

reboot

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Commission for DustyError

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Rated Mature

“Tell me about Velvet.”

Bianca looked up from a warm cup of tea. “Hm? Velvet...?”

Abigail’s furry cheeks dimpled in a smile. She gestured with her fuzzy panda eyebrows to the Fennekin droid stacked up proudly in the living room corner, standing like a monument to dust-stained CRT monitors and compac disc trays everywhere.

“Her,” Abi clarified. She crossed pawed legs. The recliner groaned under her weight. It was built for lazy boys, of course, not 6’8” furies, and the construction didn’t lend itself well to her gratuitous, bottom-heavy physique.

“That’s her, right? Velvet? You mentioned her before, and I was a little curious.”

Bianca fidgeted bashfully. She set the cup down and picked at her sleeves. She was all sleeve, Bianca. Sleeve and hoodie and skirt and soft, shy eyes hidden in an old pair of round-frame glasses. The type with a prescription that had run out years ago but she still kept around because getting a new pair would be expensive, and copay didn’t cover new glasses the way it covered her HRT medication.

Still, she grimaced. “Are you sure?”

“We have another hour,” said the bear. She tapped her smartphone in a visual acknowledgement of the timer they’d set. “And as your informal therapist, I think talking about your accomplishments is a good thing.”

Oh, Bianca doubted that. Not the realistic sort of doubt, mind, but the inflexible, involuntary doubt that happens to transgirlies when someone clearly signals interest in their hyperfixations. That old gnaw. Those ornery braingoblins who complain at the first sign of positive interaction, a distinctly different mental phenomenon to the one Bianca had grown accustomed. The difference between a reflexive instinct and a fully populated

system, a community of selves with opinions and motives and clearly laid out needs, living in one knobby, girly body.

Unfortunately, instincts were hard to break.

Bianca took a breath. "Well," she said hesitantly.

Abi waited patiently.

"... Vel's not a 'her,' not like. Strictly. She's still a she, but she's also an object, because I identify with objects sometimes, and also my old science project. And like - Fennekins didn't exist all the way back in OG Pokemon generations, right? But I love Fennekin and I love the little sound disc trays make, so those feelings got bound up together and I had to iterate on it and create it physically and. U-uhhh."

She sputtered. Her thoughts felt like broken strings. Bianca laughed nervously under her breath, and tried desperately to piece them together.

"... the place I put all my 90s nostalgia, y'know? A kinda person-not-person."

Abi tapped her chin. Bianca futzed, feeling the weight of her own explanation bearing down on her shoulders.

"... she's who you want to be sometimes?" Abi asked.

Bianca digested this.

"... I... I think so."

"How long have you been working on her?"

Bianca rubbed the back of her neck. "Oh gosh. Years. Do doodles in composition books count?"

Abi giggled politely. "I think they do."

"That's middle school, then. It's hard. I didn't know I was drawing Velvet for years until I came out, and noticed how many of these characters had the same traits."

"Yeah?"

"Y-yeah!" Bianca felt her cheeks turn warm. "They were all these silly Pokemon girlbots with this, like - this old-fashioned aesthetic that reminded me of a time before depression. Shag carpets, blocky controllers, hard plastic monitors, the hum of a vacuum tube transistor buzzing in the background between bit-crushed sound effects and voices. The feeling only got stronger as I got older, but- Well. You can see how far I got with it."

"I can."

"Engineering ain't easy. It really isn't. I tried assembling her a bunch of ways and nothing really worked. Model one was based off of my raw feeling when I first figured myself out, but the more work I put into Velvet, the less it felt like I was making a fully functional bot, and instead some kind of time capsule."

Abi made a grunt of agreement. "You were building her as you remembered, not as she is."

Bianca nodded, a little ashamed. "She and I were new. We're still new. I just. Had trouble. She's nostalgia, right?"

"Right?"

"And nostalgia is hard to put together in a new way."

"It is."

"So I reach this point where all the parts - her case, her ram chips, the CPU, the wires, the soldering - it's dusted, clean. Fresh Windows 3.1 install. She's as new as she can be without new parts. It's just. I don't have the money for parts. I don't even know what parts I can put it and avoid feeling like I'm betraying what she is."

"Because the parts inside the shell are just as important as the look?"

"Right!"

"She would not be Velvet-coded if she's not running 16 megabytes of ram max."

"U-uh huh!"

"Or if her voice was running on anything more advanced than a well-used Soundblaster card."

Bianca sputtered.

"Y-yeah," she said. She hid her stupid grin under the brim of her cup.

Abi gave a knowing smile.

"Did I hit the mark?"

"I dunno, *maybe*." She tried, weaseling out of the last word like she hadn't just been caught fantasizing about a downgrade. That damn confidence. She practically walked into a trap there. "I-I think it. Sums up my feelings..."

The sentiment seemed to stir something in Abigail. She looked thoughtfully at Velvet, the girlbot standing motionless, its bright red and orange paint muted in afternoon shadows. This immediate, intimate expression of self left unpowered, a permanent presence in Bianca's head as much as her living space, unfinished but not unloved.

"One moment."

She hefted herself up and crossed the room. Bianca turned, peering over the back of her seat, and watched as Abigail examined her creation, as she carefully traced a doughy, pad-laden finger across Velvet's conical snout. Treating her with the reverence of a friend being gentle with someone else's feelings.

At the base of her neck, she found a cord.

"Hm."

"Yeah...?"

"This is a USB 2-B, isn't it?"

Abi held the end of the cord up. Bianca squinted, adjusting her glasses.

"Uh-uh." She was puzzled why Abi would even ask. It sounded like she knew the build inside and out "I think that's her data transfer line."

"You mind if I try something?"

"Try what...?"

"Something," said Abi. "Come on now. Stand up."

Bianca did as she was told. She pushed herself out of the chair and trotted up to the panda, ending up about eye-level with her chest.

Abi wagged the cord in her hand.

"What I'm about to do is a little..." She stopped to think. "... physical. Do you understand?"

Bianca nodded.

"Which may mean you have to put your fate in my paws in order to come out the other side in one piece."

Bianca hesitated, then nodded.

What did she mean by that?

Abi placed a paw on Bianca's thin shoulder. The pad-laden mitt was surprisingly soft for its size. Large, but not unintentional in how it moved.

"And at any point, should you feel uncomfortable or distressed, or you think this isn't what you wanted, you can say 'please stop,' and I will listen. Is that alright with you?"

Bianca weighed the terms. She felt an itch in the back of her neck. That itch you get when an offer to help becomes too much. There were valid reasons to listen, but there were valid reasons to rebuild Velvet, to sacrifice a little bit of her time and energy to reinvigorating an old idea. Would it hurt? Of course. Bianca didn't like to be hurt. No one does. She learned how to avoid getting hurt long ago - but those were different times, times before Bianca knew herself or her limits, or what constituted a boundary. She was a child then, and a child still in some ways.

Trepidation made her uneasy. This was one of those moments.

Still, if there was anything to admire in a small girl like Bianca, it was her courage.

She inclined her head to meet Abi's eyes.

"Y-yeah. Be careful though, okay?"

"Okay," said Abi, in a tone as gentle as a dormouse dusting china. "I will do my best."

Bianca brimmed with a bashful smile. "Well gee, thank you for checking with me, I-"

CLICK.

Bianca blinked.

A chord was sticking out of her neck.

Out of the USB port that wasn't there a second ago.

Bianca stared. Her gaze turned slowly to Abigail and the smooth smirk unfolding on her snout.

"Well then," she said. "I think it's about time we moved on to *physical* therapy."

Bianca felt her throat tighten, and her skin prickle to attention.

How the flark did she do that?

"May I?" Abi waggled her eyebrows, a gesture that went right over Bianca's head.

“A-ah-”

“Just kidding, mhmhm~. I don’t need to ask permission to do maintenance work.”

Bianca’s voice quavered. The ambiguity of that statement set her on a good kind of edge.
“M-m-maintenance work on wha...?”

Abi didn’t answer her. Instead, she raised her paw to Bianca’s face, thumb out. Bianca shut her eyes, the only thing she could think to do, and felt the tips of her soft pads glide across her brow, across her forehead in slow strokes.

Until the thumb claw sank in.

And popped the plastic cover between her eyes.

“Ah, **there** it is~”.

Bianca swallowed. Her hands were shaking, to say nothing of her little heart pounding in her chest.

“H-holy shit.”

“The assembly is right where it should be, mhmhm. Very good.”

Abi pulled back the cover. What Bianca couldn’t see, on account of still having normal eyes and a vaguely functional if not gender-affirming body, was the exposed CPU and motherboard Abi had just opened up. It sat traversing inside a dome in Bianca’s head, near the exact circumference of her skull, plus or more a few cubic inches given over to the cableage, copper, silicon gel, a tiny regulator switch, and four cards of RAM slotted into place.

Now, when this was all flesh, blood and synapse a moment ago, it was disorganized. Wrinkles chock full of unresolved trauma and what she ate last Tuesday squished so tightly together, they often misfired.

This layout, by comparison, was completely state of the art.

At least for 1992.

“What did you do...?”

“I opened you up,” said Abi simply, wagging the cover in front of Bianca’s eyes.

Bianca went cross-eyed. “Opened me up how? What? I’m not... supposed...”

“Geez, it’s dusty in here,” said Abi.

She blew on the circuit. A wonderful shiver rippled down the nape of the girl’s neck.

“Now, you said you wanted to refurbish Velvet.”

“Ahhh, I... I did, yes...”

“And you didn’t want to use any new parts.”

“True, but-”

“*And* you wanted it to be faithful to the era she came from, which I suspect means we can only harvest parts and chassis from one particular source.”

Fuck, thought Bianca desperately. *Fuck fuck fuck fuck this is hot fuck-*

“Hm~.” Abi laughed under her breath. “But if I did that to this perfectly competent model, then where would we arrive? What point would it serve? What parts do I have to dig out of you to remake Velvet perfectly as she was, the robot fennekin as you remembered, instead of what she *could* be?”

Bianca didn’t know how to process that.

Fortunately, Abi was there to kickstart the process.

“COMMAND_LINE.”

Bianca’s ears pricked up. Her thoughts abruptly skidded to a halt.

“Open data partition /C:/ drive and transfer contents from USB-1. Full drive copy, please.”

“AFFIRMATIVE, YAP-” Bianca barked. A second later, her eyes snapped back to normal. “Um, what did I just do? Abi?”

A tiny processor started humming inside her head. She faintly heard a fan turn on, a tiny fan located right behind the ear port, before a slow heat spread through the floorboards of her mind. “A-awawa...”

She slumped against the couch, clutching her head.

“Oh, and COMMAND_LINE.”

Bianca stiffened again. This time, she was straight as a board.

“Grant administrator privileges to user ‘ABIGAIL_LINH.’ Lock out all permissions for

'BIANCA' until further notice."

The thought crossed Bianca's motherboard. By the time she parsed it, her mouth was already open. "AFFIRMATIVE, YAP. H-huh?!"

It was done. Like that, she had signed herself over, and without a fight.

A coolness settled over Bianca's frame. Her arms went limp and her legs fell slack as the unspoken privilege of control scaled itself back to the most basic operations. It was like losing articulation, losing the finer puppet strings that held her body together.

Abi stepped back to admire her work. Bianca tried breathlessly to follow, willing her leg to move and only managing to lift up the foot and stumble clumsily forward.

The experience was humbling.

"No way..."

Bianca balked at her hands. Even her mouth felt unresponsive and slow, and the voice behind it weirdly dry. It had a presence behind it, a crunchy fry that didn't have anything to do with larynxes and voice boxes.

"H... how???"

"Oh, how is fairly simple, I think. See, rebuilding Velvet to period-appropriate specifications isn't hard. In fact, you seemed pretty close."

Electricity whirled down Bianca's back. She tried to respond to it, tried to straighten her neck and roll her fingers, squeeze and clench them to diffuse the energy, but her reactions were too slow and the power surge too great to hold it in.

She heard a muffled groan. A round, striped shape with rivets squirmed in the back of her sweatpants.

"But there is one thing you failed to compute, dear," said Abi.

"Nnnghh..." Bianca puffed out her cheek. She forced every little motor in her head to work together, brought her hands back to her waist and forced the band of her pants down, until the shape cleared the hurdle, and popped free of its confines.

And let her all-metal fox tail out to breathe.

It was a perfect match. The spotwelds and riveted sections, running from the tapered base to the flared midsection down to the purposefully chunky tip mimicking the lines and shape of Fennekin's design, reflected the AutoCAD schematics into which Bianca poured her heart and soul.

It wagged approvingly. Bianca watched it, looking over her shoulder, unable to look away.

“You’re treating Velvet like a separate object, like a car or a tool that needs new parts to function in the way it was intended. But I propose we treat her like we always should have.

“Like you.”

Affirmation bloomed in the marrow of Velv... of Bianca’s hard drive. She found herself again whilst floating back to the surface, as if the suggestion alone was enough to make it true.

“I... I-I...”

Bianca stammered. The fry in her voice gained crunch, a synthetic reverb. Around the USB plug, skin hardened, erasing the imperfections, the faint acne scars and moles that’d tramped there, under a growing coat of steel.

“Velvet is an extension of **you.**”

That word.

“**You** and her are the same.”

The weight of it nearly sent Bianca to the floor. She felt it press against her mind, the implicit connection carrying so much meaning paired with Abi’s smooth, commanding voice.

It was all she could do to avoid succumbing here. Now.

“Aaawwawawa...”

“Well? **You** know what I’m saying, don’t **you?**”

Her legs shook. The heels of her feet began to rise, ankles popping, pushing Bianca onto a digitigrade stance. Inside her slippers, the bottoms of her soles softened, remaking themselves with mouse pad fabric and jelly silicon, merging unneeded toes into a more efficient three-pronged array, while the nails slid forward, clicking into shape, making not claws but the keys of an ergonomic keyboard.

V-E-L on one three-toed paw, and V-E-T on the other.

“She is me... and...”

“Go on.”

“And...”

“I’m listening.”

“I’m... auuuughhhhhh frick...”

Her thoughts were slowing. No, no they were... were they spinning up? Shifting? Changing. Yes, they were changing under her feet paws.

Much ado has been made about human thought being a network of electrical signals, but computers, Bianca knew, ran on binary. The language was a systematic on-off mechanism that stored power as data at the lowest levels as 0 and 1. Every iteration of hardware that improved data retrieval built itself on the most efficient use of notation. 2 bits became 4 bits, then 4 became 8, 8 became 16, 16 became 32, 32 became 64, and on it went. The expression of that notation became infinitely more complex as digital computing evolved command lines, GUI structures, hard disks, random-access memory, advanced processors and the like, but the fundamental element that underpinned decades of scientific achievement remained.

1s and 0s were synaptic. They were the heart of the machine, as much as the transistor core or the motherboard.

And Bianca felt the hum.

The animating spark.

The churn of bits behind her thoughts.

It was already working. In the small places, the soft spaces, errant lines of thought were subdividing, spreading. They were accessing different portions of a disk - not a brain, but a *disk* - constructing words out of binary signals and thoughts out of strings. Among them, she was a user, and a lowly user at that. Completely incapable of interacting with the subdermal processes going on, the slow work digitizing a human mind into an android shell, but that separation made it all the more profane. Bianca couldn’t stop it. She didn’t want to stop it. She wasn’t just repairing Velvet or updating her.

She was becoming her.

Bianca knew the answer now. “I’m... her. Me. I am Velvet!”

“Ding ding ding~ **You** got it right.”

Abi sashayed into a shivering, grinning Bianca. The largess pushed Bianca into the back of the couch just as her spine went rigid with new rivets bolted onto a metallic spine.

Bianca crumpled. Abi caught her by the chin. As she levered her captive half-human,

half-droid back up to her bosom, metallic corruption spread along the bottom of her jaw, spreading the suggestion of cheekfluff with its own welded seams on either end.

“You didn’t even need me to tell you that,” Abi chided. Her voice reached deep, like a hand reaching for a soul at the bottom of a long well. “You built Velvet from your core memories, the childlike innocence and objectification you synthesized into a fresh shell. Separating that fox into a new body may have sketched her out, but the only way you can bring her back together is to incorporate that into what. You. Learned.”

She ran her thumb against Bianca’s chin, coaxing out of her a thoughtless giggle. The constituent bits of her lower face slid into each other, into a metal cone that lay flat in the panda’s palm. A tiny red dot popped out of the end.

“I know you’ve grown. I know you are a good girl. You’re a good girl, right? A girl who’s learned how to incorporate her experiences?”

“Aaaa...”

“Am I wrong?”

Bianca swallowed a lump, which turned out to be her voice box. A more literal one, mostly complete, took its place. Affection made her ears billow steam.

“N...no...” she whispered through her sound chip.

“Of course not. Which is how I know you’ll make Velvet perfect.”

Far below, beneath Bianca’s clothes, more radical shifts were underway. The changes in her stance were migrating north, spreading solid manufacture into her knees and thighs, trading the flexibility of flesh for a thin layer of stainless steel. The knee joints bowed outward, turning circular and round, and when the paint reached her hips, it washed over everything, including her sex and the sanctity of cute anus. Both were swallowed up. Both were painted over. Both were stripped of their nerve endings, and hidden under a Braixen-inspired skirtline.

Bianca was honestly glad to be rid of them.

But there was one more thing to do. Abi turned Bianca’s snout this way, that way, examining her like a giant doll.

“... you did want to make her authentic...”

“Hnh?”

Bianca reached for something to squeeze. She settled on Abi’s belly, feeling and articulation coming back as her fingers became separate, hyper-exaggerated digits.

“Copy profile ‘BIANCA.’ Paste in partition. Registry edit, then find and replace all instances of ‘BIANCA’ with ‘VELVET.’”

Another flicker. It lasted only half a minute, and by the end, the transgirl Bianca was stowed away somewhere safe.

Velvet, meanwhile, was experiencing the world for the first time. Not quite on a new OS, Windows 3.1 was hardly new, but on something resembling a factory reboot. The base was still there, the girl was still a girl, the mind was a still a mind, but the pieces had been rearranged, and the spirit driving it all, once an ideal, was now full realized.

“Done~.”

Velvet blinked, the metal slats clicking a couple of times before the servos actuated.

Abi gave her space. The foxdroid looked down at herself, taking in the full bliss of her synthetic body. Some of it was informed by Gateway modem builds, the chunkiness of early 90s CRT shells made of ABV plastics - but the segmentation of her joints, plus the welds and the rivets, called to mind Asimov, the Jetsons, Ed Wood and Weird Science, the angularity and camp of a bright future.

She peered up at the panda, handpaws hanging limp in an expression of dim-witted fondness.

“Hey! Uh! Did’ju help Bianca remake me?”

“Not really,” Abi told her. “But I did help. How do you feel?”

Velvet’s long, segmented tail made a hollow sound as it swished back and forth.

“I feel kinna... good!!! My CPU feels a little funny...”

“That’s okay. Foxes don’t need to think too hard, do they?”

“Nuh-uh!”

Abi hummed. She patted the top of Velvet’s updo, and smiled as the foxdroid leaned into it, her electronic eyes lidding contentedly.

Regression was a common form of treatment. Guided therapy through simpler stages. This too was Bianca. A simpler, happier Bianca.

And she was just as valid as her creator.

“You wanna show me your games?” Abi asked.

“Oh? You play?”

This got the foxdroid’s attention. She started bouncing on her heels.

“That’s why I came over, isn’t it? We’ll play until it’s time for Bianca to come back.”

“Okay! Cool, I got soooo many games!!”

“Is that right?”

“I got Sega and Super Nintendo, and I got all the Marios! You can be Luigi if you want!”

“I do want~”

“And and and - Bianca got us 64, so if you want, we can play Kart too!”

“That’s so thoughtful of her.”

“Yeah, she’s nice! I like her.”

“I like her too...”

As Velvet tittered over her maker’s game collection, sorting through cartridges and the mess of AVI cables behind the living room television, Abi put away the USB cable, and closed the port from whence it came. She lingered on the incomplete model, the half-finished Velvet droid in the display case. The one that had captured Bianca’s imagination and proved impossible to realize.

One day, she thought warmly.

One day these two would be sisters.

