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PEOPLE COULDN'T BELIEVE WHAT I'D BECOME

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Angelica leaned her aching head back against the couch, stared at the ceiling through the tinted computer glasses that helped reduce the visual noise of her new power, and listened to her friends amble around, getting drinks and snacks from the kitchen. As they chatted with each other, she thought about how she was going to do this.

She became aware of an expectant silence and looked around. Kit was perched on a kitchen stool, a bottle of soda held in both hands between his knees. Kendis was settled in the chair she found easiest to get out of, her crutches propped in the corner, and her glass of soda water on the end table next to her. Simon was folded into the deepest armchair, his jeans-clad legs tucked up tailor style. They all watched her with a vaguely inquiring air.

"You may all be wondering why I asked you here today," Angelica said, not intending a joke, but covering her face as soon as the line was out of her mouth. "I mean... oh, hell. All right, I have something I need to tell you. And I need you to swear on whatever you hold dearest that this doesn't leave this room."

Simon and Kendis nodded, giving her looks that said, almost identically, "What do you take me for?" and Kit made all the motions that go with the "cross my heart and hope to die" promise.

"Okay," Angelica said, and she narrowly avoided biting one of her freshly manicured nails. "Okay. This is... really stupid, actually. But huge. And... well, shit, I guess I have Jane Liberty's power."

There was a silence. Then Simon said, in a small voice, "*Which* power?"

"The main one! The big kahuna!" Angelica exclaimed. "The one that made all the others possible. Shit, I don't even have words to describe it. Like, I can see everything alive. Every. Fucking. Thing. I guess, eventually, I'll be able to figure out what bits I'm seeing are powers, and what bits are normal. I... already know what cancer looks like." She

shuddered. "I might be able to figure out how to change them. Powers. Genes. That sort of thing."

"You mean," Kendis said, picking her words carefully, "that Jane wasn't always superstrong, invulnerable, shit like that? That this one power made it all possible?"

"Yeah," Angelica said. "Yeah, that's what I mean."

"And she gave it to you," Kendis said.

"Like she made your power more powerful, yeah," Angelica said.

"Shiiiiiiiiit," Kendis breathed.

"Yeah," Angelica said, letting a little of her misery out in an exhausted sigh.

"You can see and manipulate genes?" Simon said thoughtfully.

Angelica nodded, and when his face brightened, she said, "I've already thought about it, dude. Eventually, maybe, I can give you a Y chromosome in every cell. Someday I might be able to give myself a second X chromosome. Maybe we can just *swap*. I don't know. I kind of think I probably can't. Even Jane's superpower can't work miracles."

Kendis said, "And anyway, even if you two swap chromosomes, you've still got the outside junk to deal with."

Simon's shoulders sagged. "I know, I know."

"You could remove the power from yourself," Kit said. "Just delete it."

"If I knew how to spot it, I suppose I could," Angelica said, rubbing the bridge of her nose. "Maybe. I wonder if I would remove my own ability to edit it before I could delete the power entirely. I could end up stuck with the vision, for instance, and no way to get rid of it. I can't believe it's only a single gene thing. From the reading I've done, no paranormal ability is a single gene mutation."

"You know better than I do," Kit said with a smile and a shrug. "Just an idea."

"No, it's a good one," Angelica said.

They sat in silence for a while.

"Anyway," Kendis said, "you'd never forgive yourself for getting rid of the power."

"What?" Angelica said.

"It's like my power," Kendis said, tapping the side of her own head. "I can't give it up. I couldn't at this point. I couldn't ask Jane to knock it back down. Because I do too fucking much good with it. I make people happier just by *existing* in their space. Who could give that up?"

"As long as no one really figures out it's you," Simon said. "Think of the Plum Blossom case."

"That the chick they chopped up and grew clones of?" Kendis said. She shivered. "Shit, thanks, Simon. I hadn't thought of that."

"You met her," Angelica said absently. "That was Madeline."

Kendis stared at her and said, "Wut."

Simon said, "Yeah."

Kendis looked freaked out and kind of ill; Angelica felt bad for having sprung that on her. One does not meet people who were at the center of a gigantic military atrocity every day.

Kendis finally shook her head as if to clear it. "*Anyway*. My point was: how can you... I mean, 'one', really... refuse a power that has so much potential?"

"I guess one would have to find a way to pass it on to someone who wanted it," Angelica said with a grimace. "Jane said it had to go on. I guess she felt pretty strongly about it."

"Why you, though?" Simon said.

Angelica shook her head and shrugged. "She said that maybe because I was a biologist, I could figure out how to do things, like cure cancer, that she never could. Really fixated on cancer. I guess 'cause she was dying of it right then."

"Is that what happened?" Kendis said. "I figured her heart just gave out. She was pretty old. Eighty-six the obit said?"

"No," Angelica said, rubbing the bridge of her nose again and the area between her eyebrows, hoping to relieve the headache. "Definitely cancer." She remembered the scene again, for the umpteenth time, and finally said aloud, "Lady J was asking her to 'stop using Maddy's power.'" She turned a baffled look on Simon, their resident para historian.

Simon scowled and put his chin on his fists, elbows on knees. "I think one reason the Army decided on Operation Plum Blossom was because they tried... kind of... giving some of their recruits infusions of Madeline's blood or something. Anyway, the research showed that if you weren't born with her power, use of the power would make things grow that shouldn't."

"Like cancer," Angelica said.

"Like cancer," Simon said.

"*Why* was she using Madeline's power?" Kendis said.

"For the same reason she was using yours, I think," Angelica said.

"She told me it was slowly helping fix the holes in her head," Kit said, interrupting Kendis' outraged outburst. "Or something like that."

Kendis settled back into cynical silence with a snort.

"Anyway," Angelica said. "Jane told me not to tell anyone until I knew what I was doing. But I can't do that."

"She was probably thinking of Plum Blossom too," Kendis muttered.

"Probably," Simon said. "Don't worry, no one will hear about it from me."

"Or me," Kendis said.

"No one smart believes me anyway," Kit said with a grin.

"Also, if there's anything I can do to help you figure it out," Simon said, "I used to help people figure their powers out all the time when I was in high school."

"Thanks," Angelica said, sunk in a brown study. Then she shook her head and pulled herself up out of it. "No, really, thank you."

"We could make you a costume," Kendis said. "With all the stars and shit."

"You *should* have a code name ready," Simon said. "Just in case you need to anonymize yourself quickly."

Angelica didn't want to admit she'd already been thinking about that. She didn't want to be in spandex, would never be in spandex like Jane had been. But... "I already know that," she finally said.

"Oh?" Kendis said. Kit and Simon both perked up with interest.

"Of course I do," Angelica said, with a little more confidence and her first smile of the whole conversation. "I can't be anything other than... *Libertad*, right?"