

Diana had called me that night at Brook's, waking me up from a very cuddly sleep. She'd been worried, and the simple fact that she'd been worried had warmed my heart. She'd even come to pick me up from Brook's house, saying it was too late for me to be bussing around anywhere. So, reluctantly, I'd said goodbye to Brook and left to wait out front.

It was now Saturday, and I was nervous as hell. Maddy had been a bit squirrely with the time over the last few days, but we were finally going on a date! I was super excited, and I hoped things would go back to normal between us. Things had cooled down a little since we'd agreed to this. So that was another source of anxiety.

I was one hundred percent anxiety right now actually. Nothing but nervous jitters, causing me to drive Diana up the wall.

"It's okay Elsie. I'm sure things will be fine, but if they aren't, you know that you can call me and I'll be right over there to pick you up. No hassle, we'll have a calm, chill night with pizza and a movie or something," she smiled, pulling me in for a hug that was probably as much about trying to keep me from literally bouncing around the room as it was about comforting me.

"But I want this to go well!" I complained into the hug, wrapping my arms around her larger frame.

"I know, and it will. Have you picked an outfit out yet?" she asked in a tone that might be meant to soothe me.

"I tried to pick an outfit, but I ended up just trashing my room and now there's clothes everywhere and I don't know what I'm going to wear and I think I'm going to cry!" I whined, feeling tears build in my eyes.

"Well, let's go see about that then. What type of outfit do you think Madeline would be interested in?" she asked, taking my hand and pulling me towards my room.

"I don't know... she liked all my early outfits," I shrugged despondently.

We entered my room and looked around at the bomb site I had turned it into. Clothes were everywhere, some having been thrown randomly in a fit of frustration. I knew I was acting like a bit of a brat, but I was so wound up and nervous and, honestly, a little too close to a panic attack for my liking. I just really wanted this to go well. Even staying as amicable and cheerful friends

would keep me happy, because it had felt like things were incredibly weird between Maddy and I all of a sudden.

“So she appreciated the skater style you were running around in then? But something a little nicer than that, because you’re going to a restaurant,” she mused, staring around at the mess. “Did we end up buying those black jeans you liked? I can’t remember.”

“Um, yeah we did... they’re... oh, they’re hanging off the dresser,” I said sheepishly, moving over to grab them.

I held them out to her, and she took them and stared thoughtfully. Then she walked over to the bed and swiped all the clothes that were on it onto the floor, then placed the jeans neatly on top.

“Do you have those black skate shoes we got you?” she asked next, looking all business as she gazed around in thought.

“Yeah. They’re at the door. I kinda got them all muddy last night running around,” I said sheepishly.

“You’ll have to clean them then. Go do that while I think about this some more,” she smiled, ruffling my hair.

I did as she asked, my cheeks tinged with a little bit of red as I felt a happy warmth in my heart. It was nice to have an older person give a shit about me. It almost felt like she was being a parent to me and... well I wasn’t used to it, for one. The simple way she was providing help without guiltting me for it or demanding something in return... it was going to make me start crying all over again.

I took my muddy shoes to the washroom and got to work, scrubbing them clean with a brush. The mud had caked on and so I had to get a little forceful. Lucky for me, my powers took over and they were clean in no time. Towelling them dry was relatively easy as well. Thanks powers, good work buddy.

The work, plus Diana taking charge, helped to ease my anxiety and by the time I returned to my room with the washed and dried shoes, I found Diana had an outfit ready on the bed.

“Hello, I see you have the clean shoes. I suggest going and taking a shower before you put them on thought,” she told me with that small smile of hers. She didn’t move her face much when she was making expressions in general, but they always felt like so much more anyway.

Maybe it was because the emotions behind them were real and genuine, unlike the too-large fake smiles my father used to flash at people he wanted to impress.

I nodded, and placed my shoes on the ground, then raced off to have a shower, scrubbing my body to within an inch of its life and using the nice scented soap. I washed my hair too, drying it afterwards with the blow drier. Blow dryers were great. So were detangling brushes.

I returned to the room nice and fresh and ready to put my Diana approved clothes on. I still had a few hours to kill before the date, but I wanted to see myself with the outfit on *now*. So I put it on as carefully as I could, letting my powers do most of it so I didn't mess anything up.

When I was dressed, I slowly approached the large mirror and looked at myself carefully. I had the shoes and black jeans on from before, but she'd matched it with a navy blue waistcoat. I'd have balked at the waistcoat if not for the fact it was especially tailored for women, and fit me particularly well. She'd been insistent on getting it right when we bought it. As such, it hugged my curves perfectly, and I smiled just looking at how this traditionally male piece of clothing made me look so feminine. Fuck yeah!

Under it I had a plain white dress shirt with a short button down collar. The key to the shirt, I'd been told by Diana, was to leave it untucked if I wanted to go for the scruffier look that was close to my normal skater look. My hair was messy and everywhere, but that was fine, it also fits the formal-scruffy look. I wonder if there was an official name for this look other than just, "messy butch".

It looked like something Brook would wear just for everyday use actually, and I grinned as I imagined her in a similar outfit. Damn... she'd look so good in it. For some reason I imagined her standing next to me in a matching outfit, using my shoulder to lean her arm on while she gave a cocky eyebrow raise to me in the mirror. I grinned and looked down at my shoes awkwardly. Fuck I was so weird, but it made me smile anyway. I was allowed to think of things and people that made me smile, right?

Anyway... I looked good, or I hoped I looked good. It was only meant to be a casual kinda thing. The restaurant wasn't expensive or posh or anything either. Ugh, my heart kept remembering what was about to happen and skipping a beat or two in terror. Please stop Ms Heart. You cause me enough trouble already, thank you very much!

Okay... deep breaths. Everything will be fine... you just need to chill out for the next like, two hours and then it's time to go. You can chill out for the next two hours right? Do your makeup?

I was not able to chill out for the next two hours. My makeup was done quickly, much to my disappointment, then I crawled up the walls and paced and almost threw up from my nerves. Gosh I hated my anxiety. This was so not the end of the world, but try telling my terrified animal brain that. Instead, it was acting like the fate of the entire human race hinged on this date going well.

I'd opted to take a taxi to the restaurant rather than get a lift from Diana, mainly because it just wasn't cool to get a lift from whoever was acting as your parental figure. High school dramas on TV taught me that. It just wasn't done.

The taxi pulled up outside, and I sat there in the back seat and had a meltdown as quietly as I possibly could. The ride was already paid for, but I was paralyzed. I couldn't move.

"You okay there miss?" the kindly old driver asked, looking back at me through the window thingy that separated us.

"Yeah," I squeaked like one of those honking rubber chicken things being tossed in a blender.

"Right. You need a minute then?" he asked, clearly not believing my lies.

"Please..." I said in the same desperate tone of voice.

The pressure to get out of the cab made it all even worse though, and I threw the door open in a burst of speed and slammed it maybe a little too hard. Didn't matter, I was out, I was in front of the restaurant, now I just needed to wait for Maddy to arrive. I was a few minutes early, so it might be a little bit. She always arrived on time though, so I was confident it wouldn't be like, ages and ages.

I leaned against the window and checked my phone for the hundredth time. I'd texted her a few times today, only getting a quick and curt reply in the morning, followed by radio silence. I should probably have called her or something, but I was far too nervous to do that. Gosh, get yourself under control Elsie!

My problem was that things had been really strange between us for a few days now, and I was getting really weird vibes about the whole thing. Like, you know when you can just tell by the most tiny and subtle of changes in someone's behavior that something was wrong? No? Maybe? Anyway, that's what I felt from her. A vibe. It was a, *"Sorry, I'm really busy and I really don't give much of a shit about you right now,"* vibe. It made me nervous.

I tapped my finger against the window of the restaurant as I waited as a way to get my nervous energy out of the way, and almost jumped out of my skin when someone from inside banged on the window next to my head. I looked back to find a grumpy old man frowning at me from inside. Oops, I must have been tapping and annoying him. I stopped the tapping and moved a little ways down the wall, desperately trying to control an impending heart attack. Damn, fuck, please get here soon Maddy!

I watched as the time slowly, agonisingly ticked down towards seven o'clock, the time we'd finally agreed on. When it hit seven on the dot, I looked up and around. Strange, no Maddy yet. I kept glancing around, then down to my phone, then up again. Finally, I flicked a text to her asking where she was and then waited some more.

Every minute that went by after seven, my heart and mood dropped lower. At fifteen minutes past, I finally gathered the courage to call her. The tone went through and connected to her phone, and it started ringing. Nothing. It rang, and rang, and rang, then went to her chirpy voicemail. I frowned at my phone as her pre recorded message came through. Something about how happy and carefree she sounded in that message tanked my mood even further.

I decided to check the news, on the off chance that some hero fight had happened or something that might delay her, but there was nothing. The headlines were full of Vulpatrix and Nightbinder showing up in New Zealand of all places. Things seemed really hectic down there, so I guess they could use all the good Emerged they could get, what with the invasion and all. Wait, were those giant robots? Why was there a giant robot fox person duking it out with a huge angry lizard thing?

I turned my news app off. That was too strange and too much crazy for my anxious mind right now. When it got to half an hour past the time we'd agreed to meet, I was starting to feel despair and more than a few tears welling in the corners of my eyes. Maddy wouldn't... she wouldn't stand me up would she? She at least gave enough of a shit about me to cancel if she didn't want to come... she wouldn't leave me standing out here...

I tried calling again, and again, and again. Every time I heard that insultingly happy voicemail message, more tears began to flow. Why the hell wasn't she answering? This sucked. It was

typical though, no one really gave a shit about me. They didn't care about Coby before, and they certainly didn't care about Elsie now. Had anyone ever actually loved me?

It was time to call Diana. She seemed like she might actually care right? With shaking fingers and falling tears, I went to her contact entry in my phone and called her. I put the phone to my ear and waited for it to connect. It rang and rang, and I didn't even notice it had gone to voicemail for a moment or two, simply because I'd been hitting voicemail on Maddy's phone so much I'd gotten used to it.

Diana didn't answer.

My arm dropped limp to my side. Diana didn't answer. She didn't care. No one cared. No one cared except Brook. Only one person on this entire shitty ball of fucked up rock actually loved or gave a shit about me. Not my Mum and Dad, that was for sure. They hated me by now. My brother had fucked off to do his own thing without so much as wave in his rear view mirror. Now the two new people in my life that I'd had high hopes for were nowhere to be found. I should just—

My phone started buzzing in my hand, and I yanked it up to look at the screen. Diana was calling! I smashed the receive button and put it to my ear.

"Hey Eloise! Sorry, my hands were covered in pizza sauce when you called. How's your date going?" she asked in what seemed like the most happy, casual and calm voice I'd ever heard. Maybe it was the fact that it felt so out of place when viewed alongside my emotional state right now, but I fell apart.

I wasn't even able to get words out. Crumpling into a sitting position on the pavement and started bawling my eyes out. I sobbed and sobbed and sobbed. Dimly, I heard her drop what she was doing, put the phone on speaker and start moving around. I heard the car start, I heard her driving, and I heard her calming words. She kept me on the phone until she arrived.

She stepped out of her car and walked over to me, her eyes full of care and worry, and to my surprise, scooped me up off the pavement without any trouble. How was she this strong? She carried me to her car and gently placed me in the passenger seat, then buckled me in.

We drove home in silence, I was still in a post meltdown haze, and Diana wasn't saying anything. We pulled into her house a few minutes later and we sat in the car for a few moments, Diana still wasn't saying anything. She seemed really cold right now. Had I upset her?

Without a word she got out of the car and stalked towards the door with me stumbled after her, my anxiety spiralling into ever deeper depths as I watched her ram the keys into the lock and turn them. I'd never seen her angry like this. Why was she angry? I didn't want her to be angry.

We made it into the entrance hallway before she stopped dead in her tracks, her back to me. Wait, was she glowing? No, she wasn't glowing. She had smoke... no... cold mist? Moisture was billowing off her like she was a smoke machine. Was she Emerged? On no, what was she going to do to me?

Almost in an instant, her arm froze over in a flash, turning into a huge spike. Then she screamed in rage and spun, twisting with terrifying grace to put her frozen spike of a fist viciously through the wall like it wasn't even there.

She tore it out almost instantly and pointed it at me, saying in a seething voice, "Why the fuck does everyone keep hurting you? Can they not just give you a fucking break for one week? One day? I look at you and I see so much trauma, and I want to break the vows I made as a Hero and kill the fucking lot of that family of yours. And now the girl you were interested in goes and does it too?"

Wait... the ice... a Hero? No way. I hadn't been dropped on her doorstep that night! She'd carried me home, because she was... Levice. She was Levice! Oh my god!

"You're Levice!" I blurted, much of my anxiety disappearing as I stared at that spike of ice in awe. Then I grinned at her, feeling strangely giddy. "My new Mum is Levice!"

"New Mum?" she asked, her anger faltering as she blinked it away and looked at me.

"No I mean... um..." I stammered, realising what I'd just said.

"No that's... an accurate description of how I feel about things," she said in an awkward but tender tone. She looked down at her ice covered arm and seemed to will it away. It drifted away in a haze of mist until it was just her arm again, no angry ice spike.

"Really?" I asked, almost hopefully, pleadingly.

"Yeah... I just... I feel very protective of you. Can we uh, can we hug?" she asked, smiling that little smile of hers. "Then we can have that pizza and watch a movie?"

“Yes! I cried, throwing myself into her waiting arms.

Despite being the flying ice lady hero, she felt very warm as she wrapped me in a protective hug. Someone did care about me after all! There were two people who cared in this world! And two was twice as many as one!