**Seizure 18.A**

Herb Winslow had. . . made some mistakes.

Okay, he’d made a lot of mistakes.

Okay, it’d been *mostly* mistakes.

But that was nothing new.

He’d always been screwing up. When he’d been young, it’d been small things. Like not doing his homework in school because, from the time he got off the bus at his street to the time he got back on in it, he was either sleeping, eating, or doing whatever his foster-parents wanted. If he was doing his schoolwork than he was ‘wasting time’, but he still remembered the whoopin’ he got when he told the teacher that’s why he hadn’t done his work, for ‘lyin’’ and ‘makin’ them look bad’.

And then another whoopin’ when he asked what he lied about.

And then another whoopin’ when he asked how *he* was the one that ‘made them look bad’.

And then another whoopin’ when he was honest, right after they told him to be honest.

And then another whoopin’ when, well, he wasn’t sure, only told that ‘he knew what he did’.

And then another whoopin’ when he honestly told them he didn’t.

For lying.

*Again.*

Eventually he stopped asking, which stretched out the time between pain.

Eventually he stopped trying to figure out what he did wrong, because sometimes even asking questions that *weren’t* about what he ‘did’ were enough to make things worse.

Eventually he stopped thinking about it, because thinking never helped.

Maybe he was just dumb, like his brothers, and sisters, and parents said he was.

That’d explain why he couldn’t stop making mistakes.

And that’d been his life. Drifting through. Trying to help, because he wanted people to be happy. And fucking it all up. Over and over again.

He smoked weed for a bit, which helped, but he never got as into it as his brothers. Didn’t go into selling it either, or the harder stuff. Didn’t kill anyone over it either. Didn’t go to prison over it either.

Didn’t get into pimping either, like some of his family. He knew the way to do it, knew how to break people, break people like his father had broken his- like some people he knew. But. . . that wasn’t him either. He tried to take those lessons and *help* people, but he was an idiot, so he fucked that up too.

He’d had what he thought were friends. Helped them. Usually wasn’t helped in return, but hey, *they* were happy so he was doing something right. Right? And then he’d either fuck that up too, and they’d leave, or just drift away, like people did, and it’d just be him again. His family might need some help, and he tried to do so, or he’d need some help, and they’d let him crash at their place for a bit, before kicking him out, even if he was trying to help, even if he *hadn’t* made any mistakes.

But if he did the stupid thing, and asked why, that always just made them mad, and his mistake would either be something he *hadn’t* done even though he didn’t know he needed to do it, or it’d be ‘obvious’, or there’d be no reason at all.

And he’d go back to drifting.

And then he’d met Lee.

Lee was. . . different. ***Weird***, but in a good way. Met at a D&D game of all things. Dude just took him as he was, and tried to make him better, just like Herb had tried to make things better for other people. Some people had tried to help him, but always a just a little, and never as much as he tried to help them, but he hadn’t minded. Lee had stuck around though, still trying to help, long after anyone else would’ve walked away. Poor guy got *no* fuckin’ breaks, but he never really. . . *stopped*. He’d get pissed, and try and find a different way around things, or pound his head until something gave, even if half the time it was *him.* But then he’d be back, a couple days later, having learned *nothing* and still trying.

Well, that wasn’t true. Herb’s friend did learn, he just didn’t always learn the *obvious lesson*s.

Like the fact that Herb *always* fucked things up, eventually.

And he tried. He *tried* to tell Lee. But Lee’d just get that stare, like he was looking *through* Herb, to see something else entirely, and then Lee’d take him at his world, instead of what he *really* meant.

Because you *never* said what you *really* meant.

Or you got a whoopin’.

So Herb had tried, and he’d tried to do what was *best*, what was *needed,* since his best friend worked in certain ways, and *wouldn’t* work in others, because the guy had *no* give.

And to survive in this shithole, he *needed* to be careful, in a way the man would *refuse* to be.

Like with Cauldron.

Herb had no illusions, delusions, confusions or any other -usions about the kind of things he did for that group of assholes. He killed people, mostly, and he knew that some of them weren’t even *bad* people, but doing so kept the heat off Lee while he tried to do the right thing and help people, *way* more people than he could. But he got paid, stayed useful, and kept his friend safe.

And he’d failed at that too.

Over and over again.

And now, he’d done fucked up the worst he ever had.

He’d been happy as a clam in shit to finally get something to *do*, having felt more and more useless as time had gone on. He tried helping Lee with clearing out the weird shit in Spookytown, but he didn’t have any sensing powers, and his friend was strong enough to not need the help. He’d tried to help around the place, and Quinn had jobs, but they were always things that felt like busywork, and the Replicants were doing more and more of that. They were supposed to help, and he’d been the one that *picked* the fuckin’ power, but more and more they were replacing him. At work, and at home.

He’d given Kayden the space she’d asked for, being there for her, hoping to help *her* be the better person he knew she could be, but then Smith had slid in, slicker than he’d ever be, more confident than he’d ever be, and let her be *worse* while still getting what she wanted.

And it’d worked.

Kayden didn’t have to be a better person, she didn’t have to do *anything,* and she got *everything* she wanted. He could practically see her backsliding, but when she’d tried to be nice, and called him a negro, which he knew it wasn’t *really* a slur, except *this* time the way she said the word it practically was, that was when he’d known he fucked that up to.

He’d gotten mad, not at her, but at *Smith*. At first he thought the Replicants weren’t patterned off him, like they were supposed to be, but after his family. That they weren’t *really* him. That *he* wouldn’t do what they did.

Until he’d talked with Tyrone.

The short dog-themed man had just looked at him when he’d sidled up to the issue, and let out a bark of laughter.

“C’mon, Prime. You know better than that!” he’d said. “I’m *you,* nigger! You if you’d given a shit ‘bout respect. Bout runnin’ *with* the pack, ‘stead of sittin’ home with a thumb up yer ass and yer head in the fucking clouds, and not even the fun ones like BJ! Bout getting’ some bitches ‘stead of bein’ worried ‘bout what was ‘right’ an’ shiet, taken whatever you got given without fightin’ back.”

“So, what?” Herb had shot back, hurt, but not backing down. Not when he had to find out what the Replicants wanted. He’d heard about Curtis, and had to be sure. “So you’re the Alpha asshole?”

Again, the barking laugh. “Nah, dawg, that ain’t me. It ain’t *you* either Prime. Look ‘round, and see who’s the shot caller ‘round here.”

“Overwatch?” he’d asked, since the man was the one managing things.

In response, he’d gotten a flat look. “Get your head out yer fuckin’ ass and stop bein’ a bitch, *Prime*. You know who the Alpha is. He might not give a shit ‘bout respect, but that’s ‘cause *he don’t need it*. Shiet man, *erreybody* here knows who he is, knows it’s his ass that’s signin’ their checks, and most of ‘em don’t even *know who you are.* But that’s *what ya fuckin’ wanted,* isn’t it, ***Prime****?”* the Replicant sneered, teeth pulled back.

Herb hadn’t had an answer to that.

“That’s what I *thought*,” the dog-themed Villain had remarked, walking away. “Nah, bitch. We’re all you. Just *better*.”

And he’d walked out.

*Yeah*, Herb had wanted to find something to do after that, and when Lee’d given him something, something that Lee *couldn’t do,* he’d jumped at the chance. And, because all he had to do was *change* things, he really couldn’t fuck it up!

Well, he could *kind* of make mistakes. Lee’d had suggests on what he *could* do, and, well, half the time it was dumb, so he didn’t, but the other half he did try to do what Lee’d suggested and, well. . . he’d definitely changed things so they wouldn’t happen like they originally did!

And, for a couple weeks, it’d worked!

And then he’d fucked up.

*Hard.*

He’d been in Cedar Rapids, trying to find a guy that’d already triggered with a low-level healing ability to recruit for Spookytown before he got snapped up and abused.

He hadn’t expected to find the Slaughterhouse Nine.

And they’d been careful, keeping low, out of his copy-range so he didn’t stumble across them until it was too late.

He’d only had a moment, for Jack Slash to step into range, to get the man’s power, before it was too late. Herb had, in an instant, been able to sense every Cape around them for miles, and put pressure on them, before the man’s easygoing smile had tightened, and he’d said, “Now, Nathan, if you would?”

The boy, with the power to give absolute commands, like Valefor had entered Herb’s range even as Enter manifested, charging the boy, who called out, *“Sleep!”* and everything had gone dark.

When he’d woken up, he’d felt weak, heavy, and was strapped down on a table. Instantly, he’d tried to shift forms, but the power wasn’t there, *Enter* wasn’t there. For half a second, the Stand started to manifest, before a cold feeling lanced down his spine and the Stand disappeared as quickly as it started to manifest, not quite real.

The feeling hurt, but it wasn’t the pain that made his power shut off, it was something else. The top of his head felt warm and cold at the same time, a faint breeze blowing against skin that should’ve been covered with hair, but something else, hot and wet, was on the top of his head and down his neck, like a mullet made of microwaved bologna.

“Ah!” a young girl’s voice said nearby, and he felt his stomach drop. “You’re awake! I’ll go get Jack!”

The sounds of small feet ran, leaving Herb alone in the cold room, able to see the edges of several computer monitors set up nearby. Struggling, even stronger than a person should be, he couldn’t get out, and this time, when he tried to call Enter, nothing happened, the cold feeling in his spine throbbing. Weirdly, enough, he didn’t feel panicked. It just. . . didn’t feel real. He thought he’d gotten past it, but, well, he hadn’t.

Soon enough, Jack Slash arrived, walking right up the table Herb was strapped on.

*Oh, okay, there’s the panic,* Herb noted, almost clinically, as his heart started to thud in his chest. This was *Jack Slash*. And they’d fucking *blindsided him.* And, the worst part, Herb knew *exactly* how he’d done it. The other man’s power had a range in *miles*, and had him before he even knew what he was doing.

*Well, I fucked this up too,* Herb thought, knowing he wasn’t going to get out of this. The only comfort he could take out of this was the fact that it’d *only* been him that’d been caught. *Fuck, Bonesaw’s gonna turn me into a fucking puppet, and Lee’s* *gonna have to kill me,* he thought despondently. He’d *tried* to be there for his friend, tried to help, but, like everything else, he’d made mistakes there.

It was weird, his body was going *nuts*, but his thoughts were weirdly clear, like he’d dropped all the way through panic and came out the other side. Not that it was going to help.

“Hello there,” Jack had smiled. “This was easier than I thought it’d be.”

Herb wanted to scream, to cry, to beg, but that’d never worked *before,* and it sure as hell wasn’t going to work on fucking work here. He opened his mouth to reply something like ‘Yeah, I was surprised too’, but instead all that came out was *“AAAAAAAAAAHHHH!”*

Okay, maybe he wasn’t as calm as he thought.

From behind Jack, a small girl with blonde hair up in ringlets walked over, and injected something into his throat, not cutting off his scream, but made it a whisper. “Yelling at people is *rude!”* she scolded, before walking out of Herb’s sight, the man unable to move his head to watch her.

Jack Slash just smiled. “Don’t worry, poppet, it’s a common enough response.”

“Doesn’t make it any less rude,” the girl muttered off to the side, clinking sounds coming from her direction as she did. . . *something.*

The psychopath in Herb’s view nodded as Herb ran out of air, his scream petering off pathetically. “You’re not wrong,” Jack agreed, before looking down on the tied-down man. “But you’re not here to scream. Though that could be fun. No, you’re here as *bait.*”

*. . . No.* Herb tried to move tried to escape, tried to pull away, but got nowhere, the cold feeling in his spine, which had faded, refreezing as Enter was only a wisp before it was gone.

“And you’re already wiggling like a worm on a hook!” Jack smiled, clapping his hands together in delight. “Good effort, but not quite *that* literal. No, I need you to call Boardwalk! He’s *very* hard to find.”

*“w-why?”* Herb rasped, confused.

“Because he stole my Mousey! And stealing is wrong!” Bonesaw pouted.

Jack smiled at his ‘daughter’, before adding, “And he’ll help us get to Vejovis. Something about that Hero. . . he just rustles my jimmies. And I prefer my jimmies *un*-ruffled. It’s far more fun to rustle everyone *else’s*,” the slaughterer sighed, idly pulling a knife from a pocket, and flicking it from finger to finger, the blade expanding and contracting as he did so.

“You ever met someone you just didn’t like?” he asked conversationally. “Everyone does. You just meet the person, or see them on tv, and think: that guy right there? That guy’s a fucking *dick.*”

*“Don’t swear!”* Bonesaw rebuked the older man, a scalpel being waved in his direction *right in front of Herb’s eyes*.

“Sorry, dear. Now, I’m sure you have that happen, Break. Everyone does. You just see someone and go ‘I want to wreck that person. I want to take them, and turn them around from boring stick in the mud, into something *interesting’.* Hero. Villain. Rogue. Person hiding in obscurity. *Especially* the last one,” Jack mused. “Something about them just. . .” he glanced in Bonesaw’s direction. “*annoys* me. And you know what?”

*“what?”* Herb whispered, when it became obvious other man waiting for his input.

*“You* annoy me,” Jack revealed. “And Boardwalk. And Vejovis. And Æonic as well. The last two never leave, though. And are. . . *gratingly* well-defended.”

*The Flaw,* Herb realized. *That Flaw we got before we ever got here.* They’d picked it up, needing the points for extra powers, but the Slaughterhouse 9 had *never come to Brockton Bay*. They were *ready* for them to come. . . so they hadn’t. Instead, instead he’d walked right into them.

“But you’re going to help us get to them,” the leader of the Slaughterhouse 9 smiled. “Isn’t that *great?*”

*They were going to torture him,* Herb realized. *They were going to torture him until he broke. Until he did* ***anything*** *to make the pain stop.* And part of Herb was terrified that he *would*. *. . No,* he resolved, staring the man in the eyes. *No. He’d fucked up so often, made so many mistakes, he wasn’t going to screw up here too.*

He wanted to scream, to cry, to beg, but instead he glared at the psychopath. *“I’d rather die,”* he told the man.

If anything, Jack’s smile broadened. “I know! That’s why we don’t need your compliance. We just need your *voice*. Poppet, you ready?”

“I am, Jack!” the girl smiled, walking up into Herb’s vision, holding a scalpel and a syringe of something that bubbled. “I’ve never made an external Larynx before!”

And Herb knew he’d made, yet another, mistake.

<AB>

Lee had shown up, as Boardwalk, and been dropped in seconds even as he burned with eye-searing radiance, which, when it faded, showed the small forest of spikes that had sprung up, growing in every direction around the two members of the Slaughterhouse Nine. Lee’d only been there for an instant, but he’d still been within a *hairs-breath* of victory before he’d been put down, just like Herb had. Both he and Lee had immunities to so much, even if Herb’s were borrowed from his Stand, but neither of them had immunity to Masters. Herb had thought that Lee’s hatred of them hadn’t been fair. Had been him being paranoid.

He hadn’t been paranoid *enough*.

And now he had to watch, unable to make a sound, as Jack laughed. “Well, *that* was certainly closer than I would’ve liked. It appears that we’ve been denied some *need-to-know* information, Bonesaw. That’s *definitely* Boardwalk, but those powers were *very* much those of that Case 53 they’d picked up. Unless she’s not one at all.” The man looked at the hero’s fallen form and sighed, “Well, they say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Speaking of, Poppet, go get your Auntie Siberian, would you?”

“Yes Jack!” the insane little girl smiled, carefully picking her way around the spikes that had grown towards the pair from every direction, having to clamber over a few of them, careful of the razor-sharp points. After she left, the man took out a knife, steel shimmering as it extended outwards. Reaching out with it, he moved the sword-like blade, only for it to be caught on seemingly nothing at all.

“Clever,” the man mused, glancing back as a naked woman walked in, pure white with black zebra stripes crisscrossing her form. “Be a dear and clean this up. Then undress our guest, would you?” he instructed, William Manton’s projection nodded, stepping forward and through the spikes which all snapped off in an instant as she shuffled around the room. Making a wide circle, she walked through whatever Jack had hit with his knife without issue, finally reaching down to grab Lee.

And then she was destroyed.

Like a soap bubble popping, The Siberian disappeared, as did Lee’s costume, leaving the man naked as his cellphone, a couple of Marked knives, and everything *else* in his pockets clattered to the concrete floor of the warehouse room they were in, the man thankfully in one of two empty spots not covered in fallen steel spikes, the other being where Herb was still restrained.

There was a moment of silence.

“Well. . . I suppose that did the trick,” Jack commented blandly, as Bonesaw turned her back to Lee, squealing something about the sight of a ‘naked man’ not being appropriate for young girls. A moment later The Siberian came running into the room, face in a snarl and eyes darting around. “Good of you to rejoin us,” the leader of the Slaughterhouse 9 remarked. “Like I said, grab him and put him up there so Bonesaw can get working. I don’t want any more surprises.”

The Projection nodded, leaping over the cluttered ground and grabbing Lee’s fallen, naked form. This time, nothing happened, and he was lifted easily, plopped down onto the operating table, and secured with the black synthetic straps which had held Herb an hour or so ago. Bonesaw skipped out of sight between the fallen spikes, excited, as the boy looked on nervously, disappearing back through the doorway at a negligent wave of Jack Slash’s hand.

Herb could hear the sound of something *wet* from behind him, and the Biotinker came back, holding the nightmare offspring of a mechanical horseshoe crab and a mutated brain. As she did so, Jack Slash, smiling to himself, pulled out a differed blade, and took it to Lee’s head. Unable to do anything but watch, the demented barber removed his friends hair, and a fair bit of his scalp as well, blade coming away bloody after the first few passes.

Through it, Lee remained asleep, until Jack stepped away, with a formal bow, letting Bonesaw work. As the small girl, with Siberian’s help, fitted her creation onto his friend’s head, Lee’s eyes flew open with an inarticulate scream of pain as he bucked upwards, snapping through the thick cables holding him down, arms flailing. However, before he could escape, the Siberian was on him, holding him down with ease even as the man tore bits off the table pressed down into.

*“****N̶̨̙̣̯͠O̸͍̬͒͒̈͝Ọ̸̬̜̏͐͠͝Ơ̴͍̳̬͔̤͘!̶̢̮̠̀͋̄̂̕****”* Lee screamed, fighting against the projection holding him down as metal burst from every pore, glowing brightly, dark blue fields on the floor appearing and sending Jack and Bonesaw flying backwards, meaning they were *not* in range as blood-red stars started to pop into existence, knives made of dark blue ice started flying in every direction, and more metal spears started growing from the floor around him. Clouds of inky darkness blossomed mid-air, from where Lee’s things had dropped a black wooden humanoid form grew, starting to charge the Siberian, the air seemed thick, almost smothering, and below it all a heavy, bone rattling sound started to fill the air with rising intensity, before the brain-spider flared with a dark blue. As quickly as it had started, almost all of it disappeared. The frozen blades still stuck out of the walls, the iron spikes were still present, and, statue-like, the humanoid form clattered to the ground.

Bonesaw and Jack Slash both stared at the unconscious form of the Hero, both bleeding slightly from ice-knives that had cut them, but not penetrated, both of their eyes wide at what had just happened.

“What the hell’s going on?” a young man with flaming hair demanded as he burst through the doorway, a middle eastern woman hesitantly following. They both froze as they took in the devastation, though neither of them sent a second glance Herb’s way.

“I lost control of my glass,” the woman, *Shatterbird*, stated, fear in her voice, and Herb remembered her medium of control was Sound. Something that Lee had complete control over. He’d actually been waiting for her initial attack, screaming across the city, to start the counter-attack that’d eliminate a good number of their opponents at once.

A plan that wasn’t going to happen now.

Because of him.

“Bugs started trying to get in,” the flame-man said, fire receding to show crimson hair. “Slash, *what’s going on?*” he repeated, frowning as he looked around.

The Leader of the Slaughterhouse Nine stood up and dusted himself off, his shirt torn and bloodstained, as the surprise and terror which had been writ-large across his features was replaced with cold disdain, but under that simmered a boiling anger, ill-repressed. “Poppet, how’s the power-suppressor?”

Bonesaw, who had been shaking, looked to Jack and pulled herself together. Hurrying over, half the displays on the devices around the table were destroyed, but she went to one that wasn’t, working quickly. “It’s strained, but holding. I, maybe, okay, yeah, it won’t last as long, but it’ll keep. But, it. . . it shouldn’t be. Wait!” she called, running away and coming back with something that was a cross between a video camera, a mutant piglet, and thirty dollars of plumbing supplies. “I. . . I don’t *understand!*” she muttered to herself, scanning Lee’s head again and again. “Why am I getting so many *different* readings!?”

It was Jack Slash who answered, slowly striding over to Lee’s unconscious form, as if he didn’t have a care in the world. “It’s simple, Bonesaw. That’s because this is Boardwalk. This is *also* Vejovis. This is *also* the one who killed Nilbog. Hell, this is probably *also* a half dozen capes we’ve never even heard of.”

“But, Jack, one person can’t have that many powers! Or if they can, they shouldn’t have them all at once like that!” Bonesaw objected. “Even Eidolon and the Fairy Queen can only have *three* at a time!”

The man gave his adopted daughter a surprised look. “Are you saying you can’t figure out how he did it?”

The small blonde girl stared back, almost offended, before she blinked a wide, manic grin spread across her features. “Oh! Oh yes I can! Thank you *so much*, daddy! You bring me the *best* toys! Oh, I’m going to have ***so*** much ***fun!***”

Jack Slash smiled, patted her on the head, and turned to look Herb dead in the eyes, as the other man could do nothing but hang uselessly from his chains, unable to even scream. “Yes,” the leader of the Slaughterhouse Nine agreed. “Yes we are.”