

May 4th, 2011, Wednesday, 9:07 AM.

The last week had been a busy one, our villain team had hit multiple targets, none of which were anywhere near as large as the warehouse had been. Lung had been taken down by team one, but almost immediately after he had been taken into custody he had managed to escape again, on the *same* god damned day, it was ridiculous.

Oni lee had been wounded during the same battle, apparently shot in the leg by one of Coil's men. The teleporter had fled the area before anyone could stop him and I was thinking about trying to track him down, just to make sure he didn't break all of them fucking free again.

Team one had more or less been completely destroyed, but they had managed to squeak out a win in the end, a pyrrhic victory I think it was called. Bug-girl, Bitch, and a cape called Labyrinth had managed to get out mostly unscathed, everyone else was in various states of injure or dead. There was a rumor going around that the crazy Bug-girl had cut out Lung's eyes.

Cut out his *eyes* man. Fuck.

I had tried to warn Lung the first time I met him, I hope the guy got his dick back at least, I was once again reminded that if I ever had to go up against that chick I would be taking absolutely no chances. She had somehow managed to take down fucking Lung of all people, *twice*. I wasn't going to underestimate her, I couldn't grow my eyes back after all.

Kaiser had gotten messed up during the fight and had to be carried away from the battle unconscious while Menja had been stabbed in the stomach by Lung. Both of them were apparently critically injured, although with Othala on their team they would be fine in a couple of hours at most.

Newter had been sliced nearly in half but had managed to walk away from the battle in good spirits, with some help from his teammate. There were two of Coil's guys on that team as well, one of which had fallen off a building and broken his leg.

Skidmark had almost his entire left side burned badly, he was able to walk away from the battle unaided, but he would be hurting until the Merchants could find a healer that would treat him.

Mush had been killed.

Lung had gone straight through his trash armor and burnt him alive, all the more fuel for his fire. it sounded like a horrifying way to die, I had never spoken to the guy before, so I didn't have an emotional connection to him, which somehow made me feel guilty that I didn't feel bad at all.

Bakuda had managed to flee from one of her workshops, the one that team two had raided, there were no outstanding injuries of note and they had taken all of the normies out with relative ease.

I was kind of pissed off, team three, my team, had not gotten into a single cape fight during any the raids, it had just been normies with guns and knives. Most of them had started to run away at the first sign of trouble after we systematically conquered their bases one by one. We had gotten some stacks of cash and even more drugs out of it though.

I had spent the last few days preparing to take another crack at getting Squealer to make me something cool, I now had a total of seven crates of varying drugs, and a shit load of other random stuff that I could use to bargain with. If she refused to make me anything this time, I was seriously considering just kicking the Merchants asses and then forcing them too. The only thing holding me back was that Mush had died pretty recently, and I knew how that felt.

The news was currently showing clips of Vista and Clockblocker talking with a rather attractive reporter. Despite everything we had done in the last couple of weeks, the Wards were actually the heroes of the hour, and for good reason. The Wards had come in hot, taking both Lung *and* Bakuda into custody about two hours ago. I was honestly surprised that it had been the Wards that had done it and not the protectorate that had gotten them. I didn't even think they were allowed to go after dangerous capes willy-nilly. Hopefully, this time Lung and Bakuda would remain captured because I was getting sick of their shit, to be honest.

The Wards had even managed to stop a big-ass bomb from killing us all as well, the final fuck you from Bakuda. It had supposedly been powerful enough to crack the entire city like an egg, they had saved all of our lives, and we didn't even know that we had needed saving. A fundraiser was being prepared, hosted by the PRT to hand out awards to the heroes who had participated in taking them down, it was taking place sometime tomorrow.

I would make sure to thank the Wards next time we ran into each other, one good turn deserves another.

May 5th, 2011, Thursday, 11:37 AM.

There was a breaking news report taking over all of the local news stations, apparently Medhall a medical company had been bombed a couple of hours ago. A bunch of Empire capes had immediately shown up in the aftermath to fight off an unknown group of people that had perpetrated the bombing. There was gunfire, explosions, and a bunch of shenanigans going on.

I swear to god if Lung and Bakuda had managed to break out again I was going to lose it, I was distracted when my phone suddenly started ringing.

"Hello?" I said curiously.

"Urchin," Coil's cool voice came over the line. "I have another job for you."

I shot up from the couch in excitement. Had Lung actually broken free again? Did another millionaire need me to find his lost watch? Was there a tragic Nigerian Prince that needed my help to receive his inheritance?! The suspense was killing me.

"Sure," I said with forced calm. "What have you got for me?"

"The Merchants have been making nuisances of themselves in the docks," Coil said calmly. "I would like you to get rid of them."

Get rid of them, huh? The truce certainly hadn't lasted for awfully long, a single day after they had been caught and everybody was already at each other's throats. What did he want me to do exactly, I certainly wasn't going to kill them?

"Get rid of them how?" I asked seriously.

"I am *well* aware of your non-lethal policy, Urchin." Coil chastised. "Hand them over to the PRT or one of the hero teams, as long as they are no longer around, I will consider the job complete."

I felt a bit guilty for doubting him, the job sounded easy enough, it looks like I was going to be squaring my debt with the Wards earlier than expected and pushing my Squealer recruitment pitch up the timetable.

"Alright, it's just Skidmark, Squealer, and Trainwreck right?" I asked for clarification. "Or do you want me to get all the normies too."

Coil paused for a moment before speaking.

"Trainwreck was a double agent." Coil said evenly, his tone measured. "I called him back to base yesterday."

I blinked tried to wrap my head around that for a second. Coil was a fucking badass sometimes, I kept forgetting but the dude seemingly had a plan for everything, I tried to think back to when Trainwreck had joined the Merchants. It had to have been over a year ago now? That was some insane long-term planning, who else was secretly working for the guy? Coil's power *had* to be some type of Thinker ability, something to do with planning? Like that guy from Boston, what's his name, the guy named after those squishy hand piano things. I wonder if he had any plans about me, setup for years down the track.

I felt a sudden uneasy feeling creep up on me.

"Skidmark and Squealer are all that remain of the Merchants." Coil explained, "Do not be overly concerned with the unpowered members, they will quickly fall apart without leadership, you may handle them as you wish, but they will be dealt with them in time."

This didn't sound like an exceedingly difficult job, at the risk of sounding arrogant neither Skidmark nor Squealer really stood a chance against me, I scratched the back of my head, feeling a bit guilty because of Mush. I wonder if Coil would be pissed off at me for recruiting Squealer, he did say as long as they were 'no longer around.'

Did that count? Fuck it.

"Hey Coil, mind if I recruit Squealer?" I asked curiously, the worst-case scenario was that he told me to fuck off.

Coil paused for a long moment, as he always did when I asked something that he wasn't prepared for.

"I see no issue with that." Coil said bemused. "I would prefer if this job was completed within the next three days."

"I'll have it done by this afternoon," I promised, before hanging up.

I finally got to hang up on *him*, revenge tasted glorious.

I was headed for the rooftop.

May 5th, 2011, Thursday, 1:49 PM.

Kayden had met me halfway, with her white bodysuit hidden underneath her street clothes, a simple combination of a hoody and jeans. I was also dressed in plain clothes, only my costume was stashed inside a duffel bag that was slung over my back. We had been walking around the Merchants part of town and keeping an eye out for anyone selling on the streets.

"What made you decide to go after them today?" Kayden asked quietly.

If we ever managed to find one of these assholes we would need to duck into an alleyway to change clothes, I hadn't really explained much to her yet, I suppose saying that we were going to go kick druggie asses was pretty vague, I had better clarify.

"Someone hired me to do it," I said honestly.

Kayden studied me quietly for a moment before nodding.

"That's why you came after me as well, isn't it?" Kayden asked easily, and I nodded.

"It was another job, but I messed up." I admitted, "I was only supposed to get in contact with you apparently, I thought I was supposed to recruit you."

I shrugged at her, it was an easy mistake to make, honest.

"You are such an idiot," Kayden said in disbelief.

"That is *no* way to speak to your boss, missy," I said snootily.

"What is our actual goal today, boss?" Kayden said wryly.

I preened at her words, nobody had ever called me boss before!

"Scatter the Merchants essentially, which won't be awfully hard. Mush is dead, Trainwreck quit the team yesterday." I rattled off, "Skidmark should still be injured from the battle against Lung."

Kayden hummed thoughtfully and we fell into silence for a while. Barely a minute later we came across some shifty looking dudes hanging around another guy who was sitting in a car. One of them had his head at the window, chatting with the guy inside. We ducked into the closest alleyway that was out of sight and Kayden spoke up after a moment.

"You didn't say anything about Squealer," Kayden said pointedly.

I watched as she pulled her jeans off and then started work on her hoody, I was abruptly reminded of a similar scene from years ago, with Belle. My eyes stung at the memories and I jerked my head to the side to squash the feeling, it only partially worked. Kayden was watching intently with a strange look in her eyes.

"We are going to recruit her for the Full Frontals," I said with forced calm, staring hard at the brick directly in front of me. "I want someone on the team to make proper armor, and between the two of us I think we can curb any of her bad habits."

Kayden remained silent and I slowly managed to regain my composure and began stripping off my street clothes, I noted idly that Kayden didn't bother turning around, the total perv.

"I see," Kayden said quietly, "Are we actively looking for more recruits?"

I wondered about that for a bit, what was the end goal here? I hadn't actually sought to make a team again, it had just kind of happened on a whim. It was my responsibility now though, so I couldn't just avoid it, but I don't think I should just make a snap decision about it either though.

"Good question, I actually haven't thought about it." I admitted quietly, "We should sit down and discuss what we want out of this team sometime soon. I'm not against making it even bigger though if that is what you want."

Kayden looked pretty happy with that, for whatever reason, I wondered if she was used to being in a leadership position? Was she chafing under my iron rule? I finished putting my costume on and cracked my neck.

"Did you make a lot of the decisions when you were in the Empire?" I asked curiously.

Kayden turned and looked out of the alleyway for a moment before turning back.

"Not often," Kayden said evenly, "Kaiser liked to be the one in control."

"How diplomatic of you," I said dryly, before starting down the alleyway.

Purity snorted at the comment before falling in step beside me, as we reached the mouth of the alleyway she abruptly started shining brightly. I sent a multitude of wires underneath the car, looping around the wheels before lifting it an inch off the ground. One of the guys noticed us and tapped his friend on the shoulder, who looked pretty worried at our appearance.

The car abruptly tried to speed off with a roar of the engine, only it didn't move an inch and the tires just spun fruitlessly above the ground. The guys all jumped away from it thinking they were about to be run over. I strode up to them and then hopped up onto the front of the car before taking a seat.

"Alright, you all know who I am-" I said pleasantly, but I was immediately cut off.

The guy in the car started beeping his horn furiously, I turned to look at him, but he didn't stop. I generated a wire hand before slapping him across the face with it. He stopped hitting the horn and began trying to wrestle with the hand, I made another hand and let him go at it, hopefully, he would tire himself out.

"I don't know who you are, sorry." A rather short guy said, strangely polite.

I made a noise of disbelief, before pointing at myself and back to him several times. Polite Guy shrugged apologetically. What the hell?

"How about her?" I demanded, pointing at Kayden.

Kayden glowed brighter for a moment.

"Yeah, that's Purity." Polite Guy answered, looking worried.

I couldn't believe this.

"This is *such* bullshit, I have been kicking ass's in this city for *years*! Come on man!" I pleaded.

"Sorry, man." Polite Guy said politely.

Fuck.

"Fine," I said sullenly, "Forget it, the point is I'm going to kick the shit out of all of you unless you take me to the Merchants."

They shuffled around for a bit, sneaking glances at each other, and looking worried.

"I'll let you guys go afterward, don't worry," I said honestly.

Polite Guy looked at the other two and waved them off before nodding at us.

"Sure," Polite Guy said carefully, "Follow me, please."

Five minutes later we were standing out the front of a dilapidated warehouse, there was a smaller building attached to the side of it, the warehouse itself had a massive pull-down door on the far side. I sent Polite Guy on his way and he disappeared quickly around the corner.

"Should we knock?" Purity asked wryly.

I looked at the door to the building and shrugged, Kayden must have taken that as a yes, because she blew the fucking door up a moment later. I barely managed to not jump from the suddenness of the action. I gave her the evil eye from behind my mask, but she couldn't see it, so the effect was kind of ruined. I could hear yelling coming from deep inside the building, mostly from the warehouse. Some people started rushing outside to see what had happened, so I ganked them with wires and put them across the street.

The massive warehouse door started to rise quickly and once it was fully open a massive monster-truck-thing came tearing out of the warehouse. It had thick rusted metal sheeting bolted overall it, and other bits of spiked metal covered the sides. It looked like absolute shit, I *cannot* believe she did this on purpose, I mean it looked pretty dangerous with all the rusted metal, but still. There was even a large mounted chain-gun on the back of it and Skidmark was trying to angle it down towards us.

I didn't give him a chance, I lifted the back wheels of the ground and wrapped another cable around the turret, forcing it up into the air. Skidmark immediately starting shooting the shit out of the sky above, and the noise was one of the loudest things I have ever heard, an unending stream of bullets. The front wheels started smoking as the care fought to move forward, now aimed directly at us. Squealer was sitting in the front seat looking at us in shock.

I waved to her before ripping the turret from its mounting, I lifted it up high into the air and Kayden blew it out of the sky with a blinding blast of light. I yanked Skidmark off the back of the truck before flipping the truck onto its roof, he was screaming threats the entire time. I shook the car until Squealer fell out of the side window and landed on the concrete with a shout of pain.

The wires on Skidmark abruptly starting flying off towards the warehouse despite my control, Skidmark was dragged along for the ride and ended up smacking face-first into the wall. His screaming immediately stopped, so I guessed that he was unconscious? I lifted the truck high into the air and Squealer stared up at it in horror.

"Squealer, I'm disbanding the Merchants," I said apologetically.

"You can't disband a gang you *aren't* in you fucking idiot!" Squealer shouted furiously.

Heh, she was mightily pissed off, while I was admiring the sheer anger radiating off her I noticed that she had a large cut on her arm, and her face was covered in bruises. I frowned

thoughtfully, I hadn't done that not unless she was prone to bruising literally within seconds. Guess she had been in another fight or something recently.

"Squealer, congratulation on joining our team!" I said cheerfully, before clapping loudly.

I looked over at Kayden and she sighed in resignation before clapping a couple of times. Squealer looked like she was about to explode at this point, so I tried to really sell it to her. I smashed the truck into the ground a couple of meters away from her before lifting it up again and then smashed it down another two times. Squealer covered her head with her hands as parts of the truck broke off, and it started to deform from the force.

"What do you say? Ready to join the best team in Brockton Bay?" I said happily. "The benefits include not getting handed over to the Wards to spend the next thirty years in prison."

I looked at Kayden again, this time she joined in without more prompting.

"Wow! That's an *incredible* deal, Squealer!" Kayden said loudly, with about zero enthusiasm.

Squealer ripped her taser out of her pocket and I slapped it out of her hand. I shook my finger at her like she was being naughty, and she made a sound of incredible frustration.

This wasn't working. I sighed before lifting the truck up high into the air again.

"Look, you can either spend the rest of your life in prison." I said seriously for the first time. "or you can continue to live your life as a successful, badass, and rich Tinker on the strongest team in Brockton Bay."

I motioned to Kayden and she cored the truck with a blinding flash of light, a metal tunnel of metal had been carved right through the middle of it, now only connected by a few resilient strips of metal, I snapped it into two pieces before dropping it on either side of Squealer.

The remains of the truck smashed into the ground with the sound of tortured metal, and I strode over to Squealer.

"Last chance," I said honestly.

Squealer glanced over to where I had Skidmark tied up for a long moment.

"Okay." Squealer said finally. "I'll join."

Kayden held out a hand to her and Squealer looked at both of us before reaching out and taking it. Purity pulled her up to her feet and I clapped her on the shoulder.

"Good choice." I said cheerfully, "Come on then, let's go drop Skidmark off and get on with our lives."

I lifted every single merchant into the air and pulled Skidmark over towards us as well. I made a platform for Squealer to stand on, giving her the royal treatment as the newest member of the Full Frontals. Purity followed us up into the air, and we left the Merchants base behind us.

"Are we really going to the Wards?" Kayden asked quietly, as she pulled up beside me.

"Yeah." I laughed, "I owe them one, so this should clear that debt up."

Kayden just shook her brightly glowing head, Squealer was gripping the platform tightly and looking down at the city with wide eyes. We made our way slowly downtown heading towards where the PRT building was located, along with the Wards HQ that was hidden somewhere inside. As we approached I noticed that there was a hive of activity going on, someone had called ahead about us, I guessed, we weren't exactly being stealthy.

As we came down to the street level we found the Wards assembled out the front of the building and PRT officers with foam sprayers were lining up behind them. I waved happily as I approached, and the Wards shuffled around a bit. I stopped around where I thought the max range was for the foam guys, I wasn't going to take any chances with that crap.

"Hey, guys!" I said cheerfully, "Thanks for stopping us all from being killed by that bomb!"

I started slowly moving the normies down towards the PRT officers closest to the vans, I left them tied up but with a thin enough wire, they would be able to cut it easily enough.

"Those are all the dudes from inside the Merchants base, I have no idea if they are members or not, but you'll figure it out," I said sheepishly.

"I'm sure you all know Skidmark, the leader of the Merchants," I said as I floated him down to the Wards. A

I placed him a few meters away from Clockblocker before quickly retracting my wires, not today buddy. Clockblocker looked at Aegis and got a nod, so he strode forward to tap Skidmark once on the head before retreating again.

"Lung killed Mush a week ago and Trainwreck quit the Merchants a while ago as well." I said pleasantly, "So you don't get the whole collection, sorry."

"What about Squealer, you have her right there," Shadow Stalker said forcefully and pointed at the woman in question.

I shook my head at the Ward.

"Sorry, Squealer has decided to join my team. So I'm afraid I can't hand her over." I said apologetically. "They will have to do."

"She's a criminal." Shadow Stalker said harshly.

I blinked at her from behind my mask.

"So am I, dumbass." I said condescendingly, "I hope I don't have to tell you I'm not turning myself in either?"

Shadow Stalker took an aggressive step forward and I noticed that her costume was actually pretty awesome, she really looked like a death eater.

"Anyway, thanks again for saving our asses from the bomb!" I said happily, before suddenly flying backward away from them.

I saw Aegis put his hand up to his earpiece, and the other Wards were looking at him for instruction. Would they attack? I didn't think they would, they had a bunch of potentially hostile people in their custody now, it would be a bad move. Aegis removed his hand before shaking his head to his team, they watched us until we moved behind a building and started pouring on the speed heading away from them. I was laughing when we touched down on the other side of the city.

Mission accomplished, Coil would be pleased.

Author Notes(old):

This feels a bit off, I think it's the pacing.

Author Notes (11/05/2020):

This was only a partially written chapter until today, it has been a couple of months since I've posted anything a lack of motivation mostly, but here the finished chapter. I will put the next one out whenever I finish it.