

The Darridge Affair (Alex)
Chapter 2
By Draconicon

Once they had the papers filled out, minus a full super-name - Alex couldn't think of one, and according to Hearthhome, they weren't going to push it for now - they left the main office and went down a few floors to the fitting rooms. The chameleon was still slightly in a haze about what had almost happened to him with the rioters as well as being in shock that he wasn't going to be arrested for what he did back home, and he barely paid attention to where they were going. All he knew was that they walked past constantly-changing bits and pieces of architecture and decorations, the interior of the Super Club obviously being decorated by every member to some extent.

He was finally brought out of it when they reached the second floor. Hearthhome extended one spindly hand to the door of the fitting room, pushed it open, and -

“Oh, Daddy, so good to see you.”

And perhaps the most flamboyant voice that Alex had ever heard came through the door, followed by strings of purple silk running down from a puffy pompom of fur around a pink wrist. He stared for a moment, his eyes wide as a poodle stepped out of the room, draping himself around the bumblebee.

“Oh, dear, Daddy, have you come to free me from this drudgery? I hardly have a moment of creativity anymore. Nobody *new*, nobody interesting. Ah, please, Daddy, let me loose upon the city again? I want to paint the town -”

“Red?” Alex suggested, aware his cheeks shared the same shade at that moment.

The poodle and the slightly discomfited bumblebee both turned to him at the same moment. The poodle, scantily dressed in nothing but a jockstrap and silk streamers, turned to him with a considering gaze.

“Pink, darling, pink, but a good try.” The poodle hummed, stepping forward and circling the chameleon, throwing one of the purple strands he wore around Alex's chest and yanking him backwards. “Hmmm, poor balance, and *dreadful* sense of proportionizing. Those shoulders are hardly the right size for those hips, and that *ass*.”

SMACK!

The chameleon jumped forward at least a few paces, yelping at the sudden spank. He rubbed his rump, only for the silk streamer to pull him back. He whipped around, finding himself face to face with the poodle.

“Oh, but such interesting eyes. Can you truly see in both directions at once?”

“Um, uh, yes, but - oh god.”

“Mmmm, I’ve never designed for someone with a face like this before.”

As he was poked and prodded, Alex could feel a very volatile set of emotions coming from the poodle. Not at all dangerous, really, but *so* strong. They were changing, bouncing, going from the utter depression that the canine had been feeling - a sense that hadn’t been feigned when they opened the door - to excitement, and now to befuddlement and frustration, and then -

“Eureka!”

“Uh, uh, Hearthhome, he-ulk!”

Yanked off his feet by the eager poodle, Alex found himself not just tugged out of the hall, but into the fitting room. Shoved onto a podium that lit up beneath his shoes, he tried to step down only to be met with a pair of sewing shears pointed right at his nose.

“Stay put, darling; I want to get this right.”

“Uh...uh...”

“Oh, don’t worry so much. I’m going to make you look FABULOUS.”

The poodle’s sheer forceful presence was enough to stop the chameleon in his tracks, and he slowly moved back to the middle of the podium. He didn’t dare move from that spot, and looked up at the bumblebee in the doorway, hoping for some sort of -

RIIIIIP!

Alex’s mobile eyes suddenly stopped in their tracks, flicking down and trying to look around the sides of his head. The chameleon had never, ever, *ever* been stripped in front of other people like this, and the embarrassment pouring through his head and heart was just on the verge of breaking free. The poodle looked down, then up, then down again. As the canine circled him, Hearthhome looked like he was on the verge of collapsing against the doorway with giggles, though he was thankfully big enough to block the exit from anyone that might peer in. Alex tried to bring his hands towards his crotch to hide -

“No, no, darling, I need to see *everything*. Goodness, did you know that you were that well-hung? Is that your power, dear?”

“Mr. Fabulous -”

“Ms. Fabulous, Daddy, Ms. Fabulous today. I’m feeling my feminine side. Goodness. You really have so much to -”

“Ms. Fabulous. You’re probably going to give him a heart attack if you keep this up.”

“Oh, must you take away my fun, Daddy?”

“I’m afraid so. Let him have a break; he’s been through hell getting here, and it’s probably not going to get better.”

“Well, at least he can rest knowing that this latex abomination is in the fires of HELL from now on.” Ms. Fabulous tossed it over his shoulders, leaving it in the corner of the room. “Or, the trash. Same difference. Now...how to properly show off *that* bit of your anatomy, darling...”

“Ms. Fabulous...”

“Fine, fine. Alright, dear, what’s your name?” the poodle asked.

“It’s, um, Alex.”

“Alex? Alex...That’s a very -”

“Ms. Fabulous.” Hearthhome finally stepped through the door, shutting it behind him. The poodle whipped around, looking the bumblebee in the eye, and for the first time, Alex was able to cover himself properly. “I told you, he’s had a very bad day. For now, let’s skip the judgmentalisms.”

“Daddy, I was only playing.”

“I know, but he doesn’t. He’s new, and he needs soft handling for now. Okay?”

“Oh, alright, alright. But just for now, until he knows me.”

The bumblebee nodded, and the poodle turned around. Alex could sense the un-said annoyance at his hands blocking the poodle’s view to his crotch, but the pink canine stretched his arms out and cracked his knuckles.

“Let’s see what we can do for you, hmm?”

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Twenty minutes later, Alex walked out of the fitting room with Hearthhome, trying to pull at the crotch of his costume again in a vain attempt to flatten out the rounded bulge that the costume created. It was definitely higher-end material than he was used to working with, with a primary green as the main color and a deep, dark gold color running along his arms and middle. He would have liked it if it hadn't ended up as a near-target mark over his heart, or as an eye-catcher to draw the view to his crotch.

"Nnngh...this is uncomfortable..."

"Just as long as you keep the embarrassment to yourself right now," the bumblebee said at his right as they walked along. "We'll get it adjusted in a week's time, after Fabulous has had their fun."

"Why do they get that privilege?"

"Because they create all our costumes from scratch. That's their power. The fact that the costumes are all bulletproof and fireproof tends to make it worth going along with it for a little while."

Alex looked down at the costume again, trying to get used to the way that it clung to him everywhere. He felt a bit chubbier than he had in the other costume, and for all that the previous one had been a little tight in the crotch, this one felt almost painted on down there. True, he didn't exactly have his dick flopping around or anything, but...well, it was hard to get used to it just being there, hanging out, showing off to everyone that happened to look.

His cheeks burned as he looked down and away as they passed other supers in the hall. He was already getting a blast of their emotions as they walked by. A lot of curiosity, some annoyance at a new guy, some frustration at the rioting, some spikes of lust here and there that did not do him a lick of good: he groaned, trying to ignore it all as they kept walking along.

"Where are we going?" he muttered.

"To your room."

"I get my own?"

"For now, yes. You might have to room with someone else if we get more supers than I expect, but for now, you have your own room."

"I'm gonna need it..."

"I'm sure, all things considered."

"Wha - not like that!"

“I’m just saying, Alex, you have options. You - oh, dear. You don’t need me saying that right now, do you?”

“Nooooooo.”

The chameleon’s cheeks were about as red as they could be, and the red was spreading up his eye stalks and down the back of his neck. He had a hint of a grip on his powers right at that moment, and he honestly didn’t know how much longer he could keep that grip if he kept getting teased.

Thankfully, the bumblebee understood. The comments stopped, and they walked in silence to the fourth floor. They walked down what felt like a dormitory hall, something like what he had seen in college. Each door was decorated with a different symbol, some of them painted on, others etched in. Some of them were actually replaced with metal doors, something that drew his eye as they walked by and left him curious enough to get Hearthhome talking again.

“Some of them are gadgeteers. Some powers come out as super-geniuses, though...well, we haven’t told them that we haven’t done any testing yet. Some *are* really smart, but the others...”

“Fast mind, no substance?” Alex asked.

“Pretty much, yes.”

“I get it.”

“Anyway, this is your room.”

His room wasn't particularly large. In fact, it was closer to a hotel room than anything else, and there was nothing besides a bed, a dresser, and a bathroom attached to it to be seen. There wasn't even a nightstand for an alarm clock. Sure, there were outlets for chargers and things like that, but as for anything that might have been useful? Nothing. Not even a hint.

Yet, at the same time, that made Alex feel a little bit better. It felt like a room that would either be used for a short time before moving him to something better, or somewhere that he could completely personalize. Either way, it felt better than moving into a room that belonged to someone else and showed it. He nodded, stepping inside and running his hands along the wall.

"I noticed that you didn't bring much with you," the bumblebee said. "Do you need to go on a shopping trip at some point?"

"Don't have the money for that," Alex said absently. "Didn't have a job before I left, and spent everything getting here."

"So, in terms of belongings..."

"Just the stuff in my backpack, really."

He was answering without thinking, and oddly enough, he was feeling ever more relaxed. He walked over to the bed and sat down, slowly laying down and staring up at the ceiling. The mattress was an amazing change to the hard seats of the bus and the barely softer seats on the train, and it almost made him conk out right then and there.

"You really did leave it all behind, didn't you?" Hearthhome asked.

"Yes. Yes, I did."

"No regrets?"

"...Not compared to this."

"It's not much. People hate you out there."

"Yes. Out there."

But not in here. Not where there were decent folks. Not where he could be himself without having to worry about being arrested just for an accidental flash of his power. Not when he didn't have to worry about being killed just because he made a stupid mistake or because he experimented a little bit. This place, this little club, was a safe place, and that was worth all the angry mobs in the world to find.

Hearthhome muttered something about letting him rest, and Alex nodded absently. He stared up at the ceiling for a bit longer, hearing the door close, and then he closed his own eyes. For the first time in days, he let his powers expand, allowing his awareness to spread out from where he lay. He still kept hold of the part that would transmit feelings out from him, but he allowed that chunk that picked up on other people to do what it did best. He allowed it to pick up what they were thinking, feeling, doing, and he braced himself for the deluge.

One floor down, a cheetah, working on a machine and dragging her claws up and down the chassis. He felt the pleasure and the frustration blending together, almost a sexual feeling as she pushed whatever she was doing. Some puzzle, some feeling of insane happiness from working so long and hard on one thing, pushing herself to find the answer to a question that she didn't even know she was asking. That frustration built, but it added to the anticipation and creation of further pleasure, making her happy and angry in a way that was all too relatable.

One room over, someone was trying meditation, pulling at their emotions and trying to line them up in a row. He could feel the discipline, the pressure, the emphasis on control that came as the different feelings jumped and expanded and did all kinds of things to try and slip their bounds. He felt sparks of them, little bits and pieces, but nothing more than that.

Through the Club, he could feel more and more sensations, feelings and emotions pouring through because nobody knew what he was just yet. Nobody knew that they were hosting an empath that would be able to pick up on their feelings for real. They'd start clamping down on it, or trying to, but there was no holding back how you felt. There was no way for someone to be a complete dead zone in his awareness. There were those that didn't show reactions to their feelings, who were able to suppress the biological effects, but unless someone was a robot - a real, emotionless robot - he would still pick up on their feelings and what it meant to them.

Oddly, being by himself, he could feel all of this and not feel overwhelmed. To him, this was almost therapy. This storm of feelings had been overwhelming, once, but months of using his powers had gotten him used to this part. When he didn't have to focus on himself, when he just had to be part of this tapestry of emotion, it was almost therapeutic.

He breathed out and lost himself in that sea of feelings, drifting off to sleep.

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It was late at night when the chameleon woke again, and while he was tired enough that he could have rolled over and gone back to bed, he realized that there was something else on his radar. Something that was roaming through the streets outside the Club, something that was putting off a series of emotions that were completely alien to him. Not absent, but most certainly alien.

The chameleon sat up, moving from his bed to the window. He cocked his head, looking through the glass barrier to the streets. If he hadn't had the feeling of those emotions in isolation, he might not have been able to spot their source, but after a few seconds, he finally did.

It was a strange creature, one that walked on tendrils rather than on legs. It moved one, then another, and another, and it took him a moment to realize that they were not always extended, but rather pushed out from time to time, created and then pulled in when they were needed and not needed. His eyes widened as he kept watching, seeing it move along, occasionally lifting part of its body and sniffing the air, creating heads - yes, heads, not just one - and looking around.

The more that he stared, the more that he felt from it, almost like it was pulsing with one feeling. Hunger, but not for food. For something else, for...for something that he didn't entirely understand. But he panted for it, his mouth hanging open and his eyes fogging slightly.

"Nngh...ah...ah..."

His fingers curled against the window, and his costume felt tight, tighter than it should have been. He gritted his teeth, trying to look away, but that feeling, that *need* that was coming off of that creature into his head kept pulling him back. Alex wanted to reach out, wanted to do something to soothe that hunger, and he -

"Alex."

It was a short, sharp statement of his name, and it shocked him enough to make him look away. The feeling of fear followed, and he turned to see -

"Step away."

It was Flock. He remembered the bird saving him earlier, and he took it. Stepping away from the window, he pulled his awareness back in, taking deep breaths as the avian pulled the window closed, leaving him in the dark again, leaving him with his head back on his shoulders.

"What was that?" he asked, gasping for breath.

"That was from the Sunken Town. They sometimes come out at night; why most of us stay indoors after midnight and before five," Flock said, shaking his head. "Hungry things, but pretty harmless for most of us."

"Not harmless..."

"You felt something?"

"Mmm-hmm."

As a matter of fact, he still did, and it was getting harder and harder to ignore. Not because of the creature, but because of how familiar and yet strange that feeling had been. Hunger, desperate hunger, but not for food. It was a different sort of sustenance that the creature craved, something that was more like...like intimacy, like sex, like companionship, all kinds of things that it just wasn't getting anymore. It craved it, and it searched for it, day in and day out, wandering around for something, anything.

"What...what do they do if they find someone?" Alex asked.

"No idea. But one thing's for sure. If one of them manages to swallow you up, I don't think you'll ever be seen again."

"That bad?"

"That bad."

"...And they're out every night?"

"Not always, but at least a couple times a week. It's worst on the new moon. Something about a moonless night pulls them out in droves."

"Jesus..."

"Heh, don't go saying that too much. Some of our members come from Sunken Town. Well, the demon side of it, anyway."

"...Demons?"

"Welcome to the freak show, Alex. You'll get your name in the morning." Flock patted him on the shoulder. "Sleep well."

The End