

...Yeah, that's it...

There it is...

Oh, God...



The “Judgment” sign emitted a strong blue light, the glow of its gothic lettering bouncing off the rain puddles beneath her heels. It was a very quiet and very dingy alleyway, bereft of any patrons going in or out of the ominous back alley entrance. She looked at the sign, then back down at her hoodie, then back at the sign again.

This is definitely the place, she thought. God, what a shithole. I can't believe this.

She made it this far - right up to the front entrance - and yet all she wanted to do was go home. She wanted absolutely nothing to do with any of this, whatsoever. It wasn't her. In a way, Rene was desperate enough to believe that the curse would go away on its own if she just turned around and left, but she knew better. Being forced to solve a puzzle surely beats the hell out of having zero answers.

Rene stepped through stagnant street puddles, the chilliness of fresh water splashing against the bottoms of her heels. Every little crack and imperfection in the aging concrete was sensitive to her flesh, an ability she was still grappling with. The rain shower from earlier was brief, yet it was just long enough to treat her alien skin. The gushing rain drenched her flesh as she absorbed every bit of it into her body like a sponge. A burst of energy came over Rene, almost putting her into a good mood as she felt the water rejuvenating her system, but that wasn't bound to last.

It was a stressful last thirty minutes. Of all the places to be stuck in this body, she had to be right in the middle of a clubbing district. The alley afforded her some isolation, but she knew she'd have to go right back out and deal with it again. Inner City was absolutely brimming with nightlife.

“I love the heels!” Rene's spine tingled, peering over to a long line in front of a night club. Some kind of techno music was blaring from the entrance or whatever it was called. She waved back to wherever the voice emerged, wordlessly thanking the lady.

That was about fifteen minutes ago, right? She asked herself. Yeah... I need to appreciate this solitude for as long as I can. I'm sucking up attention everywhere I go like this.

She was *constantly* surrounded by people. It was back-to-back people. She no longer breathed air and yet still felt suffocated at times. She was never bothered by crowds of people until now. At the very least, nobody was blatantly laughing or reeling in cringe, but she could still tell people were watching. And judging. Everything about tonight depended on the integrity of this hoodie.

The entire bottom half of Rene was an attention magnet of its own. She was never much of a hosiery person, but after tonight, she had to start reconsidering her priorities: clearly, people *really* liked looking at them. Plus, being shiny and rubbery-looking went a long way to sexualize

everything about her physicality. That, and her mouth. People *really* got drawn to her mouth. On her way to the bus earlier, two little boys curiously approached Rene and asked where her mouth was, as if someone just ran up and stole it one day. Doing the best she could, Rene shook her head and shrugged, sharing an invisible frown. That was apparently a serviceable enough answer for the boys and they got off her case. So far, nobody ran up and pointed fingers and started laughing, but even the smallest comments always referred to her lack of a mouth. She was always reminded.

Ugh... I'm getting so weak...

The punk-esque lymental's worrying and speculating had exhausted her.

It's... too much...

She needed to conserve energy.

Follow instructions... Go to Judgment...

The simplicity in such a thought relieved her. It was much less stressful. It was all she had to focus on, anyway.

Rene bravely stood just a few feet away from the ominous entrance to the... *Judgment*. What even was this place? Was it a dildo shop or something? Or just a magick... place? Or a club? She wasn't sure. It was a quick internet search and a little dingy place called "Judgment" appeared. When she contacted the shop owner earlier, he didn't explain much about his services - he only mentioned that she needed to meet him as soon as possible. The second she brought up the "Judgement" sign on her body, there was no question that he knew something about her condition. That didn't exactly quell her anxiety.

This is a trap... She furrowed her brows. It has to be.

She took several more steps towards the door, her glistening hand reaching out towards the handle.

How is this anything else?

Another step closer. She was just a few feet away.

I'm such a dumbass for doing this. I need to leave right-

BOOMPH!

Rene flinched and jumped backwards, unable to scream out. As the door burst open, a jovial grin met her face. Fanged teeth grinned behind thick black lipstick.

“Hello, Miss Willows! Please, come in! I’ve been waiting for you!”

Rene’s lymphatic heart skipped a beat. Before she had the chance to protest anything, her confusion had already welcomed her inside. A crisp, cool air washed over Rene’s body as her eyes quickly adjusted to the warmer ambient light - a big contrast to the heavy blue glow in the street.

“Please feel free to follow me! I have many questions. The name’s Peyton, by the way!”

Only two sentences came out of this guy’s mouth so far and she was already done. He quickly jumped in front of her, strutting with a level of control and balance she never knew a man could pull off in stilettos. The flamboyant confidence radiating out of his gait made Rene feel less feminine in comparison. He most definitely exuded a level of knowledge over Rene’s situation that made her very apprehensive. She already didn’t trust this guy, but she had no choice.

Rene was now face-to-face with the inside of “Judgment”, which definitely confirmed her suspicion that it was a shop. Looking around, she noticed it was rather understated - far from the depressed backstreet shithole she was expecting. Instead, it was much more like those weed dispensaries near her old house, like a big hippie hangout scene, except instead of hippies, it was a bunch of alien sex weirdos. Rows of ingredients in jars filled the walls, storing every manner of herbs, spices, plants, seeds and more - all for spells, of course. Farther in the back, she spotted what looked like a bunch of halloween outfits, except they were all some variant of shiny, kinky and tight fitting. The effigy of a woman - perhaps a lymlinal - stood in the middle of the store surrounded by smaller statues, pouring out a blue mist. It felt like she could trip over something and incur the wrath of some ancient evil by accident.

Walking further inside, she felt her nerves mellow out. Rene noticed a lounge section in the corner of the shop - two lyminals were mumbling something to each other before getting up and leaving. Wait... *Were* they lyminals? They had the same shiny rendering as her own body, except with *really* pronounced lips, plus their skin tone was a little less monochromatic than hers and they could sort of speak. It reminded Rene of someone putting on way too much makeup, to the point of looking like a clown, except on purpose. She hated it.

Peyton approached the two. “Girls, we’re closing early! I have a special needs client!”

The two looked at each other, then up at Rene. It was like two goldfish staring back at her from inside a water tank, devoid of any existential thoughts. Their grotesque fat lips and brainless expressions made Rene want to commit war crimes, but that was for another day. They politely walked by her and left out of the front door. The whole store was now empty. A soft bossa nova tune churned over a ceiling speaker. Rene was beginning to feel like she was in a clinic and awaiting a horrible, inevitable diagnosis.

Peyton turned to her and slicked back his mohawk. She watched each spike flick perfectly back into place, gliding effortlessly between his fingers. He smiled, showing off a row of sharp teeth.

“My, my...” He crossed his arms. “Let’s see here... Spiked collar and cuffs, spiky hair, goth makeup, fishnets... Yup, that’s *more* than a little familiar.”

The manager couldn’t help but laugh a little bit at Rene’s expense, who was increasingly becoming more pissed. Despite being almost a foot taller, she wasn’t that far from kicking him in the face. Or somewhere else that was convenient for her height.



“Even the hoodie! I can already tell there was a struggle to get something in your wardrobe to work and this was your best attempt. Tell me, did “Judgment” continuously appear on your tops whenever you grabbed for them?”

...Yes. Reluctantly, she nodded, feeling more conscious about the logo imprinted onto her hoodie.

The manager's accent was a bit peculiar. It sounded American, but not all the way, like a British person came really close to imitating the cadence of someone born here but not enough quirks to where Rene wouldn't notice. She didn't think too hard about it.

"Has the name *Silenetta* come up at any point since you've been cursed?"

...She nodded again.

Peyton pursed his lips, a tiny grin forming on the end.

"Hahaha... Yes. Someone definitely played a good trick on you, didn't they? I would know..."

The lymlinal snapped his fingers, keeping his arms crossed. Rene's hypno eyes were drawn towards a glow on his chest followed by the fade-in of a word that was all too familiar.



"...because we're not so different."

He walked towards the front desk of the store just a few feet away, leaning against the wooden counter. Even as his demeanor darkened, he never lost his grin. The tall and lanky lyminal allowed Rene a full-profile look at his overall body.

“Encountered it three years ago or so. Once you figure things out, it gets a lot easier to control.” He pointed to his face. “Same with my big mouth.”

Rene watched him cross his legs beneath a long, constrictive dress that stretched below his knees. While he wasn't as exposed, she looked down at her own legs, then up at his - they were both ensnared in fishnets. He angled his stilettos a little bit, giving her a better look.

“I used to try wearing pants and shoes for a while, but I'd keep waking up in this. You just stop caring, really.”

Rene stared down at herself. She balled up her fists and stretched them back out. She felt... heavy. His voice sounded distant. Unimportant. The edges of her vision turned dark.

“When I heard you describe your condition earlier, I was beyond ecstatic. I just couldn't wait to-”

Peyton's attempt at consolation died mid-sentence. In that moment, the stress finally culminated into its highest peak. Two whole days of this shit just to hear this goddamn clown tell her it's as bad as she expected. It didn't fucking matter, anymore. Nothing mattered. She was done. Sprinting over to the lounge area, she plummeted down into a seat and sobbed.

Peyton frowned. “That could've gone better...”

He slowly approached Rene's direction in the lounge, but not too fast nor directly. This curse was far too much for one person to process all at once, and he had plenty of experience with that. The information had to be bled out slowly and with some amount of confidence on his end. It was also somehow not shocking that she found her way to Judgement - the Silenetta Blue Eyes curse had a way of uniting all of its users, or at least, the handful that existed. It wasn't some widespread thing to his knowledge. The “Judgment” shop was there to offer some reprieve for those dealing with exotic and difficult curses, most particularly being the one he and Rene had.

Peyton approached Rene and leaned down. The crying, even if it was dead silent, felt loud in his ears. He knew that “sound”, or rather, the absence of sound where it should've been. He made sure not to grab her shoulder or anything touchy yet - she needed obvious space, yet also someone who understood what was going on while dissolving that sense of isolation that was plaguing her mind. He wasn't sure yet how long she was dealing with this, but it couldn't have been for very long.

“It was a good thing you came here, you know,” he said. “You wanted to find help. I'm just about the best you-”

Peyton once again stopped mid-sentence. Staring down, he caught Rene pulling out her phone as she began nervously typing something. It was most definitely being addressed to him if the depressive wording was anything to go by. He raised a finger.

“Oh! Before you do that - try thinking of something.”

Rene turned around, completely distraught with tears. This was a woman at the end of her wits, completely mortified and humiliated.

What the fuck are you going on about? You fucking freak. Will you stop goddamn-

“Think of an object - anything.”

I... An object...?

She wasn't sure what he was going for, but she complied. What else could fuck up at this point?

.....Okay.

Rene thought of an apple.

“Now then - try envisioning yourself sending the thought of this object at me.”

She paused. Rene had trouble processing what exactly he was trying to get at, but she went along with the instruction, anyway. As if preparing a brain-powered catapult, Rene imagined the thought of the apple literally being shot out of her head and towards his face. Despite being such a silly visualization, Rene still felt something... click. It was almost tactile, like she could feel a distinction between the thought being in her skull and the thought escaping into society.

He raised his brows and nodded. “Ah! An apple!”

.....Huh.

“See? Communicating as a lymlinal isn't always hard. Just one of our many quirks. However, it only works between lyms, not so much with ordinary people.”

She rubbed the tears out of her eyes. Again, the stress, the depression, the anxiety - it was once again all being recycled and processed out of her system. In retrospect, the blatant sobbing followed by instant relief felt amazing. None of her negative emotions lingered unless she wanted them to. She was allowed the ability to completely vent out her frustrations and then not have to deal with the stickiness of them.

Peyton was once again crossing his arms in confidence. He smiled down at her, satisfied with his work.

“Until we get a better grasp of your specific problem, I’d highly recommend that you drop by here frequently! I don’t know how far away you live, but it’s really important that I incrementally watch your progress so that I can better assess your situation. The Silenetta curse is very specific depending on the person in question. My goal is to make sure it doesn’t go as long as mine did!”

Without thinking too hard about the implications of what he just said, she gave a reluctant nod.

“I know you were going to ask if this was permanent, and the answer is... *very unlikely?* We live in an age where curses - even the nastiest of them - do not have the finality that they once did back in the good old days when lyminals were legitimate slaves. There is typically a cure for everything in some capacity, it just varies depending on the person.”

“Silenetta Blue Eyes is clearly not as simple as a recreational morph, but you’re not doomed to be this way forever, either. Regardless of the outcome, it won’t be cured overnight, and neither has mine. My best suggestion is that you drop by often, okay? I wish not to miss anything.”

She nodded, then shot another message at him: *Thanks for helping me.*

He grinned. “Anytime.”

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The bus ride back to Lexborough was very silent. The last time she pulled out her phone, it said 10:30 PM or something, which was like... twenty minutes ago? Aside from the handful of people sitting up front asleep, she had the entire back of the bus to herself. The pulsing anxiety from earlier left her exhausted - she could not produce anymore even if she tried. This was perfectly fine. Big deal. She didn't care what she looked like. She was just exhausted and wanted to go home.

Holding a water bottle, he tipped it up to her face, simulating drinking as well as she could. It absorbed into her lyminate flesh, rejuvenating some of her lost energy. She tried putting into practice what Peyton suggested: pivot the opening just a wee bit, but not so much that it starts pouring down her shirt. Drinking water as a lymental was refreshing in a way that was missing back when she was human.

...Rene wasn't sure how to feel about her future.

So... I'm just going to be a lymental from now on? Is that it? How am I gonna deal with this?

A twinge of panic arose, because of course it did. She also expected the emotions to fade back into the dark just as quickly. It was a rollercoaster of contrasting feelings.

What are my parents gonna do? Or my brother? Or my friends? Or work? Or school? It's going to completely devastate my entire life. It's like I have to relearn everything in a different way.

She pulled back her hoodie sleeves, taking another look at her arms. The spiky cuffs complimented her gothic aesthetic, and the ashen-colored swirls were typical of a lymental's body patterns. Her humanity was truly compromised. And despite Peyton's display of cocksure positivity and quick talking, she had no indication of when - or if - she'd find a cure. If he didn't figure it out himself, why believe anything he says?

So sleepy...

Rene stretched back against the cushioned bus seat and let herself relax.

I'll worry about it tomorrow. I'm gonna stop riding the rollercoaster and just relax.