**Infringement 16.11**

After Herb’s newest replicant, Mick, and his Stand, apparently named The Prick, had introduced themselves, however oddly, I felt myself relax a little. After Curtis I was ready for another dominance game, but this one’s personality seemed oddly straightforward.

All of the replicants seemed to have taken one of Herb’s traits and flanderized it, blowing it up out of proportion until it defined them. For Boojack, it’d been his apathy, for Curtis, his enjoyment of fighting, for Mike, his fear, and for Tyrone, his confidence. For Mick, it seemed to be his ability to get to the heart of things, which, ultimately, was okay with me.

That or I was wrong completely.

Even his unsettling movements and odd speech patterns helped, his eccentricity easily seen, and just as easily dealt with. I nodded at his request, “Of course I’ll help, as long as it isn’t anything too big or bad. But I don’t really need help.”

“Everybody *needs* help,” he countered, staring almost through me.

Well, if that was his stance. “Okay, then what help do *you* need?” I asked.

He blinked, once, tilting his head. “What *help* do *I* need? He asked right back.

Okay, maybe I was wrong on this replicant’s main trait. “You *just* said ‘you help me, I help you’. So what help do you need?”

Again, the pause. “I *don’t* know, *yet*. I just *got* here.” So was this a ‘help you know for unspecified favors later, deal?’ “*But*,” he continued, “I *always* offer help *to* those *in* need.”

“That’s. . . admirable?” I more questioned than said, trying to square his words with the unnatural, almost negligently menacing way in which they were delivered. “Uh, I. . . I don’t think I really need any help,” I shrugged. “The standard way this has been going is, well, do you want to look like someone else? Someone who isn’t Herb?”

There was another pause, this one longer than the others. “. . . . . . . yeah. I *don’t* like these *cheeks*. I *don’t* like this *jaw-line*. Slimmer. *Tighter*.”

I waited, but that’s all he said. “Do you have a reference for me to work from?” I prodded. “Like X meets Y, or just get a mirror and figure it out from there?”

“. . . . get *a* mirror.”

It was the work of moments to grow a silver one from the inside of a drawer in my desk pulling it out and handing it to him. He snatched it from my hand in an instant, the motion harsh, and jerky, but without any sense of anger. It was just like he decided he was going to move, and so he did. Different, but, like everything else about him, not inherently *bad*.

I held out a hand, which he regarded for a moment, before quickly putting his hand in mine, sitting up straight as his posture *screamed* tension. Either way he was giving me a connection to work with, so I got started. I made his corrections as he fed them to me in a stream, shrinking him substantially, my Get Better treatment, which I kept at a low level, compacting him, increasing muscle and bone density to be more like mine.

Well, I *guessed* that was happening, as, by the way Panacea’s power worked, I should’ve had to shunt the extra biomass *somewhere*, but instead I was doing *something* with it. Eh, I’d have Amy look over it later.

Either way, when he finally told me to stop, he looked. . . *odd*. Not bad, not *really*, just. . . not what I’d expected.

He was a mix of Korean and Indian, definitely asiatic, and dusky skinned, but hard to pin down exactly where. His nose was large, as were his lips, while his eyes were slanted, and his cheeks were pulled in tight, almost gaunt, and so sharp they looked like they might cut something.

His height, shrunk down as he was, was just short of five and a half feet, and his entire build was lean, *compact*. With this new form, he kept the pattern of the Stand being a head taller than the replicant that mad them, and, with his skin was lightened, and then tuned to a different hue, it honestly didn’t look like Mickwas related to Herb in the slightest.

“. . . you *do* good *work*,” he commented, almost negligently dropping the silver mirror on my desk, but in such a way that it made barely a sound.

“Thanks!” I replied cheerfully, glad to have something that was straightforward and easily completed, *for once*.

“*Any* problems you *need* solving?” Mick asked again, pulling back his hand and sitting back in his chair in a single movement. Once again he shifted  from high-tension to complete relaxation in an instant, like a switch was thrown.

I sighed, “Not really,” I lied. I had problems, *so* many problems, but they were *my* responsibility to handle. Then again, Herb, Quinn, Amy, Taylor, and Karen *had* all told me I should at least ask so. . . “It’s this thing with the Merchants,” I sighed, sitting back in my own chair, unable to come close to the boneless calm that Mick was displaying. “I really just don’t know how to go about. . . *this*,” I waved in their general direction. “You replicated off of Herb, so you know what he knows, right?” I asked.

“*Yeah*,” Mick replied, calmly, at odds to my current state.

“So you know what they did, what they *almost* did, and what they could do without realizing,” I said, more to myself. “You, well, *Herb,* was right. Going in big, like I was planning, that’s dumb. *Hell*,” I laughed bitterly, “it wasn’t until an hour ago that I realized that doing so would give the Master time to set off pre-programmed commands, like Valefor would. It’s just another one of those *‘it’s obvious’* things that he doesn’t think he needs to explain, isn’t it?”

A pause, then another sharp nod was the other man’s reply.

“Well, now I’m trying to figure out how to go in. . . quietly. My other personas won’t work, but I’ve got a few ideas that *might* work, but there are a *lot* of Merchants, and I don’t know *how* to do it,” I said, ranting a little, and whining a little as well. I just *couldn’t see how to do this*, in a way that was acceptable.

“. . . hit *the* big first, *exterminate* the roaches,” he stated, as if it were obvious, but also without any judgement at my not being able to see it.

That took a moment to parse as ‘decapitation strike, followed by cutting off avenues of escape of the mid to low level thugs’, and it had a certain amount of sense. With the Master taken care of, the effects of her power *might* stop completely, and even if the conditioning survived her death, having her unable to offer more commands would be a good thing. It would be *best* to have her undo what she’d done, but, without a mind-control power of my own, there was no way to make her.

And I *wasn’t* going to become a Master. At least, not a *human* one.

She’d already proven she’d sacrifice her own people in a second if she thought it’d help her get away, and she’d use her power, even if she couldn’t affect me directly, to try to screw me over in the hopes of escaping. That meant she needed to be dealt with. However, that didn’t solve the largest problem I had.

“Okay, but. . . they have the Master, right?” I asked, rhetorically, and he nodded in agreement. “From what I can tell, they have to take the Drugs *to* get Mastered but. . . there’s a chance that some of them *aren’t willing.*”

“. . . why?” Mick asked, puzzled.

I frowned back, “What do you mean, ‘why?’ Because those that’ve been Mastered aren’t responsible and should be saved. Hell, I’m able to undo it with my Get Better, it just takes a lot of time, at least a lot of time in a combat scenario. I mean, they’ll likely have taken drugs of their own free will in the first place,” I added, thinking about.

“*Right*,” Mick nodded. “They *put* themselves there. Their *fault*. Not *yours*.”

“I mean-” I started to argue, only for Mick to interrupt.

“***Kill them***.”

I blinked, and then, as I always had to do with Herb, tried to backtrack the logic. And there was a certain logic to it. Get involved, get the drugs, get Mastered, they weren’t exactly blameless here, but. . . from what I saw, the power attenuated itself over time. To go full on enslavement, she’d need to get right in someone’s face and hit them with seconds-old drugs, like she had for Mouse and Taylor. If someone got them normally, like the Merchants were selling, it’d be a suggestion, not even as strong as Canary’s, and then you could *just say no.*

I laughed at the image: ‘say no to being Mastered’. Not exactly fair for the upper end ones, but *I’d* shrugged off low-level Mastering. Hell, a good number of people that were around Glory Girl had. It *wasn’t* unfair to hold the Merchants, at least partially, responsible for what they’d done when the Mastering *wasn’t* direct control, but merely a low-level push.  However, “Don’t you think that’s a little much? We don’t know that they’ve *all* done things, just that they’ve joined the Merchants.”

“You’re *doin’* them *a* favor,” The replicant replied. “Like *Heart*breaker.”

“Eh,” I sighed, trying to argue, but having a hard time of it. “I could heal what was done to our people, I *couldn’t* heal the Heartbroken.” Or could I have? My power effected brains. . . *No,* I thought. It wasn’t worth the risk, and chances were I couldn’t’ve anyways. Taylor and Karen had, according to Panacea, had low level brain damage. The Heartbroken weren’t damaged, they were *rebuilt.*

“New *dose*. Single *dose*. Not Master-*Junkies*. Not subtle *orders*,” he disagreed.

He had a point. My data-set was tiny, and, if repeated doses built upon themselves, I might not be able to fix the damage. More than that, I could not, *would not,* mess with people’s minds.

“Think ‘bout *it*,” Mick pressed. “Life *on* drugs. *A* toxic life. *Getting* Mastered. They’re *dead*. They don’t *have* to fall again. And *they* will. Can’t heal *that*.”

“Sherrel got better,” I pointed out.

“Was *gettin’* better without *you*,” the replicant countered. “You *helped*. ‘Cause you *help*. *Help* them. *Kill* them. Like you *helped* the Heart*broken*.”

I winced, unable to argue that point. I didn’t know the mechanics, and there was a world of difference between fixing damage done minutes ago, and repeated abuse that might have worn its way into being part of the brain.

Mick, seeing my reticence, tried to explain himself. “Think *this* way: you aren’t *immune*. She got *you*. Full *of*. . . medication. She’s your *god*. You *don’t* know *why,* but you *do* things.You know *what,* when you *do* things*.* You *want* to stop. *You* can’t *stop.* How’s that *sound*.”

“It sounds like a living hell,” I replied, flatly.

He paused, nodded sharply, and continued, “Somebody *comes*. *Kills* you. *Frees* you. What *would* you *say?*”

“Honestly? Thank you,” I sighed. “. . . *Fuck!* It *is* the Heartbroken all over again, isn’t it? I was able to help our people but that took minutes, and that was before the drugs *really* kicked in. To do that for the others, even if it’s possible in the first place? I’d need to capture *thousands* of people, *and* bind anyone in leadership, *and* control them all, *and* we just don’t have the combatants to do that, even with everyone, including the replicants, and *maybe* Amy could help, but we’d have to *scour* the place clean in case the drugs still work after the Master’s death and it’s not the Master that has to give the orders, and-”

“And *is* it worth *it?* Being *a* hospital?” he asked, cutting me off. “Working *to* save *roaches?* For *hours?* And *hours?* And *hours?* And *hours?”*

I looked at him, my gaze hard. “If that’s what it took to save innocents, *yes.* The problem here is *logistics.*”

“You’re *not* savin’ innocents,” Mick countered. “And yeah, *logistics*. *Too* many *people*. *Too* many people *escapin’*. *Too* many people usin’ *smack* to be mini-*Masters*. *Too* many people takin’ your *time*. You’re *busy* collectin’ the *dead*. The *real* innocents. *Killed* by *Leviathan*. *Killed* because *you* didn’t go *hard* enough. You *know* they’re *junkies*. They’re gonna *go* right *back* to *using*. Go *back* to getting *mastered*. Only, *without* powers. Go *back* to *steal.* Go *back* to *rape.* Go *back* to *kill.* All *to* feed the *need*. Are *you* going to *let* a bunch of *raping*, murdering *roaches* stop *you*?”

Each proclamation was a hammer-blow against my position, and I winced as each one hit, but *he wasn’t wrong.* “It’s, it’s not the drugs that are the problem, it’s the *mind control*, Mick. And the killing innocent people, and, I mean, you don’t *know* they’re raping.”

“*I* do,” He looked at me, calmly, and while his eyes were flat, there wasn’t any judgement, just a faint glimmer of understanding on why I was trying to hold my position.

“What are the chances that they’re innocent?” I asked, *hating* that I was hoping it’d be something low, so that I could tell myself it wouldn’t be *that* bad. “What are the chances they got pulled in without meaning to. No, not without meaning to, but like how Mouse got hit? Just, poof, in your face, fuck you?”

“***Zero.***”

I binked, looking at him in disbelief. His response had been immediate, and completely confident. “*Seriously?*”

He nodded, once. “Merchants *Party*. Sit and *get* high. They’re *runaways*. Junkies. They’re *people* who *want* the *life.*”

I could see where he was going, “People who choose to be there,” I added getting a nod.

“And *the* Master? Their *source*. Wouldn’t *risk* her. Bringin’ *her* was their *Trump*,” he stated, before I could point out the flaw in his statement. “And *it* worked. *Probably* doesn’t *leave* home,” Mick explained, and I understood.

“So the chances of her being there to hit someone with a full-enslaving dose are minimal, because that’s risky, so anyone brought in would get the stuff that’s just suggestions at first, not commands,” I sighed, seeing how the number of mind-controlled innocents very easily could’ve been zero, despite my first assumptions. I didn’t know drug-use culture, or gangs, or *any* of those things, and Herb, and by extension *Mick,* did. “As opposed to Heartbreaker, who just grabbed people off the street. And no one seemed to care.”

And, if he was anything to go by, even if I went to the Protectorate with this, even if I gave them all the intel I had, if I gave them *proof* of a dangerous human Master, *nothing would happen.* Hell, with what I knew of Tagg, he’d probably use the evidence I gave them against me, call it ‘unlawful spying’ or some shit. Which meant it was all down to me. *Again.*

And, with all of the unknowns I was dealing with, I couldn’t plan effectively, find that ‘everybody lives’ golden answer, because there might not *be* a perfect solution here, because I wasn’t dealing with perfect, or even particularly *good* people. If I had more power, I could solve it, but until I could read minds, or paralyze a city block, or something else ridiculous, I couldn’t. There were *Master* powers that’d do it, but that was a line I *would not cross.* But, that was the what-ifs, I was dealing with the *current* problem.

“There’s too many variables,” I said to myself.

“Too *much*. Too *hidden*,” he agreed.

That wasn’t exactly correct, though. “If I could have more time, if I could track her down and See her, I could figure *out* those variables.”

“And if *ya* got caught? If they *start* to run? If she gets *away?* She *did* before,” Mick pointed out. “They got a *new* Cape. Maybe they *got* two? Or *three*? Or *four*?”

“And every cape is another set of unknowns. I did *not* see that cow coming,” I agreed. “So If I kill her, the Master, the effects might not disappear, but she won’t be able to make anymore. And then I’ll need to clean house,” I said, thinking through it all. I’d ignored the Merchants because I thought they weren’t a threat, because I had bigger things to deal with. They’d now *officially* made themselves the biggest threat I had, and I’d deal with them quickly, efficiently, and with exactly as much care as they deserved. I had to ask, though, “Really think I should do it? That I should just kill them all?”

He smiled. It was not a nice smile. “*Every* day. *All* day.”

“Just for the Merchants, though, right?” I clarified.

“Just *for* the Merchants,” he agreed.

I didn’t like it, but I really didn’t see a better option. “And if we didn’t, I’d have to capture all of them, I’d have to find all their drug stashes, I’d have to. . . and for what? For these people?”

“Who’d *go* and *do* it all over *again*,” Mick agreed. “*Them*? Mastered *before* they joined *the* Merchants. You’re *just* helpin’. *Save* them, *Lee*. *You’re* the only *one* who will.”

“*But why?*” I demanded, suddenly angry, the abruptness of the feeling taking me off guard, even as the replicant just stared, unmoving. “Why does it have to be *me?* Why did *I* have to be the one to take out Heartbreaker? Drop a smoke grenade, Door me, behind Heartbreaker, toss in a bomb, close it, *job. Fuckin’ Done.* Or any of the *number* of other ways it could be handled. *Fuck*, man, Dragon’s a fucking *robot!* Why couldn’t *she* have taken care of it?”

“Takes *hard* people to do *hard* things,” the replicant stated, as if commenting that the sky was blue. “Hard *people* usually aren’t *good* people. *You’re* special.”

“Well I fucking *shouldn’t be!*” I argued. I wasn’t special, I just wasn’t *evil*. I didn’t think of myself as part of some special anointed class, some group that was just inherently *better*. Anyone could do what I could, hell, Taylor, now that she wasn’t suicidal, likely *would* in a few years, when she was an adult, but why did it always come back to *me!?*

Mick shrugged. “But *it* is.”

I wanted to snap at him, tell him he was wrong, but every step of the way, even before I’d gotten to this world, it seemed like *everyone* had been content to sit back and let bad things happen, even when it was their *job* to stop them, while using the power they held to achieve their own ends. And then, when I found out I’d been lied to, or that someone was supposed to have done something, something they *promised* to do, be it their word, their job, their *oath?* *Nothing happened to them,* and *I* was left to pick up the pieces. It was one of the reasons I was so strident about *not* abusing my power, about trying to do what was right, instead of what was easy. So I wouldn’t do that to *someone else.*

While it wasn’t the edgy ‘wolves don’t concern themselves with the bleating of sheep’, if I was trying to help, and *no one else was*, why was I tearing myself to pieces over this? Why was I trying to save people that’d likely never tried to save another in their lives? These *weren’t* innocents, or *children*, or *anything* like that, so I’d *do* what I *would* to help them, *do* what I’d want someone *else* to do to *me* in the circumstances, and *move the fuck on to the next problem that no one was trying to solve.*

“*Fuck it,*” I sighed, *done* with this problem, which *could* be solved *so easily.* “You asked if I needed help?”

“*Yes,*” he replied, looking directly at me.

I brought up the locations of the Merchant strongholds, spread out over an eight of the city, and waved to them. “Help *me* solve *this* problem.”

For the first time, Mick looked happy, as he replied, “*Abso-fuckin-lutely*.”

I had a single moment of doubt, a niggling at the back of my mind. “Herb. . . Herb probably wouldn’t want us to do it this way, would he? I want to say no, that he’d be against it, but, I don’t really feel like I know him anymore. Would he tell me I’m being an idiot, and I should just do it? You know his thoughts, would he be okay with this? Should we get Herb in on this? He’d be immune to the Master too, but, would he want to?”

“*We* don’t *need* to bother *him*,” Mick reassured me, “It’s *late*. *I’ll* be there for *you*. *He’d* want to *help*, but let *him* relax. *He* didn’t plan. *He* still needs *sleep*. It’s *not* like *he’d* have room to complain. *With* what *he’s* done.”

The thought that he would, after what he’d done, was so absurd I snorted. “Yeah, you’re right. I don’t *need* him for this.”

“*We* don’t need *him* for *this*,” the replicant corrected. “*We* can take *care* of *this*.”

I was taken aback, so used to Herb offering the ‘we’ when it was general, but also happy to sit back and let me do things on my own, that the insistence surprised me. I felt myself smile, “Right, sorry, *we* will do this. Okay. First, lets go scouting. I-*we* don’t want *any* of them to get away.”

“*None*. We *need* to *wipe out the* ***hive***,” Mick agreed.

I stood up, and offered my hand, “Sorry, I, I *didn’t* start this off right. I’m Lee, and I look forward to working with you. I think this might be the start of a good partnership.”

He reached out, his grip strong, and firm, and shook, once. “I *feel* the *same*.”

And we headed out, to go take out the trash.

<AB>

It was in good cheer that I walked into the meeting that Quinn had called. I’d only managed to get a couple of hours of sleep, but I was feeling better. Still *tired*, but not quite as bad as I’d been the night before. There wasn’t exactly a spring in my step, but food did taste a little better than the near tastelessness it’d had since the spy shitshow happened.

Walking in, it was just the ‘planning’ council that’d I’d started calling together when I was trying to figure out how to respond to something, namely Herb, Quinn, Karen, Amelia, and Taylor.

The last two shot me enquiring looks as I walked in, but I shrugged, not knowing what it was about this time. It was another day, which meant it was probably *another* problem. The problems seemed to come near weekly, but the last few had all stacked up on top of another after the near month or so of peace that we’d had, so what was another? I’d likely be more upset if I hadn’t cleared the board of the last issue just under six hours ago.

“Thank you all for coming,” Overwatch announced, showing up as a hologram. “Something has happened, and while it doesn’t seem to be a rapidly devolving issue, it’s something that merits our attention before it strikes at us.”

I sighed, smiling a little to myself. “So what is it this time? We’ve had fire, flood, I *am* a plague, *Zerg.* . . did Ziz decide she wanted some of that wonderful beachfront property? That’d fit.” Whatever it would be, I’d handle it, and move back to the reconstruction efforts.

“You okay, dude?” Herb asked, looking over at me.

“As good as I am these days,” I shrugged, still staring at Quinn, “So, what’s it this time?”

The lawyer-cum-adminstrator glanced at me oddly, before turning back to the screen, displaying a familiar looking crater. “It’s the Merchants. Something attacked them last night, and they’re. . . *gone*.”

“You mean they ran?” Herb asked. “Good riddance.”

Quinn shook his head. “No, I mean they’re dead, or worse.” The image changed, cycling through warehouses, apartment buildings, and the like that the Merchants had been using as bases.

*Had* being the operative word.

The images, not counting the crater, could be divided into two different categories: completely empty, and massacres. The former was almost unnaturally clean, while the second, from the clear footage from Quinn’s ‘borrowed’ satellites, were littered with bodies and looked to almost be painted with blood.

“If I had to guess, it’s two completely different anomalies, possibly three” Quin guessed, and he wasn’t exactly wrong. “Anomaly One,” he showed the empty warehouse, the only indication that the Merchants hadn’t upped and left being the cars still parked hap-hazardly around the structure. He switched the photo to one taken yesterday, where a couple dozen Merchants could be seen loitering, most of the cars still in the same place.

“Anomaly Two,” he said, cycling again through the killing ground, bodies everywhere, some almost looking unhurt, while others seemed to have been ripped limb from limb. “And three.” And we were back to the crater. “What worries me is that they all seemed to happen at the same time. Unfortunately, I didn’t have any eyes over that portion of the city, then, the closest we have is this.”

The images were blurry, lacking the crystal clear sharpness of his previous footage. Bursts of light that might’ve been gunfire could be seen at the slaughters, while the blank areas were blots of darkness, and nothing more.

“We need to be on our guard. I believe it went after the Merchants, because of the light and noise they made, so it’s only a matter of time before they come for our people,” Quinn said seriously.

“They won’t,” I disagreed, smiling, glad it wasn’t anything that bad.

“How can you know?” Overwatch asked, confused, freezing as he turned to stare at me. “This was you?”

“Set number one was, and the crater. Well, the crater was mostly the cow-girl, I just did the cleanup,” I agreed easily.

There was a moment of silence at my statement. “And the others?”

“That was Mick, Break’s. . . *fifth* cousin,” I said, mentally counting them off, surprised we were only up to five out of ten. “We scouted out the area, I took the leadership, and the softer targets, while he went after the harder ones.”

“How many did you kill?” Karen asked, voice a little queer.

“Personally? About three-fifths, probably,” I shrugged, not sure about their reaction. Were they mad about me going off without them again? I’d explained why they shouldn’t be there, but sometimes even my teammates didn’t listen.

Herb was the next one to speak, questioning, “Out of the ones there?”

“No?” I asked, confused, I thought it was obvious. “Of the total. They were Mastered, and in such a way that there weren’t anyone that’d been forced into it.”

“But, how do you know that?” Amy asked, staring at me.

It was a fair enough question. “Because if they had a way to do that, they wouldn’t’ve needed to chain up their sex slaves,” I replied easily, and Taylor flinched at unpleasant memories. “None *that* young, Lady Bug, thank Christ, but if the Master drugs worked like that, they wouldn’t’ve needed to be tied down.”

“But,” Karen objected. “You could’ve cleaned them out, like you did for me and LB.”

“Tried that on one, still tried to kill me,” I disagreed. “However it worked, repeated commands made things permanent, or at least permanent enough to not being worth it.”

“Not. . . *worth it?”* Taylor echoed, and I looked around at the room, as everyone stared at me like *I’d* done something odd. Taylor and Amy I’d expected, but the others were adults.

“They’re *junkies. Were* junkies,” I corrected. “Junkies that raped, and tortured, and killed. Yeah, there was a Master, but they could’ve walked away, and they didn’t. I talked with Mick,” I nodded to Herb, “And he made some good points, so we took care of the problem.” I laughed, “I mean, we probably should’ve taken care of it earlier, but I was kinda busy.”

“And the bodies?” Herb asked, glancing over to the image of an empty stripmall that’d been a Merchant camp last night, and now looked like a warzone.

I grimaced, “Yeah, apparently Mick doesn’t clean up after himself. I’ll probably swing by tonight to incinerate them like I did mine.” Laughing, I shrugged, “Apparently being a bit of a slob is a *family* trait.”

“So, what’re you gonna do today?” my friend asked skeptically, dodging the issue.

“Corpse cleanup for a bit, see how Sherrel’s doing, maybe figure out which building I’ll build next,” I shrugged, “You know, the usual.”

Herb and Karen shared a look. “Um, you sure that’s a good idea?”

As I glanced around the table, everyone seemed to be staring at me like I’d said something *wrong*. “Guys,” I laughed, trying not to feel attacked. Maybe I was just mis-interpreting their looks, or maybe they were just surprised I’d gone and taken care of an issue before it metastasized into a city-destroying threat, *for once.* Either way, I tried to let it go. It’s not like *they’d* been doing anything before now *either*. “Re-*lax.* We had a problem. We no longer have a problem. We’ve got so many irons in the fire, that the one made of scrap metal and cocaine isn’t that big a deal.”

The stares, if anything, deepened. “Mick was right, and I was overcomplicating everything,” I sighed. He’d also been right about the others not being hard enough, strong enough, to see it had to be done. “The victims are healed and dropped off somewhere safe, the Merchants are dead, and the Master’s power died when I reduced her skull to the consistency of chunky salsa. Win, win, win as far as I’m concerned. So, thanks for bringing this up, Overwatch,” I said nodding to the projection of the man, “and sorry ‘bout panicking you, I didn’t think it merited mentioning. I was just getting rid of garbage, after all. I do that in Brockton Bay almost every day.”

Shaking my head, I stood up, and walked out, no one saying anything else, since the meeting was obviously over. *Mick was right*, I thought as I teleported to the casket warehouse, and flew over to the skiff. *Taking care of it really did make me feel better, and the solution was so easy.*

*I wonder what else I’m overcomplicating?*