

## A Bio 59

### Chapter 59: Nightmares and poor decisions

A nightmare, this is what it was, she could still feel the skin under her nails, the bleeding wounds on her face. The dread and all-consuming terror, the fear, the shame, the guilt...

More than anything, she could see her worst nightmares coming true. She...had made a mistake, no, not only one, several. Eloise had been happy when they told her she might get to keep the spot and that she would no longer be a substitute teacher if she managed to keep her students as well-behaved as they had been.

It had been quite the surprise to arrive after the fiasco that was the visit to the R&D laboratory where they found Alexa, Eloise had thought that they wanted to keep her happy so she wouldn't run at the first news station. And she was okay with that, so long she could keep doing her job and making sure 'The Kids' were okay, she was okay with it.

Keeping 'The kids safe' what a joke.

Her first mistake was dismissing the dangers an untrained Core User could cause. Just because Melissa was keeping the class normal and happy didn't mean that she knew what she was doing; worse, the girl probably didn't know how she was doing it.

Eloise didn't have experience with the intricacies of a Core User. What she knew was that the Heroes on TV made it look so easy. They just flew around and fought against Villains, neither hurting civilians most of the time, unless they walked into the line of fire.

The line of fire of The Scorchers.

Most had a tenuous rule: leave civilians alone unless they were needed for their crime, keep them alive, and that ensured that the heroes didn't go too hard on them. Go over the line? And you get other Villains going after you. Or so they said.

Eloise saw that as a joke, what kind of Villain would listen to those rules? What kind of Hero would let a Villain leave because they played nice?

No, she didn't understand why they set those rules or how they seemingly enforced them. All of those who found a dangerous Core Power should report them to the law enforcers, or if they didn't trust them, to the nearest Minion they saw working for an approved Villain gang.

Ridiculous, why would she go and report that a five-year-old had awoken a power that they deemed dangerous?

Eloise hadn't thought about it, no...She hadn't felt inclined to report Melissa. Why would she? She was a good girl.

The disgusting feeling of her own thoughts twisted almost made her puke. Melissa had twisted her mind and the minds of those around her, all so they could play a happy classroom, with her in the middle, all of them feeding emotions into her so she could practice.

The multiple games they played and the movies they saw were all fueled by her own curiosity, seeded into her mind: 'What will the kids feel if we watch a horror movie? A comedy? A love story? What if we play this? What if we eat that?' It all made sense now.

“What are the [Rules of Engagement]?” And then her second mistake stared at her.

Alexa, the girl she had suspected was an abused girl.

The same girl she had asked Eleanore to search for, the same girl her friend had found, Eleanore liked to pretend she didn't care, that she didn't understand how Eloise felt about abused kids, orphans, and her kindred spirits.

Eloise knew better. The Woman had probably cashed and owed plenty of favors just to convince her bosses to allow the orphanages to be set up in the heart of Vulcanus' Territory. And that was the kind of favor her friend owed now because of her whims...because of the interest she felt toward Alexa.

She had been unstable at the best of cases, why had she jumped at those conclusions? There was evidence about it? Yes, but just as how bruises and light clothing could be explained by an abused family, it could also be explained by a roudy girl escaping home to see something interesting.

Of course, Alexa looked anything but that.

Even at this moment, when the girl's empty eyes stared at her...Even as something under her clothes seemed to grow...Even as her fingers turned from those of a human into something similar to claws....

Even as her teeth seemed to grow fangs...

“Alexa? What do you want to do? Why are you asking me this? What....What is happening?” She heard her own voice tinged with fear, the sweet taste of the emotion she hadn’t felt in years, not after she left her last adopting home. Not after she left the orphanage because she had become an adult and didn’t want to spend a single second longer in the orphanage.

“I need to understand the [Rules] of this [Testing Room], if possible I want to [Terminate] the [Hostile] so I may [Eat] and earn new [Data] to further my main [Directives].” Alexa answered in a cold almost mechanical voice. “Also, I am not the [Entity] you have come to know as Alexa; you may refer to me as [P4].”

Terminate?

“How can you help Mama? How can you help Papa?!?!?” Melissa screamed at the back, the girl was surrounded by her other students, all of them seemed to be in a trance, was she playing with their emotions too?

Was Melissa decreasing their sense of fear? Increasing their curiosity toward a determined action? How did her Core Power work? What were the rules? What was she even doing with their mind...

“Ale- No. P4 you said? How did you help me? Why was I....hurting myself?” Eloise needed to know, she needed to know if what Alexa had done could be replicated on the other kids. Needed to know if they would...hurt themselves.

“[Human Entity Designation: Eloise Baker] you were deemed the [VIP] that held the [Rules] within this [Testing Chamber], your [Brain] Integrity was compromised, so we cleansed all the altered [Brain

Chemistry], reset it to the [Original Blueprint], fixed all the [Damage] to your [External and Internal Shell].” Alexa answered mechanically, as if what she had done was normal, casually altering the brain chemistry of someone else? Healing all her wounds? What kind of Core Power would even allow that? And at this moment she was even changing her own body....Oh...

“You are a Shape Shifter? Did you use that to modify my body?” Eloise asked as realization hit her, but even so. How could it work? What kind of Shape Shifter would even...Ah...Eleanore had said they suspected that Alexa was some kind of genius and that she would have a Tinker Core of some kind.

This wasn’t in the realm of a normal tinkerer’s core thought; it was way beyond that and in the realm of monsters.

“Affirmative, we are capable of easily changing shape and form of our flesh and of that we are interacting with.” Alexa answered as her cold, uncaring eyes turned to evaluate the other kids in the classroom; Eloise could feel the dread climbing at her back as Alexa assessed the other kids. “Amending [Combat] situation, adding 38 extra [Hostiles]. Please provide [Rules of Engagement], or we will proceed under the premise that the [RoE] are the average ones.”

“No!” Eloise quickly screamed, feeling her dry lips crack a little, “No, please...Don’t.”

She couldn’t even utter the words, what kind of crazy life had Alexa lived? That she would casually disregard the lives of others as nothing?

Right, Eleanore had said it hadn’t she? That what they found about her past was enough that she would save a recording of Alexa’s parents being tortured by villains. Her sweet childhood friend wishing to hurt someone should have rung a bell, if only she hadn’t been so mind-addled....

“Please provide the [Rules of Engagement] in that case. One of our new [Prime Directives] set up by [Eleanore] includes ‘Prioritize your own life above others.’” Alexa said in the voice of her friend. It was eerie, seeing the mouth of a young girl produce the same tones and inflection as her friend, while her normal voice was so...detached.

“Okay, okay, that is a good one. Always keep that one,” Eloise said, trying to think how to deal with this. Could she convince Melissa to release the other kids?

No...

The girl was a mess, her eyes were red as she had cried and she had a crazed look as she seemed to be trying to keep her grasp over the other kids...Actually, why wasn't she trying to control Alexa? Why had she released control over her?

“Why isn't Melissa controlling us?” Eloise asked before continuing, “I need to know if this affects the....‘Rules of Engagement’ that you want.”

“[Hostile VIP Designation: Melissandra Singh] has been trying to tamper with this [Skinsuit] as well as [VIP Designation: Eloise Baker]; measures have been taken to prevent such intrusion,” Alexa answered, pointing at her own head. “This [SkinSuit] brain chemistry has been temporary stopped, brain normal functions must restart within 15 minutes or a new [Brain] will be needed.”

.....Eloise didn't know how to react to that statement.

“As for [VIP Designation: Eloise Baker]’s brain chemistry, a temporary disruptor system was left within [Skull Cavity], time before retrieval is needed, 39 minutes - 52 seconds.” Alexa finished her answer.

“You left something in my head?” Eloise asked as she touched the back of her head with one of her hands, she didn’t felt anything different.

“Yes, it is located at the base of the neck. In case the host is unable to retrieve it, a simple operation should suffice. It is in the form of a small [Bio-Organic] sphere 3 cm wide. “ Alexa said uncaringly, “[Rules of Engagement]?”

“Right, okay. First, you can’t kill anyone.” Eloise stated first, for a second, she thought that there had been a slight annoyance on Alexa’s face, but the feeling vanished as soon as it came, “Second, you must help the other kids.”

That was important, she couldn’t have Alexa becoming a Villain, it was hard enough as it was with Melissa, Eloise wasn’t sure if she could even help the girl. At least they could attribute Alexa’s Core as if it had awoken at this class thanks to the stress.

But Melissa? The amount of damage she had made into the other kid’s psyche....

The amount of damage the girl had done to her, Eloise would have nightmares for days as it was, she was not looking forward to the night terrors she would probably have after today...

“Third, you must ensure Melissa doesn’t hurt herself or anyone else.” Eloise was aware that she was placing too much restrictions in Alexa, but...Heroes always managed to win the day right? “Fourth, you

must help Melissa, she is a good girl. She is only in a dark place, I'm sure that if we talk it out everything will be okay..."

Eloise felt something on her face so she checked with one of her hands, and found tears on it. She was crying, "Please...Melissa is a good girl, I'm sure of it, even if she twisted our view of her...she only needs help...I...I don't want her to suffer as we did...as you did..." Eloise was half sure that Alexa's past was way more traumatic than what she had imagined before, the stance.

The disregard for human life.

The disregard for herself, not referring to her body as that, but as a mere...skinsuit.

Was that what her body was for Alexa? A mere...suit? Something she put on to pretend? How did she look in reality? Was...was that pretty and bright-looking girl she saw this morning a disguise? Was this the real one? Eloise didn't know.

"...[Acknowledged]." Alexa said in a small voice, her eyes shifting ever so slowly, from disinterest to calculating, she could almost see small numbers on the blonde's eyes, "...starting combat. Discarding [Lethal] subroutine."

Alexa's nails dislocated from the blonde girl's hands. For a second, Eloise saw the pink fleshy skin under the girl's hands. Even if the wounds closed themselves a few instants later, it was enough to make her stomach roll at the sight.



“Starting new shift, increasing flexibility in joints, decreasing density within bone. Preparing knockout strategy.” Alexa didn’t finish speaking when she started moving. Her stride was not only swift but also calculated.

Within seconds she stood in front of one of the nearby and biggest students, she quickly threw a jab at the other kid’s torso, Eloise winced at the sound the kid did when Alexa hit him, the kid however didn’t loose conscience and only keeled over.

He seemed to be mostly fine, even if he was gasping for air. Did Alexa empty his lungs? That surely was one way to deal with it.

“YOU LIED TO ME! IF YOU COULD FIX THE FEELS YOU WOULDN’T ATTACK JIMMY!” Melissa screamed at the back, one gesture of her hand was all it took for the other kids to turn and look at Alexa. They all as one started moving towards the blonde girl, the little girl she had tied the hands off. The little girl whose survival she reduced because she didn’t want to have the blood of others in.

“Be careful!” Eloise screamed as Alexa was being surrounded.

“Heyo~~~~ “ A new voice chimed in in this maelstrom of kids attacking others, “Is this...1-C... oh wow, were you guys playing or something?”

A young woman showed up opening the door to her classroom, “I’m Skye...I wanted to present myself since I may come to pick up Alexa.....” The Woman’s face turned serious as she looked at Alexa being swarmed by the other kids and how she dodged the lunges and hit them back, ensuring they never hurt her.

“...What the f#ck?” The black-haired young Woman said as she turned to look at Eloise.

“[Coworker Designation: Skye], please be advised, hostile [Core Power] is in effect within the area, current listed effects include: [Mental Tampering], [Emotion Tampering], [Unconfirmed Emotional leech], [Emotional Injections].” Alexa spoke without missing a breath or stopping moving, “Caution is advised.”

“Oh, only that? Let me rephrase it then, “the young Woman said as she closed the door. "F#CK!"

The Woman raised a finger at Eloise, and she felt both shame and curiosity, shame because this new Woman was probably going to admonish her for putting one of her new students at risk. Was she going to admonish her for housing a Core User? For not reporting it? For not running away and asking for a Hero?

“Ughh....fine, hey Alexa! Can you like, make sure not to break any bones? I could probably keep them down or something.” The Woman asked turning to Alexa.

No wait. Wasn't she surprised that Alexa looked like that? She hardly looked....normal. Ah, right. Eleanore had said that they were sure that Alexa did not have a Tinker Core, but she never stated that she had no core at all.

“Can you help them? Are you a Heroine? Do you work with Lena?” Eloise asked, turning to look at the young Woman. Perhaps she could save them?

“Oh right, civvies, man...Cerberus will be mad at me.” The young Woman sighed as she turned to look at her, “I'm sorry, this is probably the worst first impression but I will need you to sleep.”

The next thing she knew was that she was getting drowsy. Was everyone a mind-core user?

What was that smell? She....was feeling.....so....tired.....

The next thing she knew was that she was laying in the floor, the world turning darker.

“Well, at least this thing worked as expected, so which one are you? You don’t talk like Alexa, or Alexa... or Alexa...Man, we need a good way to differentiate you all.” The Woman spoke cheerily as the sound of a wind turbine sounded at the back. “No wait, should I call you Rhapsody right now?”

Rhapsody? What?

Was Alexa really training to become a sidekick? But she lived within Vulcanus' area of influence.

“I’m P4; you may refer to me as such. As for the other [Human] sides of me, you may discuss it with them. I am to assume you will be of assistance?” Alexa spoke at the back.

Eloise was fighting to keep awareness of what was happening; she was responsible for that much.

“The [VIP Designation: Eloise Baker] is still conscious. Your dose of sleep drugs needs to be tweaked. An extra dosage of 100 mg is recommended.” Alexa spoke mechanically.

“Ooooh, you can even detect these? Man, you are scary, especially with the whole Mechanical Assassin vibe you have going.” The other Woman spoke back as Eloise felt the sweet smell increase once more. She tried to hold her breath, but the mysterious gas entered her lungs through her nose anyway.

She would need to speak about manners with Alexa later.

If she woke up to find her classroom in order. And then? Then she would need to apologize to Alexa, to Eleanore, to Melissa...And she may need to find a way to help Melissa. The memories that had been either repressed or dismissed came forward, all the evidence, the days Melissa wore baggy clothes that covered her arms and her legs.

She was probably hiding bruises, she should have known, she had done the same before. She truly...wasn't suited to be a teacher after all.