blonde couldn't be that far away. He surveyed the shopping center but everything was closed for the night so there was nowhere to hide. And he certainly couldn't hide behind the lamp with these melons.

Staying close to the shops, Brill tried a few doors, hoping one could give him safety from his hunters. He banged against door after door to no avail. Slamming his shoulder into one last door, Brill popped it open and the momentum shoved him through, flopping down, and hitting the ground hard. He scrambled away from the entrance and ducked behind a counter, panting in his new frustratingly petite voice.

A light shone from the back of the shop and he heard footsteps coming down the stairs. Brill struggled to get up but was too exhausted to heft himself off the tile floor, so he slumped back and waited for his fate.

“Oh dear!” A woman's hushed voice came from the back. Her steps sped up and she was soon kneeling at Brill's side. “Miss! Miss! Are you hurt?”

Brill bristled. After a sigh, he managed to shake his head, the long bangs flopping side to side. “No, I'll be okay. I just need a minute. There's somebody out there.”

The woman sternly nodded and put her hand around Brill and hoisted him off the floor. “You're safe here. Do you need help?”

He nodded. “Please. I just need a place to hide for a bit.”

The woman shot a glance towards the door and then helped Brill the rest of the way up. She nodded her head towards the back room and the two shuffled on the way. Brill glanced over at his mystery helper. She was hard to read in the low lighting. Maybe in her late 40s, but her silvery-blonde hair added a few years to her. She had a kind smile, matronly like a teacher that has been at her school for as long as anybody can remember and everybody likes her.

She led Brill to a large chair and he plopped down into it. Acutely aware of how much the motion made his chest bobble about.

“Relax, love. I'll go get you a drink. You sound exhausted.” She put a hand on Brill's shoulder. “My name is Vera.”

As the sound of her footsteps receded to the kitchen, Brill sighed. "My name's Brill. Thanks for your help, Vera. Today has... Today has been something else."

Vera returned with a cup and Brill gulped the juice down. She took the cup back from him and gave him a peaceful smile. "Please, explain what's going on. Are you in danger from those people?"

Brill shook his head. "I've lost them a few times before, but I don't know." He grunted and leaned back in the plush chair and put his bare feet on the footrest. He was too exhausted to try cover up the madness of his tale, so he figured he might as well just get it out.

"This is going to sound crazy, but hear me out..."

"I work for the city, checking properties. There's this house languishing out there, you probably know it. That fancy one, if you take the road past the lake. It's just been sitting there forever and the city is looking to finally take it down and do something with the land. I headed out there in the morning to make sure there wasn't anybody squatting in it and there's nothing dangerous inside for demolition. Just a regular gig.

I get there and am doing my work like usual. But the house, it seems to go on forever. Rooms everywhere and I have to check all of them. Every hallway was lined with rooms and then a room would lead to a back hallway with more of them. The place wasn't in bad shape though, so I was worried some people might be hiding out there. It wasn't spotless, but everything was still in its place, tidy. Most of the places I'm sent to survey aren't tidy.

I'm exhausted searching this maze of a mansion and catch a glance through the window and it's pitch black outside. I had been there all day, so no wonder I was tired. And then... Ah, I'm an idiot. I figured I'd just spend the night. I didn't want to drive down those roads and through the woods at night. There aren't any lights out that far and the last thing I want is to have a deer jump out and I crash into a tree. Idiot...

So I picked one of the rooms. It was upstairs and a bit out of the way, so if somebody snuck into the house at night, I'd have a chance to hear them and get ready before they made it to the room. But the second I hit that mattress, I was out. Soundest sleep I'd had in years.

When I woke up, everything felt... off. The bed didn't have sheets the night before, but now there were some on top of me. And I could feel something under my clothes. I was wearing this bra. At first I thought it was some joke, like some weirdos got into the house and did this to me, but I couldn't get it off. I couldn't undo the clasps and no matter how hard I pulled, I couldn't budge the straps or shift it around. I panicked and my heart was pounding but my chest was throbbing too. It was like, little by little I could feel myself growing, expanding into this damned thing. It felt like it was eating me, but I was filling it out.

That was when I became aware of the house itself. Like it was watching me, closing in. It just gets crazier. I felt like I was aware of all the clothing in the house. Every room had a closet or a wardrobe. Every one of them! I... I must have gotten turned around. I ran through a door to the hallway, but fell into a closet. It was dark inside, but I could feel things wrapping around me, clinging on, pulling me in. I fought my way out, shrugging off everything clawing at me, still fighting to get the bra off. Something was wrapped around my leg and I hit the ground hard. My vision was swimmy, blurry. It was like the clothes tried to swarm me. Dragging me back to the closet, like... Like everything

wanted me to wear it.

My chest was getting worse. I filled out the bra, but they kept growing. I could feel something like that all over as the closet spilled out on top of me. That throbbing all over. The house reshaping me. I stood up again, but some shoes had wedged onto my feet. God knows where my boots went. I toppled forward, just barely catching the bed to save myself from another crash. The heels wouldn't come off but I bashed them against the bed post and they finally popped off.

After that, I just ran. It was too dangerous to try to deal with this inside the house, so I just had to get out of there. I stumbled my way around and eventually somehow made it outside. But my truck was gone! So I kept running. Away from the house. Just... away from it.

As I was running, that's when I saw them for the first time. They were moving around the yard, looking at the house. This redheaded lady and some blonde. They had to be involved with the house. They were the only people I had seen. Then, then I saw them again as I was running out of the woods. They were looking around. I think they're trying to take me back.

I made it back to town. Figured I could lose them. But I would catch glimpses of them searching around. Always where I had just been, scanning around. I've been trying to get away from them all day and that's how I got here and I'm... I'm just so tired. I don't know if I can... Keep going.”

Vera nodded, silent through Brill's tale. She got up and softly put an arm around his shoulder. “This all sounds... Very dangerous. But let me help in any way I can.”

Brill smiled and turned to thank her, but she was already walking over to some cabinets. She rifled around them and pulled out a pair of scissors and a spray bottle.

“Stay still, dear. Let's see if this does the trick.”

Brill leaned forward for her to cut the straps, but Vera instead sprayed him with a mist from the bottle. He coughed and jolted back, wiping the fruity mist from his face and coughing again. “Ugh!”

But he suddenly felt some slack. For the first time, the bra relaxed its grip. Brill picked at the strap and it slid off to the side.

“Y-You did it! How did you-”

Brill stopped and felt like he had his breath knocked out of him. His whole body tingled. Stronger than before. Pressure built up inside him and he groaned. Then, the pressure released and he started to expand, faster than before. Brill's hands shot up to his chest to try to hold them back, but soon, any slack left in his shirt was gone and the already distressed collar started to tear. With one more surge, his shirt split down the front and freed his bust. The new globes thrust forward, cradled in the bra expanding to keep up with them.

Vera leaned in and snipped off the remains of his tattered shirt and flopped it to the ground.

“There! We can't have you walking your path in just a single bra.”

Drained, Brill weakly struggled to lift himself from the chair but he was now wedged into it. “What's- Who are you?!”

Vera smiled and gave a slight bow. “Just a humble servant of the Goddess, dear. She has revealed your divine form and the servants at Déesse Salon are here to help you be your best on your chosen path.”

“Wh-What are you talking about?!”

Vera studied her new charge. “The Goddess has helped you ascend to a higher form. Since she led you here to me, it is my duty to make the most of it.” She happily gripped Brill by the shoulders. “You will excel with all that the Goddess has granted you. I will help guide you and protect you from the hunters and in return, you will help me here and turn this shop into a true shrine to her Goddess's wonder.”

Brill shook her hands off, the following wobbling was dizzying and uncomfortable. “You nut case! I won't help you do anything and when I get out of here, I'll-”

Vera pulled him free of the chair and to his feet. “Tut tut. The Goddess watches over us and will not let you abandon your duties.” She gave the spray bottle a swirl towards Brill and he slunk back.

“Now, dear, let's show you to your quarters. We have a lovely room upstairs that you can settle into tonight. Tomorrow, we work, but you may rest for now.”

Morning came quickly for Brill and Vera was there to introduce him to his new schedule. He was rushed off to the shower, with its sweet, aromatic spray before being bundled up in a fluffy robe and presented to a wardrobe of lingerie and made to select the day's outfit. Brill examined a bountiful bustier and everything there was sized for his new form, like it had been waiting for him. He selected the most modest-looking blouse he could find, only to discover it had but three buttons at the bottom of the garment, proudly presenting his bust for the world to gaze upon. Vera lamented his short hair and presented him with treatments and sprays and an almost unending combing and teasing routine that felt like it was pulling his hair, forcing it longer and longer. But that was nothing compared to her regimen of make-up tips and secrets. Brill was made to replace his make-up every few hours to drill the beautician's art into him and perfect his skills.



The days continued like this, trapping Brill in Vera's game. Dress-up and primping day after day under Vera's watch. Brill tried his best at sneaking off but the shop doors were always shuttered to his touch. Vera could leave for errands, but Brill remained stuck inside, unable to open the doors or windows and with no phones to call for help.

Brill was polishing the mirrors, the barely recognizable reflection bouncing and bobbling back at him, when Vera tapped him on the side.

“Sparkling, dear! Your first customer is scheduled to arrive shortly. I'm so excited for you!”

Brill startled. “Customer?”

“Yes, of course. Let's put all that training to use! I'll handle the more... specialty work and you help our new charge to look her best!”

Brill's expression hinted at the defiant anger and thoughts of outnumbering his captor, but Vera saw right through it. She poked a finger right at his chest and smiled.

“And I know you'll be on your best behavior and represent our shop well. Our work pleases the Goddess and if she were displeased... It would be a shame if you were transferred out of my care and to some kind of unsavory role in this confusing world.”

Brill shrunk back. He wasn't sure what possibilities were out there, but he knew Vera was capable of putting him through anything.

Brill fidgeted on his heels, waiting in front of his station at the salon. He smoothed his skirt and played with his hair until the door chimed and the taps of Vera's heels announced her presence. The boss had an arm around another woman, steadying her and leading her to Brill's chair.

“My dear, this is our client. Miss Aoife is new to town and wants to look her best for her first days on the cheering squad!”

“Cheer-” Brill looked the woman up and down. He felt like he towered over the petite client. Even without his mountainous heels, he would have stood more than foot over her. Aoife's small, sturdy stature conflicted with the outfit of a crop top with a tiny vest, pleated skirt that just barely covered her, and heeled ankle boots pitched inward and looking dainty and frail. Her hair was a dull reddish-orange and her pale skin was flawless and dotted with freckles that brought out her smile. She seemed disoriented, gazing around the shop and unfocused, and smelled vaguely of smoke with a sharp hint of cherry to it.

Brill wasn't sure what to do with her. She was already quite pretty and dressed in an eye-catching outfit so the “training” Vera had subjected him to wouldn't be needed.

“Miss, are you all ri-”

Vera interrupted and gripped Brill's shoulder, with a calm but stern look in her eyes. “Each shop is a shrine to the Goddess. They are places of peace under her protection, and that helps the customers stay in line, knowing they're safe under the Goddess's care. I am quite sure you will treat our client with the utmost care and let her be the beacon to the Goddess she wants to be. Correct?”

Brill shrunk back and nodded. “R-right this way, Miss.”

The cheerleader rolled her head slightly to the side and let out a boisterous “O-kay!” before mincing to the station and plopping down into the padded chair.

Brill rearranged his supplies and grabbed a bottle of sheen. With a few spritzes, he combed out the woman's already flowing locks as she stared into the mirror. Brill set out to work, following the methods that had been drilled in on himself, primping and teasing to add volume.

Vera beamed, pleased with the work, before turning and heading to her office in the back room. Brill continued his work for a few moments before looking around and leaning in close to the woman. The smoky smell was fading, leaving just an intense perfume of cherry.

“Miss, please. Are you okay? Are you hurt? Did somebody... do this to you?”

The cheerleader cocked her head like a confused puppy, but Brill's inquiry seemed to focus her and awaken something. A hint of recognition and light shined in her eyes and the reflection in the mirror suddenly seemed strange.

“I- We were celebrating. The boys- My team. We had won a game. Ended a bad streak for Central. Things had been going poorly for us so we were happy to finally be out on top. Our manager took everybody out for the night to party. My agent was there too. She congratulated me and said it was the start of good things for me. There were a lot of drinks, so I didn't really want to talk business, but my agent said that was fine. She brought some entertainment to the party too. A bunch of beautiful ladies. They could have been models. They partied with us and I just figured they were fans. Everybody was having a really good time. I didn't feel pretty though...”

Brill stopped curling the end of the cheerleader's hair and after making sure the room was clear, leaned back in. “No! Please, focus! What happened at the party?”

Aoife shook herself and regained her calm.

“There was a hookah being passed around. The club was kind of weird, but I'd seen that kind of thing before and everybody was cool with it. Stephie, our kicker, she- He went first. Was small and a lightweight so he zonked out quickly. Then they passed it to me and all the ladies, they cheered me on. It tasted great, intensely fruity. I stopped but they kept cheering and I didn't want to let the fans down and it was a party. The rest of the team tried it too but they kept passing it back to me. It just made you feel really relaxed and good inside, right? My agent said this night was the start of great things for me and I was going to be a star. That's everything I wanted to hear! The rest of the night was kind of a blur, but our fans were all over us. They stayed with the team all night, sharing the hookah, getting us drinks, just super friendly ladies.

The next morning, I woke up with a hell of a hangover back at the clubhouse. Manager must have taken us back there instead of sending us back home because we were in no shape to drive. I felt strange, but couldn't tell why. Checked myself out in the mirror and it was the same cute me. I always bounced back after a night out. Back in college, I was still small but I could go spend all night drinking, grab a nap, and I'd be back to the hottest thing on campus come morning. It drove my sorority sisters crazy!

The rest of the squad was waking up too. We made fun of Stephie for going down first last night but we love her. She's just adorable when she gets huffy. Then the manager called us over, said it was a really important practice so the team should study up. I went to join them but he called me aside and introduced me to Miss Vera. Said she had special training to test out and that I could help the team if it went really well. Of course I wanted that! Oh! Do you cheer too? You're totally a cutie. I'd love to have you on the squad and we can-”

Brill snapped in front of her eyes. “Please, stop! She's the one doing this to us! Vera is-”

The clack of heels against the tile floor rang out from the back of the salon and Brill cursed to himself. He quickly snatched a few bottles of makeup off the counter and held them in front of his client. The cheerleader seemed suddenly mesmerized by them.

“Now, I use the deeper pink myself, it's more bubble gummy, but that doesn't mean you have to as well.”

The clacking stopped and Vera beamed with pride at her student. The cheerleader seemed overwhelmed by the choice and she fidgeted in her seat, her locks bobbing up and down with her dancing.

“Miss Brill, excellent work so far. Why don't we keep things simple for our lovely charge and go for the one in the middle. She'll be up for these important choices a bit later.”

The cheerleader sunk back in the chair with a contented sigh. She seemed relieved to have the choice made for her. Brill nodded and put the other bottles away before starting his painting.

Brill finished her lipstick and Vera held out a smaller mirror.

“Well, Miss Aoife, how does it look? Quite adorable, I must say. Your squad will be jealous!”

Aoife giggled. “I'm thrilled!”

Vera smiled and pat Brill on the shoulder. “Miss Aoife and I have to do some special training off-site, so you're done for the day. Please enjoy your evening and she'll be back for another appointment tomorrow. We'll all get together again soon!”

Aoife hopped out of the chair and gave Brill a mighty wave, followed by a curtsy. “You do lovely work! Thanks so much!” She pattered behind Vera as they left towards the back.

Brill cleaned up the station, marked off the supplies for restocking, and turned towards the back of the salon with a chill. Had he done the right thing or had he just doomed that woman? Man? Was he as responsible as Vera for her suffering?

He shuddered as he ascended the stairs back to his quarters. He had just gone along with his orders. But there was something about this shop that made it so hard to say no. Like a voice in his head trying to break him. Brill kicked off his heels but felt uncomfortable without them. He sighed and slipped on the slippers that had a lower heel and that stopped the dull through at the back of his feet when standing flat on the ground. Tying his hair back and surveying the closet for a suitable dress to lounge in, Brill resolved himself to keep the client safe.

The next morning, Aoife burst through the salon doors, full of energy. “Brilly! G'morning, hot stuff!” She ran over and wrapped her arms around Brill's waist. He could immediately feel a difference in her and stepped back.

“Miss Aoife, you... look different.”

She looked even curvier today. Her top stretched out, any hope of her skirt covering her dashed at the slightest movement and her hair a more vibrant red. That smokey cherry perfume was back and as strong as the day before.

“Different?!” She suddenly seemed panicked and fret back and forth on her boots.

“N-no. Not like! You look adorable. I can just tell you practiced a lot yesterday.”

All troubles seemed to drain from Aoife's mind. “You bet! I got back to the clubhouse and the rest of the squad was sooo jealous.”

Vera gave a quick golf clap. “Brill, my dear, I'll entrust you to your work while I plan today's schedule for our dear client.

Brill nodded and Aoife was already on her way back to the chair.

A few spritzes of product and Vera gave her approving nod and left the pair alone. Brill leaned in and wafted away Aoife's perfume.

“Aoife! Are you okay? Are you in there?”

The client shuttered. “What would be wrong?”

“Is your team okay? Did anybody come after them?”

Aoife shook her head. “I don't know if they met with their agents, but mine just works for me alone. I can trust she's looking out for the best deals for me!”

“You have to ditch your agent! She's trying to transform you! Or she's at least allied with Vera. Escape if you can!”

Aoife seems confused but at least thought over Brill's warning. “I couldn't let the girls down! We're going to be the best football team! Wait. Football squad. Cheering...”

This wasn't going to be as easy as Brill had hoped, but he'd seen a hint of change in her eyes. “Tell you what. I have some new nail polish you can be the first to try, but you have to promise me, you won't smoke any more. It's uh... Bad for your glow. Dulls your hair and grays the skin. I'd be so sad if that happened to you.”

Aoife looked hurt for Brill and nodded in agreement.

As the blow dryer stopped, Vera returned to the front of the salon.

“Ah, Miss Aoife! Another stunning performance! Now, are you ready for some more training?”

“Can do, Miss Vera!”

Vera bowed and waved her arm towards the back. She turned away before stopping and motioning back.

“Brill, love, won't you join us?”

“Y-Yes, ma'am.”

He tottered back to them and joined the two in the elevator. The ride was quiet, save for Aoife's soft humming to herself. The elevator sank for some time before shuddering and then stopping. The doors opened to a sparkling white gym and the air felt different. Brill looked around and could feel he was some distance from the salon.

Aoife rushed over to a peg on the wall and swapped out her vest. She now sported a satin silver one with “CCC” emblazoned on the back in bright green. She gave Brill a flirty wink before heading to the mats.

Vera smiled. “What do you feel about the uniform, dear? We're trying a few new ones. The Clovers sounds much more fitting to our lovely charge than the Centurions, no? Our squad leader is leading a re-marketing push for her city. Very civic-minded!”

The cheerleader was surprisingly flexible given her stature and showed off flips and jumps few would dare in heels. It was difficult for Brill to look away. He knew what she was a few short days ago, but Brill found himself enchanted by her. She was beautiful and had no shame about her new form's bouncing and jiggling or showing plenty of skin.



Vera bowed forward slightly and grinned. “Exactly the reaction we were hoping for. Miss Aoife will spread the good word of the Goddess. Her divine plan for the client is working and she will lead a team to thrill and entrance the public. A joy to behold for one and all.”

Brill was stung by her words. He wasn't able to save Aoife, but he hopefully planted something in her mind to one day drive her from her agent or save her teammates from worse changes. Brill could see a future where Aoife's fame led her to grander things and a split from the agent. Once separated, there would be hope that somebody out there would find her and free her body as well.

For now, Brill would stay at the salon, keeping watch over others and fighting for their freedom from within.

Brill grabbed the final bottle of hair gel and cleared it off his station. They'd all but drained their supply on the last client and her uncontrollable mane. He tossed the empty canister down the recycling chute and listened to it thud and ping down the seemingly endless hole. Even if he could fit through with his curves, it didn't seem like a safe escape route. For the last weeks whenever Vera wasn't around, Brill had spent his time testing the salon and its security. It seemed completely self-sufficient and unconnected to the outside world, aside from the doors and windows that refused to budge for him. All wires and pipes just turned around, looping through the building but never escaping either.

The jangle of the door's bell startled Brill out of his daydreaming of freedom. Vera joyously marched through with her arms around another strange woman. Her jeans were struggling to make it over her hips and contain her backside, while a dress shirt strained from the pressure against its buttons fighting a losing battle to save the woman's modesty. She had beautiful cocoa-brown hair down to her waist and her bangs framed some kind of mask over her face. Brill leaned in and saw it had a dark eye piece like a masquerade mask but the rest was an opalescent white that covered her entire face. Her struggling gait was one Brill immediately recognized. The unfamiliarity from a new form and all the sensations it threw off.

“Brill, love, say hello to our new client. This vision is Jazmine and she just signed up for some sessions with us.”

Brill could hear a muffled feminine voice as Vera dragged the woman over. Vera chuckled and hugged the woman's shoulders.

“Yes, yes! Brill is quite lovely herself. And so very talented. She'll fix you right up!”

Vera deposited her new friend at Brill's chair and Jazmine landed with a plop against the padding. Vera smiled and her new toy.

“Brill. Given her lovely artifact, makeup won't be required this time. But she does need some good hair care routines and I want to see you flex your fashion advice. You always look so adorable, so spread that charm to the world in praise of the Goddess.”

Brill gave his phony agreement, Vera knowing full well he had no control over the outfits the salon provided him with. Or its general inability to provide him with a properly sized shirt. With the boss leaving, Brill got to work and started brushing Jazmine's flowing hair.

The client was tense and rigid when Brill stopped the brushing.

“Miss, what happened to you? What help do you need?”

She replied in a quiet but entrancing voice. Brill listened raptly as she spoke, satisfied with her story before going back to the brushing task. As he started up again, he shook himself off and realized she hadn't actually said anything. Brill could hear her speaking, but there was no distinction to the words. It just flowed out sweetly as a white noise and that somehow made him feel like the conversation was satisfying. Brill's connection to the salon made him more resilient to the curses and powers of the clients and without that, he'd probably have never noticed the woman's strange speech. He leaned in once more and could just barely make out a muffled voice hidden behind the siren's charm from the mask.

Jimmy had gone to a festival with a woman he was growing fond of. They had met several times with friends, but this was their first solo date and they had agreed to the festival as a way to keep the pressure low and just have a fun time together. He tried his best to show off at the booths, doing his damndest to win games that were almost certainly rigged and buying her a few trinkets. She laughed off his failed attempts at impressing her and they had a good time together.

After splurging on a lunch together, they came across a stall selling masks. His date immediately rushed over and tried a few on, giggling at their ostentatious and joking that this was her new look and Jimmy had to get used to it. She pushed her date into joining her, but he held back due to the worry of making himself look like a goof in front of the woman he'd spent all day trying to impress. Sensing his weakness, she prodded Jimmy and mockingly questioned his devotion and his macho act. Laughing it off, Jimmy scanned the stall and picked up the most simple one he could find, a blank white mask with an eye piece. He put it on and posed for his date, asking her if he rocked this look as well. She stared at him but cocked her head as if she couldn't hear what he was saying. Jimmy tried again but she shrugged and put her mask away.

Frustrated at looking foolish, Jimmy went to return the mask but it felt stuck to his face. He yanked hard but it stayed stuck in place. The mask was dark and he couldn't see but he shouted towards where his date and the salesman had been, but all he could hear back was his voice muffled by the mask. He could hear the woman saying he was acting weird and was drawing attention to them. Jimmy started to panic and could feel a strange sensation ripple through his body, like he was shrinking away from the world.

The mask was dark with no eye holes, but Jimmy started to feel as if he could sense the world through the mask. He just inherently knew where things were around him, like the mask was serving as his eyes and seeing for him. He spun away from his date and tugged harder at the mask, trying to pull it down or away from his face without success. Jimmy felt smaller still but his clothes were getting tighter and he shifted uncomfortably.

The woman nervously laughed and Jimmy could hear her ask what was going on. Her laughter started to draw attention from the festival-goers and Jimmy started to panic more, twirling to hide his face from everybody. Long strands of hair started to brush against the sides of his face and the dark auburn was getting lighter and shinier. Jimmy spun away the booth, trying to rush off in his panic, but his hips caught the side of a display and sent it clattering down. The noise alerted everybody around them and Jimmy's chest started to feel tight before straining outward with each gasping breath.

Jimmy bolted from the booth, pushing past people, and hearing the crowd question if he was a performer. He could feel them staring as he ran away and strange sensations thundered up as he made each pounding stride on the dirt. Each footfall led to a quivering bounce as he wobbled away, shaking his hips uncontrollably at the gawking public.

He finally broke free of the crowd and stumbled out of the festival. Straight into the arms of a woman at the gate. She introduced herself as Vera and offered to help him with the mask. They somehow ended up here at the salon, but the trip was a blur.

Brill pat Jazmine on the shoulder. "I'm here to help. I'll do what I can to get you free or at least

out of here, but you need to play along in front of Vera. I'm not sure what she'd do if she found out we're-”

The clacking of heels stifled the two and Vera made her grand entrance holding a small purple bag.

“Oh, dears, Brill does the most divine work. Doesn't she, Jazmine? Your hair looks even more gorgeous! I think you two gossips have had enough girl talk for now. I've prepped the training room for Jazmine's practice, so let's move on to some fashion for now.”

Vera handed Brill the bag and took Jazmine's hand to free her from the salon chair.

“You two can head upstairs and work on some outfits. Brill, honey, they're just for Jazmine. You're still on the clock! Have fun! Jazmine has the divine blessing of showing off. The Goddess will want her to display her lovely self to the world and get rid of those unfounded confidence issues.”

Upstairs, Brill emptied the bag and felt sorry for his new charge. Jazmine held up its contents and showed off the bodice. It looked tight, small, and designed to push his new curves upward and outward. Jazmine started to breath rapidly behind the mask.

“I can't wear this!”

Brill held his arms out. “Stay calm. It's okay.”

“I-I don't want to! This whole thing is too much. I need to get away and- and...”

Brill could sense a change in the air around Jazmine. He could tell that ever so slightly, she was starting to fill out and expand as she fretted.

“Take a breath! If you don't calm down, who knows when this will stop!”

“W-what?”

For the other clients I've seen, there seems to be some kinds of weird rules about this. Like the mask is a challenge you need to overcome. When you defeat it, you'll be freed.”

Jazmine's panic turned to anger. “Defeat it?! It's a freaking mask latched onto my face!”

Brill sank down onto the couch. “I don't understand it either, but we're in this together. I know what it's like too. I have to show off, mince around the salon, get treated like a ditz... But I need to help people. I think that's the only way I'll be free of Vera.”

Jazmine nodded. “Okay, okay. Just... Turn around or something.”

Brill swung around and could hear Jazmine undressing. The sighs and grunts of being free of too tight clothing not designed for their new curves was something he knew well. Shortly, Jazmine coughed for his attention.

The client had changed into the contents of the bag, and seemed to stand more confidently. The bodice accentuated everything about her and included gloves and stockings, then a hair tie. She wobbled a little on the heels, but Jazmine looked strong. Standing up straight, her chest forward, and hips back, she had determination. Brill was pleased the air of change around her had dissipated but was

unsure if making her wear that was the right tactic.

A knock at the door startled the two and Vera strode in without further warning.

“Well, well! I knew Brill would do a fine job. You look wonderful, Jazmine.”

The client nodded and Brill could sense her secret disdain.

“Our new model and I have some runway practice to attend to in the training room downstairs, so we'll be occupied for the night. Brill, be a good girl while we're away. And do consider picking out a few outfits such as this for yourself! Jazmine may help to attract some extra business for the shop, but if we had the two of you, what luck!”

Jazmine and Vera returned to the shop the next morning. The client looked tired but had at least been able to change back into some flimsy shorts and a T-shirt after leaving. She marched over to Brill's station and the two discussed ways to break free as Brill did her nails. If the mask fed off of her panic, Jazmine would lull it into a false sense of security until it was starved enough to smash. It meant playing along with their plans, but it was the best option.

“Photo shoot!”

Brill and Jazmine startled at the sudden proclamation.

“Our dear was approved for a calendar shoot! Earrings can wait. Let's get her suited up and posing, posing, posing!”

Brill helped Jazmine up. “For what, Vera?”

Vera gleefully held out a few scraps of cloth that would barely qualify as a bikini for a woman half Jazmine's size.

Brill paced the shop for hours, unnerved by leaving Jazmine alone and out of sight for this long before the elevator in the back finally dinged. Out strutted Jazmine, still barely clad in the swimwear and perched on heeled sandals.

“Nailed it!”

Brill recoiled at the sound of her voice. It was overpoweringly phony to his ears. The mask's flirty, feminine filter drowning out the client behind it.

“Are you okay?”

“Better than ever! Vera said she could get those photos in calendars all over. And everybody will know you did my hair and makeup so you'll get so many new customers for the Goddess!”

Brill strained to hear the real voice underneath. It was struggling to get out, but Brill could detect exhaustion in Jazmine's tone. She'd been fighting the mask all day and was too worn out to maintain dominance.

Brill thought, trying to use this as a chance to help her. “Well that's good. Since you're doing so well, you won't need that mask soon. People will be so curious to see the real you!”

There was a reduction of pressure around Jazmine, like rewriting the narrative gave her some control again.

“Th-Thanks, Brill...”

After a soak in the spa, Jazmine had recovered and calmed down. A hot rinse had done nothing to loosen the mask, but her hair was now a golden brown, sparkling in the light to draw attention.

“Vera dropped this off while you rested.” Brill held out another clothing box as Jazmine dried off. “She said it's for the final shoot.”

Jazmine gave a determined nod. She took the box to a stall and came back some short moments later.

She returned in a deep blue cocktail dress, held on by the force of her curves and the mightiest spaghetti straps fashion had known. The skirt flowed with every tiny motion she made, with slits all the way up both legs. The dress hid little but drew all the attention away from the bearer's mask.

“Jaz, you look... Gorgeous. Are you all right?”

She nodded. “Let's beat this damned thing.”



“Talking of winning the competition? Good!” Vera hovered in the doorway in her bizarrely punctual way.

Brill composed himself. “What competition?”

“Why the pageant, of course! Once Jazmine wins that, she's sure to find an agent for representation and her photo shoots will spread word of the Goddess far and wide!”

Brill felt his own panic. Their plan was backfiring and could put more people in danger and thrust Jazmine out into the public eye while still vulnerable.

“Maybe, maybe we're moving too fast. If her first auditions don't... If she doesn't come out on top, that could destroy her confidence! She's put in so much work and we should really set her on the best path forward. Let's not-”

Vera clucked her tongue. “I see what's going on here!”

Brill backed up. She was always around, what if she'd heard their plans. Nothing around to fight with, no escape routes, who knows what would happen if he attacked-

“No need to be jealous, Brill! Yes, Jazmine is our glorious beauty for the public, but once they come to the shop, YOU'RE our star.”

Vera swiftly moved in and gave Brill a deep hug.

“Say good-bye for now, love. But Jazmine will be back for our expansion ceremonies. The shop will be bigger than ever!”

Brill stood by his salon chair and watched the client sashay over to him. Terry would always stride with purpose but there was more swing in her walk this morning. He looked the client up and down and noticed that she appeared to now be wearing low rise pants that connected to her usual boots.

“Another change last night, Terry?”

The client angrily sighed in agreement and pivoted on her precariously high heels towards the station's mirror.

“Any luck with the tracing methods we discussed? Did you find out who sent the package or where it traveled from?”

Terry sighed before flopping back into the seat, dramatically pointing her leg straight up, and then settled. “No luck.”

Brill put a hand on her shoulder and gave her a comforting pat before grabbing a brush from the

shelf. Vera had been on edge lately but Brill still had to go through the motions of working on the clients. She would disappear into the back and no longer checked in on the progress. Brill liked to think that she now bought into him being a faithful worker, but felt something bigger at play. For the time, it at least gave Brill more chances to fight back with the clients and they could talk more openly.

Terry had been the first client to benefit from the new order. Their repeated sessions helped Brill stave off any mental effects from her cursed objects and experiment more with freeing her. Terry had received a package alongside his regular mail. Thinking it was just a normal delivery, he paid no mind towards opening it. The delivery contained just a pair of slippers and an ad reading "One size fits all. Last shoes you'll ever have!".

Peeved with the wrong shipment, Terry checked with the usual online shop and his recent purchase history was empty. He followed up with a check on his card and there hadn't been any recent charges. With no invoice and no return address, Terry couldn't even send them back. They did look comfortable though, so he slipped them on and enjoyed the free gift.

The next morning, Terry stumbled out of bed and felt himself pitching forward. He took some wobbly steps to clear the morning's haze but still felt uncomfortable. Scanning down, he now saw he was wearing a pair of heels. Terry immediately flopped back onto the bed and tugged at them. They wouldn't budge. The heels fit well and didn't cause any discomfort, but no matter how hard he tugged and pulled, they remained stuck in place.

Terry hurried over to the kitchen cabinet and grabbed his scissors. Wedging them between his foot and the shoe, he jammed down, but the scissors just harmlessly slid back without so much as a nick. He grabbed the handle, wedged it back into the heels, and jabbed it into the side to pierce them, but the material again stayed firm and the scissors clattered out of his hand and onto the floor. He crawled over to the recycling bin and tore out the packaging. Scanning every inch of it, there were no markings, labels, names, or addresses to be found.

Terry got back up to his feet but stumbled forward, catching himself on the counter. He looked down again to find that the heels had crept upward, now forming ankle boots. The heels had also pitched up, now forming dangerously thin stiletto spikes. He wobbled forward but quickly found his stride and could walk in them perfectly fine. It was like his feet had adapted to the boots. He had no troubles as he raced over to his computer, outside of the cursed objects now threatening to take over.

Tearing through online shops and fashion sites, he couldn't find any hint of this pair on the market. As he frantically typed and combed through images, he could feel an almost electrical tingle up his legs, but Terry refused to give the boots the attention. He fidgeted in the chair but wouldn't bring himself to look down.

After hours of searching, Terry stood up, defeated. He headed back towards the kitchen, tired and hungry. As he stepped, something tugged at him and he stumbled forward before flopping to the carpet. He held himself up and looked back to see that the boots had made their way up his legs and had now claimed just past his knees. Terry struggled but could no longer bend his legs. Rolling to the side and pulling himself up with the table, he started back to the kitchen. Unable to bend, he had no choice but to give into the shoes and walk as they demanded. Pointing his toes out and then pivoting down with a strut, he made his way to the refrigerator. Going to grab a bottle of water from the bottom shelf, he legs strained to bend but he couldn't do it. With an angry grunt, he pivoted at the waist, leaning forward to grab the drink. Terry felt ridiculous sticking his butt out into the air just to pick

something up.

Finishing the drink, he left a rambling message to the office that he wouldn't be in tomorrow. There was no way to cover these monstrosities, so he needed time to think and find a way to free himself. Terry passed the mirror and glanced at his fashionable prisons. Not only was his bottom sticking out, but the boots were tight enough that they appeared to make his calves shapely and really pop. From the knee down, he couldn't recognize his own leg. A knocking at the door startled him back to reality. Terry braced himself up against the wall, making sure he wasn't visible from any windows. He couldn't dare be seen in these things. The knocking sporadically continued every few minutes but everything eventually went quiet.

Terry slowly sauntered to the front door and peered through the peephole. There was nobody outside, but a piece of paper was sticking halfway out of the mail slot. He pulled it through and scanned the sheet. It was a flier, featuring an attractive woman modeling and posing seductively, flipping her hair back. Terry peered closer and could make out she was wearing some kind of mask. Not the best enticement to get somebody to visit the salon they were advertising. Terry crumpled it up and threw the sheet away in anger. He just need to rest and clear his head.

Terry startled awake, feeling like something was tugging him. His legs swung over the side of the bed and yanked him up onto his feet. He was groggy from sleep but it felt like something was urging him forward, forcing him to walk, and he couldn't help but go along with it. As he strut to the shower, Terry felt the material from the boots now reaching up to his thighs, giving the invading clothing ample room to drag him around. After a flurry of getting ready for the day and just barely enough time to grab some clothes, fighting against his legs' posing, Terry was dragged out the door into town. It felt like every clack of the heels against the sidewalk was deafening, drawing stares from everybody he sauntered past. He did his best to pull his hoodie over his face but the boots did their best to flaunt and draw attention.

That was how Brill first met the new client and they'd been working together since that day. Terry was refining from the salon treatments but changed much faster where the material covered her. From the waist up, she looked like a sweet girl. Brill had cleaned up her hair into a cute bob with longer fringe and she took light make-up. From the waist down though, she was a total knock-out flaunting everything she had.

Brill had tried every method of cutting and every caustic chemical in the shop, but the material's grip stayed firm. Nothing could force it to slip off, fold down, or peel off and Brill was worried he was running out of time as it crept up the client. With today's reach up Terry's hips, he was expanding out more, wedged into the salon chair that had room to spare the day before.

The client coughed and let out a groan.

“Sorry, Terry! Did I catch a tangle with the brush?”

“No. Not you... It's...”

Terry's back arched and she gasped out air. Slick strings branched off of the cursed material and crawled up the client's side. Brill jumped back in shock as the strands snaked up Terry's side, wrapping together and forming new material over him and shredding away the bottom of his hoodie. In a matter of just seconds, a corset was now squeezing the client's waist ever thinner, adjusting her posture and

pushing her chest out.

“Terry?! Are you o-” Brill was cut short by a quake rippling through the salon. “The hell was that?”

The salon shook again and Brill could sense a commotion out front. An aura of panic and danger seemed to seep through the walls. Brill looked around and caught Vera racing towards the front. She was moving faster than Brill had seen before and he could hardly make out her hurried exasperation.

“-Jazmine's photoshoot... found us... -kyrie scum have found us...”

“B-Brill?” Terry quivered in her chair.

“I- I don't know! I've never seen this before.”

A flash of green light sparked from out front, around the corner and lighting up Brill's workstation. The sound of stone hitting the ground resounded from out front and a crackle of glass split the air. Another spark of green lit up the shop and Vera came racing back. There was another shudder, the sound of a door slamming, and then... Brill couldn't sense Vera's presence in the salon. She normally had an omnipresent air that permeated everything, but Brill suddenly felt... alone.

Glass creaked once more and Brill grabbed Terry, yanking her up to free her plump backside from the chair.

“I think we have to go, Terry!”

“What is it, Brill?!”

“Dangerous. We need to take a chance. There's an elevator downstairs. I saw it with another client. It's- it's weird but I think it might be able to take us away from here.”

The duo raced to the back rooms. Terry was fighting it, but she strut slowly, shaking her hips, and wriggling in an attention-grabbing way. Brill pushed her along to speed up their escape and they made it to the silver doors of the elevator.



Another flash of light and crackle of glass burst through the shop and Brill looked over the elevator. With Terry's backside and his own exaggerated curves, it was a tight squeeze that wasn't going to work.

“Look, Terry, you get in. Just- Just get off somewhere else and get away from this place. You'll find help somewhere else and I know, deep down I know you'll be free of that thing sometime.”

“But what about y-”

“Go! I'll be right behind you. Just get out!”

Another quake shuddered through the salon and the elevator door creaked shut. There was a loud hum and Brill felt another wave of relief. He could no longer sense the client. She'd been sent somewhere, but he couldn't tell where. There had to be somebody out there helping people like them and Terry would find them.

Brill bounced on his feet waiting for the elevator to return. Another shudder hit and Brill was

forced to steady himself against the walls to stay upright. The lights burst out, leaving Brill in the dark.

“H-hello?! What's happening? Please, somebody-”

The lights flashed back on and the building appeared to settle. Brill cautiously stood back up and looked around. The commotion was gone. A feeling of calm settled around the salon. He timidly made his way back up front in the silence. At the entrance, small cracks in the front window snaked back on themselves, repairing the window, and everything settled back into place with no signs of damage from the attack.

Sparkling light shone through the fixed window and Brill no longer saw the shopping center, but gorgeous sapphire water. A patch of sandy beach stretched out between the shop and the water and palm trees dotted the simple path leading to the shop's front door.

With Vera gone, Brill felt a sense of freedom. But more than that, a sense of control over the salon. He felt an awareness of everything about the shop stirring almost unnoticeably deep inside. The salon was his, but he felt a purpose too. In those short weeks, he'd already met clients that needed help. He'd done what he could, but if this was an invitation, he could do so much more now. There would be others and they would need a place to come for help and support.

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