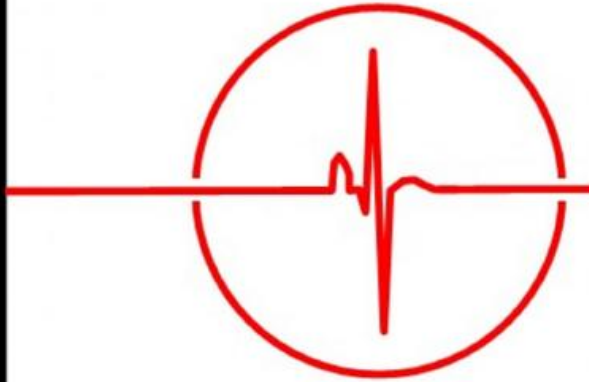


Heartbeat

Roy Ellison



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by Roy Ellison

Smashwords Edition

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People screamed in panic. The truck was gathering speed and heading for the market. The visitors tried to scramble to safety as the enormous vehicle was bound to hit the first stall. The machine roared, the wheels screamed and ... In a flash of light, she was there. Heartbeat. The protector of Santo Corazon, or Santoco as the locals preferred to call it. The woman caught the speeding truck with both hands. The car buckled and she felt its tremendous power almost throw her away, but she trusted in her superhuman strength. Heartbeat's muscles swelled painfully as the whole mass of the truck threatened to push her into the ground. Her pure white bodysuit was shining, the red line on her massive chest glowed and she held the vehicle down. The driver

screamed as he realized that his plan had failed and tried to scramble out of the seat.

She jumped up, then ran after him. She caught him in a few quick strides of her long, powerful legs. The young man was lifted in the air and helplessly held aloft. Heartbeat's long brown hair blew in the afternoon wind and she waited for the police to arrive. People calmed down and gathered around her to take some photos.

"Wait until the cops are there and take him away. We have to respect his rights."

She spoke so calmly that people instantly seemed to calm down. The spectators waited for a moment while people came to thank her for saving them. Once the cops had taken the attacker away, she took her time to pose with her fans.

Heartbeat flexed her huge arms, lifted kids and babies and even did funny poses with teenagers. Since Santoco's hero had emerged, the city was safer and happier. When everybody was satisfied, she smiled and again disappeared in a flash.

Steve stared blankly at the TV screen at the diner. A lot had changed since he had left town years ago. Service overseas had taken way longer than expected and as far as he was concerned, the place was worse off. The only thing that definitely still worked were Marcy's steaks.

"Marcy, darling, those are still as good as the day I left!"

"I'm glad, Steve."

"Seriously, I missed those. They can't cook for crap over there. Disgusting, I tell you."

"It's good to have you back."

She put a second glass of beer on his table.

"That's on the house."

"Thank you, Marcy. So, tell me, what is this 'Heartbeat' girl?"

Steve was a broad-shouldered with rough features. His black hair was crew-cut and he was still wearing the service parka he kept when he came back.

"Heartbeat? She's amazing! She saves people and she's so nice!"

"Really?"

"Absolutely. That thing now? That's just her. Just last week, she pulled a car back on the bridge when it almost fell off. She's amazingly strong!"

Steve nodded. He had to admit, this woman looked as powerful as expected. She had a huge, strong body, with muscles bigger than any heavyweight bodybuilder he had ever seen. At the same time, she had a very skinny waist and a large chest, which gave her very feminine proportions. Her face was also cute, with a tiny nose and big green eyes. He could understand why everybody was all over her.

"She's impressive, I gotta give you that. Anybody know where she came from?"

Before Marcy could answer, she was interrupted by one of the guests:

"Stay cool, nobody's going to get hurt!"

He had pulled out a handgun and aimed at the waitress.

"Open the register! Give me the money! Now! Quick!"

Marcy stared at the gun. She was shocked. Not another robbery. She edged back to the bar:

"Please, don't hurt anybody. I'll do what you want!"

"Good, good." He turned to the guests: "Stay calm, don't do anything stupid and this will all be over in a moment ..."

That's when the salt shaker hit his face. The robber was momentarily confused, but it was already too late for him. Steve had quickly twisted the weapon from his hand and forced the guy to the ground. He locked him down and said quietly:

"Marcy, call the cops."

She nodded, only now breathing out in relief.

Heartbeat entered the private levels of Lawrence Tower. She was elated. Stopping that truck had worked perfectly. The people had been saved, the cops had their arrest, the assailant would be judged, maybe the investigators would even be able to find out who was behind the attack. She sighed happily. Striding to the full-length mirror, she admired her look. It was impressive: The heroine was well over six feet tall, with shoulders broader than a professional football player. Her heavy breasts and full, muscular butt contrasted nicely with her tight, chiseled eight-pack abs. She gave her giant, ripped thighs a good shake and locked them in a pose.

The superheroine wasn't vain ... She just liked what she saw. With a body like hers, who wouldn't? Then, she reached behind her head, her heavily muscled arms brushing against both sides of her head and undid the lock of her outfit. With a slow pull, she lifted the entire head-covering off, revealing her true hair color and face. Alina Lawrence was very good looking, though maybe not as breathtakingly gorgeous as her alternate identity. While Heartbeat had thick, sensuous lips and cheekbones that could cut steel, Alina was nice and cute. She had a kind of pixyish expression and radiated confidence and a certain cheekiness. She arranged her blond hair a little, then pulled down the rest of the suit. Her body was still completely overloaded with muscle. It was a bit

strange: Somehow, the Amazonian physique fit Heartbeat's face better than her natural one. Her head seemed a little out of place on top of this mountain of strength.

Once she had stripped off the entire bodysuit, she handed it to the computer system's helpful hand and said:

"Okay, time to go back to normal."

There was a kind clicking sound, then some hissing, and then, Alina watched as her body relaxed and melted into an almost tiny figure. Her muscles deflated, as did her breasts and her entire physique seemed to become, well, normal.

Eventually, the young woman stood there, naked, her perky little breasts exposed and her body slim and tight. She clearly wasn't muscular or anything. It was the perfect secret identity. The machine casually informed her of the duration of her outing and the amount of energy she had used. It also told her that the strain placed on her body was within parameters, something which didn't worry her.

The young woman showered and got dressed. The predictive system was calm now, so she'd be able to have a night on the town with her friends.

Steve walked home. The blood was still pumping in his veins. This wasn't like combat, it was way more direct and personal. He liked it. Beating this asshole up had been tempting, but he'd stopped himself right before that. He didn't want trouble.

Or did he?

He stopped. Honestly: This guy wouldn't be off the streets for long. And he'd be back to his tricks moments later. Maybe, just maybe, it would be necessary to ... press the subject. Steve smiled: He could try that. Just a little. See if it actually improved the situation.

For now, though, he had to take a nap. Working as a cab driver at night was tough enough, being tired made it only worse.

He headed home quickly.

"So this club is the most exotic and rebellious location in the entire country right now, nah, in the entire world!"

Loana was gushing about her discovery, which was only available by invitation over a special site to be found on some far reaches of the net. Alina didn't know she was really interested. Loana and Sharyn had been so happy to take her with them that she had agreed, but she still didn't understand the joys of club culture. She had been a very sickly child and an even more miserable teenager. The disease which had destroyed her heart as a baby had prevented transplants or therapies. Instead, her parents had developed a prototype system of nanomachines that kept her body alive without. The machines had taken years and years to perfect, only becoming good enough to allow her to live independently when she was twenty years old.

Her parents both died in a mindless terrorist attack. That's when she had decided she would help the world against things like these. Having spent all her life watching the development of the nanomachines, she knew them perfectly and found a way to "overcharge" them. The effect was her transformation into Heartbeat. While Alina Lawrence was still weak and sensitive, Heartbeat was big, strong and reckless. And unstoppable.

That didn't change much that Alina had little knowledge of the finer things in life. So, she was stuck faking it as good as she could.

"Sounds great! Here's our cab."

They climbed inside. They were all wearing cocktail dresses, although Loana's might be a little too short. She didn't mind. Alina had a compacted version of Heartbeat's outfit hidden as a two-inch-cube in

her handbag. Just as a precaution should anything extraordinary happen.

Steve waited for the three women to climb inside, then closed the door. He did his best to look professional.

"Okay, you ladies, everything set?"

"Sure, dark and handsome, let's roll!"

Sharyn laughed and said:

"Hey, don't harass the poor guy! He's only doing his job!"

"What can I do, he's dark and handsome! Hey, 'D and H', you've been to the military?"

Company policy was to keep quiet on personal things, but he nodded.

"See? For all we know, we could be riding in a car with a god-damned hero!"

Steve concentrated on the road.

"Are you a god-damned hero, 'D and H'?"

Steve pointed to the "Please do not speak to driver while travelling"-sign.

"Oh, come on! I'm pretty sure this means yes!"

Alina put her hand on Loana's shoulder:

"Please, let's concentrate on the party, shall we?"

"Yeah! Let's do this!"

Steve stopped the car at the requested address. It was in the bad part of the town and the place was pretty dark. His danger sense, trained by years in the field, went on full alarm. This was a bad idea. Still, business is business.

He said:

"Here we are."

The girls seemed to understand his hesitations.

"Are you sure?"

"It's the address you gave me. Are you sure it's correct?"

Loana nodded:

"It can't be far."

That's when a lamp on a factory close by went on.

"Ah, you see!"

They all got out and thanked him, paying him handsomely for the trip.

He hesitated:

"Should I wait here for you?"

"Ah, we're going to stay until the morning, so, maybe not."

"Mhm."

He nodded. Bad idea. Still a customer's wishes are orders. He said goodbye and got in the car.

Steve waited until they reached the door and were let inside before driving off.

Loana walked in first. The place was spooky. There was some light, yes, but the whole thing seemed to be ill prepared for a party location.

Sharyn said:

"We should go back outside. This isn't funny."

"Wait. It's just around the corner. I'm sure it is."

"What kind of party are we expecting down there anyway?"

"I dunno. From what the page said, exclusive special DJs in a secret location. It'll be great."

And then they found the place.

The trio turned the corner and found itself in a cavernous building, probably a former industrial complex. Someone had set up lighting rigs and sound gear and their ears were greeted by appetizing basses. Loana turned to her friends:

"Didn't I tell you?"

The two others were relieved and smiled at her. She walked to the bouncer and said:

"I registered online. The name's Loana!"

He nodded, marked her on his tablet and said:

"Enjoy!"

They went in staying together. There was a crowd, but it was a little on the small side. That was just as well. The music was loud and drinks were expensive. Loana said:

"See, there was no reason to be scared at all. It's all perfect!"

Outside, Steve still hadn't driven off. This wasn't good. He checked his phone, finding more and more missed jobs. This was a bad situation. Still, he didn't hear of them, so it was probably alright. He got ready to finally leave, when several heavy cars stopped around the building. The people that got out of them were clearly not here to party. They looked more like professional fighters. Steve turned down the lights and left the car. He wanted to know what was going on.

Sneaking closer through the shadows, he managed to eavesdrop on them.

"Okay. The place is locked down. Their phones are going on our server, so they're pretty much isolated. Time to get started."

What was this? Some kind of kidnapping?

Steve got out of the car and sneaked into the building. He had to know what was going on. Sadly, he couldn't alert any help. He'd have to do this on his own. He wasn't entirely sure he didn't like that.

Meanwhile, at the party, Alina was looking for Loana. Sharyn was with her, but their friend had disappeared along the way. They went to the bar first:

"I'm sorry, but have you seen this woman?"

The barkeeper looked at the picture on her phone and shrugged. Shouting into her friend's ear, Sharyn said:

"Maybe she's on the toilet. I'm going to check."

And she was off. Alina didn't like this one bit. And now, she was alone. She just couldn't relax. Something was going wrong.

When Sharyn didn't show up five minutes later, she decided to check after her. She went to the part of the complex that housed the toilets. It was pretty dark back here. She held up her phone and used it as a light. Suddenly, she was grabbed from behind. She tried to scream, but someone had clapped his hand on her mouth. She tried to bite the guy, but he was wearing gloves. Fine, then. She stomped his foot with her heel. No effect. Suddenly, he stopped and collapsed behind her. She turned around and looked into the taxi driver's face. There was a big man dressed in black lying at his feet. She stared at the driver and said:

"What's going on?"

"You're in danger. I guess this is a trick or something to kidnap people."

"What?"

"I don't know either, but we have to clear this up."

"Can't we call the police?"

"They have a relay that blocks outside communication. We can't reach the cops."

"Oh. So what are we going to do?"

"Lady, 'we' aren't going to do anything. 'I'm going to take care of this. You stay hidden and try not to get in my way."

"Err. What? Are you some kind of wannabe superhero guy?"

"No. I'm just an expert on beating assholes up, so I'm going to do what I know best."

He was already carrying away the guy he had knocked down. Alina couldn't tell whether he was out cold or really dead. Her superhero persona was stirring. She just needed a moment alone to change.

She agreed:

"Okay, I'll just hide down here."

"Good. Don't move, don't talk to anybody. Try to stay hidden."

And he was off.

As Steve went to work, stalking the foes, he thought: What a jerk. That woman didn't even say thank you. Ah, yes, civilians. Gratitude is something that never occurs to them.

Meanwhile, Alina stayed in the dark and took out the cube. Time to change. She slipped out of her clothes and shoes and waited.

She powered up the system within her and felt the pent-up energy course through her body. Within moments, the transformation started. The first effect was that her heart beat harder and stronger. She took big breaths. Everyone lifted her chest some more, making it grow and expand. With each breath, her pecs got bigger and thicker. Her waist turned more muscular. She could feel her abs emerge from under her skin, grow and collide. She felt her body rise. Her obliques and serratus emerged and framed her waist, enhancing her v-taper. At the same time, her shoulders started to grow bigger and bigger. She could feel her neck grow. It was a familiar experience, but one that never failed to arouse her. In a few moments, she had gone from waifish and weak to huge and strong. As the transformation continued, her arms wrapped themselves in layers upon layers of muscle. Her biceps grew to baseball size and even larger. She lifted her now heavy arms and flexed them cockily. Below, her legs grew at the same rate. Her thighs went from sticks to huge slabs of meat in a few moments. She felt that her hamstrings and buttocks expanded, giving any male bodybuilder or powerlifter a run for his money. Her calves turned into huge diamonds of pure strength.

She gasped as the transformation reached its finale.

Her back expanded some more, her entire body turned more ripped and her breasts expanded as if her entire bodyfat melded into them. Gone were her tiny B-cups. Instead, she felt her enormous boobs the size of her head stand off hard from her powerful chest. She looked at herself and smiled. This transformation always turned her on. The mere idea of all this power was arousing.

She took the cube, released it and slipped into the costume. As she pulled the mask over her face, she felt herself become a hero.

It was time to sort this out!

Meanwhile, Steve was hard at work. He was carefully stalking the kidnappers, decimating them with well-aimed blows. Soon, the tables turned. Steve grinned. They were looking for him now. Just as he liked it. While the music was still playing and the people were still partying, he climbed up into the rafters. Below, people were dancing and drinking. Up here, he was at an advantage. So, it was time to get their attention.

With a solid kick, he knocked down one of the big projectors. The device tumbled down and crashed on the dancefloor. Steve breathed out. He had made sure it wouldn't hit anybody, but he was still relieved this had worked. Soon, people were climbing up the pylons.

That would be fun!

At the same time, Heartbeat was on her way to the top of the building. Before doing anything else, she had to get backup. She had no idea how long the driver would last, so it was best to get the cops. She emerged on the roof and looked around. There it was. An array of antennas, complete with several computers had been set up. The moment she looked out, three guards looked at her. She used the moment of hesitation when they saw her costume to charge. They tried to get their tasers up, but she was all over them. She rammed her shoulder into the first one, throwing him to the ground. Then she turned and snapped a powerful kick at the next one's face. The poor man was thrown in the air by her enormous muscles and crashed on the concrete with a gasp. Number three pointed his taser at her, but she didn't even care. Instead, she grabbed his hand, twisted the weapon from it and forced the guy to the floor. Holding him down with some casual pressure of her foot, she checked the machine. Bingo. This thing was receiving all the signals from the building and its surroundings and filtering it. Any calls for help would be redirected into some electronic nirvana.

Well, that would change. She asked:

"The login. Pretty please?"

The man under her foot shook his head. She said:

"I'd hate to push some more, so please, tell me how to shut this thing down."

She shifted her balance. Her heavy, muscular body squeezed the man into the concrete roof. She didn't like to do this, but they had to be quick.

"Okay, okay, I'll tell you!"

"Wonderful. Thank you very much!"

Below, Steve was having a ball. A good dozen black-clad fighters were trying to get to him and, well, they weren't. Whenever one of them managed to get close enough, he'd find himself on the receiving end of a well-placed punch or kick. They either retreated or crashed down on the floor below and he could tell they didn't like that.

For him, things were pretty simple. This fight was attracting the crowd's attention, the party was breaking up and people were staring and pointing. Steve could tell that these people were losing control and once they did, they would probably run. All he had to do for now, was not die.

And then, things got more difficult. Steve stared as a huge guy climbed closer. This one was way out of his weight class. The soldier held his breath. Well, the bigger they come, the harder they fall. He jumped and swung to another part of the construction. The big man followed him with surprising agility. Steve dodged the man's blows as he came closer. He was surprised. He had expected him to be way slower and careful. Well, big problems needed big solutions.

With a quick jump, he threw himself at his opponent and tripped him off the scaffolding. The big man stared at Steve, but he lost his footing and fell. Steve tried to catch the rigging, but it was too late. So, he did the

best he could in a fucked up situation and clung to the guy, using him as a shield.

Heartbeat looked around. Clearly, things were heating up in the building. The police was on its way, so it was time to get back inside and sort things out. That's when she spotted a few of the perpetrators running out and heading for their cars. Ah. It was too much for them now. With a mighty leap, she soared through the air and landed on the first vehicle's roof. There was a crash as her bulk blew out the windows and stopped the car dead. She reached inside, grabbed the driver and threw him down with a flick of her wrist. Then, she rolled off the car roof and turned to the second one. The driver tried to get the vehicle moving, but she was faster. She grabbed the front bumper with both hands, crouched down and lifted the front of the car. The wheels spun pointlessly. The driver stared at the muscular goddess in front of him and slowly removed his foot from the gas. She smiled and mouthed:

"Get out."

Steve was stunned. The guy below him had broken his fall, but it was still hard. He struggled to get to his feet. The men above him shouted and screamed, but in this moment, Steve couldn't think of them. He was now standing up and stumbled off into the darkness, trying to lose them. It didn't help much. Within moments, they were upon him. The men dogpiled him. He fought them off as good as he could, clapping their ears, breaking their noses and poking their eyes. They ran over him like a wave. He grabbed one of them by the balls and squeezed hard, causing the man to scream in panic. Punches rained down on him as he tucked in his head, hoping to protect it. He could hear more shouts and screams. He was having a hard time concentrating as fist after fist struck him, but then, there was an opening.

He breathed in sharply, his busted lips tasting of iron and tried to attack. That's when he came face to face with this gorgeous amazon. He stared at her as she picked off another attacker and helped him to his feet. He looked at her and mumbled:

"Thank you. I had them right where I wanted them."

Heartbeat looked at the taxi driver, his face almost unrecognizable from the relentless beating he had received and said:

"I just thought you might need a diversion."

He laughed and instantly winced. Somebody had clearly broken a few of his ribs. She said:

"The cops are coming. You did well."

He nodded and replied:

"That's great. I just have to check on someone."

He stumbled off into the darkness.

Heartbeat wanted to say something, but just then, the cops arrived and she had to assist them in clearing up this whole mess. There was no time for explanations.

Steve arrived home after an endless odyssey through the night. He had looked all over the place for Alina, but hadn't found her. It was as if she had been spirited away. He didn't know how to deal with this. Had she failed her and the kidnapers had managed to take her away? Had she disobeyed his orders and gone off on her own?

It took him a while to give up, then he left as quickly as possible. He didn't want any trouble with the cops. After all, he wasn't the most trustworthy person they could meet and he couldn't afford getting locked up, even if he would later be released.

So, he climbed into his cab, bought some painkillers and medical supplies at the drugstore and went home. Once there, he went to work, carefully setting his broken bones and cleaning and closing all the open wounds. Once he was done, he fell in a long, dreamless sleep.

Only when she had explained everything to the cops, Heartbeat could return to the building and drop her disguise. She rejoined her friends, who were only slowly calming down, cowering by the ambulance and sipping hot tea under their blankets. They were surprised by how unfazed she seemed.

Loana said:

"I'm really sorry I got you involved in this. It was a stupid idea. I just didn't know ... I thought it would be exciting."

Alina sat down next to her, put her arm around her friend's shoulder and answered:

"Well, it was exciting, but next time ..."

"I know, right."

She took a deep breath and accepted the blanket and drink although she didn't need them. As the tea cooled in its cup, she started to think. This was the second shocking incident in a week. Maybe there was something more to this.

Paul looked at his audience. A whole room of hungry young investors, ready to make a killing. A bunch of predators, out for blood. They also looked a little disappointed. He didn't care. They were at the beginning of their project, a certain amount of "wastage" was to be expected.

"Operations One and Two captured the eye of the public and caused a measurable decline in sense of security. Although the intervention by Heartbeat and an unnamed figure have prevented Operation Two from deploying its full effect, there will be ripples ..."

Flora, a hard-faced woman that wore her suit like an armor sighed audibly.

"Ripples won't make us money, Paul. We were expecting massive changes. If they are gradual, businesses can adapt and we won't get our profit."

He kept his expression under control.

"I assure you, Operation Three will get us the payoff we expected."

"I hope so. Because I'm not entirely sure you correctly factored in this superheroine or her little civilian friend."

"Trust me. It'll work perfectly!"

Flora leaned back. She'd see. So far, this man's grandiose plans were a little too vulnerable.

Steve crawled back into normal life over the next weeks. He was forced to drive his car while still on painkillers, but he managed. The passengers might have noticed, but he was pretty certain he made it work. Still, after the events of that night, he kept his ears to the streets. This operation was way too professional to be a casual thing. There were people behind this who knew perfectly what they were doing. He talked to everyone he remembered from before his time overseas. The consensus was clear: Yes, there was something behind this. No, they didn't know who or why. But nothing of the sort had happened anywhere else. It was obvious he had to look for answers in Santoco.

Alina had been on the lookout for the next strike and when it hit, she was all ears. It started innocently enough. Within a week, two teenagers had disappeared. When she looked into it, there were no previous signs of this on the social networks. The girls had normal trouble in their lives, regular parents and enough friends to be okay. And yet, they disappeared without a trace. The police was careful not to cause a panic and investigated discreetly.

For Alina, it was time to look into this.

Using the available data from the networks, traffic control systems and CCTV cameras, she managed to reconstruct the two women's ways. They disappeared in a blind spot, never to reappear. She sat in front of the computer and wondered how that happened. There was literally no trace. No one came to those spots for hours, and yet, the women had vanished.

There was only so much she could do from her desk. It was time to investigate in place.

Steve stopped his car. This was the last known place Sandrine Garcia had been seen. He waited. Taking in the atmosphere of the place might be a clue. Sandrine's parents had approached him after Marcy from the diner had suggested him. They offered him money to find her. He had declined. He wasn't a PI. He was just a simple citizen without any special powers or privileges. But he told them he would look into it. And there he was. It was a completely trivial place. There were a couple of buildings, a large junction box and a few alleys that led nowhere. Nobody had seen a thing.

Just as he was getting ready to get out and look around, this woman appeared. Steve stared. Now this was a surprise!

Alina looked around. So this was where the first woman had disappeared. She couldn't see anything out of the ordinary. Maybe she'd have to poke around a little more intensely. She took out her phone, activated the cloud of nanomachines and let them search. Meanwhile, she walked around, trying to get a feeling for this place.

Steve had enough of the dancing around and got out of the car. He walked up to her and asked:

"Looking for something?"

She jumped, surprised by his sudden appearance. It was true, Steve could move very stealthily if necessary.

"Oh God, you nearly gave me a heart attack!"

"Really? I'm sorry." His voice made it clear he mostly wasn't. "I was looking for you in that building but you just disappeared, even though I told you to stay hidden. I was worried those guys had done something horrible to you."

Alina immediately returned to her composed self.

"I don't think I owe you anything. You saved me, yes, but then, you completely disappeared. I had to do something."

"Oh really?" He smiled, but it wasn't friendly. "I told you not to."

"You're ex-military, but the war is over and I'm a civilian. You don't have any right to give me orders."

"I was trying to save everybody's lives there!"

"Well, me too!"

They were now practically shouting at each other. She added:

"Besides, why are you even stalking me?"

"I'm not stalking you! I only spotted you a minute ago when you started poking around!"

"So you think this is your own personal poke-space? Well, good luck with that, poker-boy!"

Steve grimaced. What was this woman even saying? Was this some kind of nerd speak?

"You're ... Just stop. I'm trying to investigate here. So please, just leave me alone and allow me to do my job."

That's when Alina's expression changed:

"What are you investigating?"

"That's none of your business."

"I believe it is. You're looking for Sandrine Garcia, aren't you?"

He harrumphed. She grinned:

"I get it. You're some kind of local hero. Or at least, you're trying to."

"And you? Are you some kind of journalist?"

"Nope. I'm just a concerned citizen. Things in this town have been going crazy lately, and I want to know why."

"Hm."

"What do you say? Since the thing at the factory worked out well, we could try and find Sandrine Garcia together. Besides, there's another disappearance which I think is related."

He blinked. That was a piece of news he could use.

"Okay, I'm in." He faced her. "My name's Sergeant Steve Yakovsky. I was in the army, but I got sent home. Long story, don't ask."

"I won't, no problem. Alina Lawrence. I don't have any fancy ranks or stuff, but I studied industrial design and engineering."

Steve shrugged. Whatever.

They went to work. It wasn't as if the place was yielding any information easily. Eventually, Steve asked:

"About that other disappearance ..."

"Yes. Her name's Linda Rodriguez. I can show you where she was last seen."

"We should try that."

After a short drive, they were at a near identical place. Steve was unhappy. He had expected more.

"This isn't helping."

Alina nodded, but then she said:

"Say, do you have a key for the junction box?"

There was another one right here. Steve fumbled in his pockets and pulled out a large keyring.

"As a matter of fact, I do."

He unlocked the box and opened it. She said:

"Bingo."

There was a hole in the floor, big enough to let a grown man through. It went down in the sewers.

"I guess we know where they went."

"Yuck."

"If you want to solve this case, you'll have to deal with the stench."

With these words, he climbed down through the hole. Moments later, she followed him.

The passage below was cramped. Steve turned on his torch and said:

"Okay, let's see. There's got to be some way to find out where they went."

"Don't you think they got kidnapped?"

"I'm not sure. I have seen no sign of struggle and getting someone through that hole against her will isn't easy. I wouldn't rule it out, but right now, I see no reason to think so."

"Wow. You're a true detective, Steve."

"Stop mocking me."

"I'm serious."

She activated the nanomachines again. They spread out, looking for anomalies. Reports ticked by on the phone's display. Then, she said:

"We should go this way."

"Why?"

"The phone says there are traces of Linda Rodriguez perfume and conditioner."

"Your phone can do that?"

"My phone can. It's a bit special."

"Definitely."

They walked through the corridors. Steve went in front and Alina gave him directions. She wasn't sure this was a good idea or even practical, but he insisted. Then, after quite a while, they reached an exit. The phone said that Linda Rodriguez had gone out here. Also, it matched the info she evaluated for Sandrine Garcia. Apparently, the two young women had gone here.

Steve made a sign for her to be quiet and climbed out. Alina was surprised just how silently this big man could move. Then, she followed him carefully.

They came out in a back alley that didn't look special at all. However, the moment they were out, Steve pointed to a corner and darted there, pulling her with him. As she landed against his hard chest, she wanted to ask why, but he put his finger against her mouth and pointed up. There was a well-hidden camera observing the place. They were in its blind spot now. Steve looked around and didn't find another one.

Good. They might yet keep the element of surprise. That's when they spotted a hidden entrance. This was a big thing.

Steve ducked over and checked out the lock. He smiled. This would be easy. With a few movements, he opened it and motioned Alina to follow him.

They entered a small room that opened into a large hall. Alina was surprised. Apparently, this place was some kind of old warehouse that had been converted into what exactly? They looked around and found that this was a kind of gym or martial arts training facility. There was no one there now, but before they could investigate further, there was a kind of commotion and a group of young people came in. They were led by a rather muscular man in a crimson outfit. It all had a kind of cult look. Steve pointed at one of the teenagers and Alina recognized Sandrine. Linda was there too. They were wearing similar red outfits, whereas the others wore white.

The cult leader had them all kneel on the floor, keeping Sandrine and Linda in front. He waited until they had settled down and said:

"Rejoice! My initiates, we have accomplished much. Your two sisters, Sandrine and Linda, have finished their training first and are now allowed to take the final step. Their transformation into true mistresses of their energy."

The audience clapped. Someone shouted "You go, girls!"

People frowned at the interrupter and the leader went on:

"As you know, we live in the End Times. The world is overrun by people who say they are acting in the best interest of everybody, but in the end, they only serve themselves. They are hailed as heroes, but in truth, they are only fooling the masses. They speak of tradition, of values, of love, of freedom ... All these words are just empty shells. Empty shells they use to blind the people. They hide their evil behind a façade. We won't do that. We are honest. Honest to ourselves, honest to each other, honest to the world."

There were nods and noises of agreement.

"If we commit acts that people see as evil, then it is only for them to see the true evil in the reactions of their would-be benefactors. We tear down their masks, we reveal the ugliness and the lies underneath. We bring truth!"

Now, the teenagers were shouting their agreement and applauded, getting up and almost dancing.

"Today, your sisters will receive the powers they need and the symbols they will show the world. They will be bringers of truth and I trust you will seek to improve yourselves and follow them. Soon, the world will tremble!"

The two young women got up and walked to the front. There were two robust medical chairs, complete with monitoring equipment. Four assistants walked in and led them to the chairs, attaching various contacts and sensors. The two young women wore only very simple underwear. Alina watched the procedure intently. She knew these machines. They looked very similar to those that she used to control and adapt her own nanomachines. But how? That technology was only available to her own company and only under strictest supervision. When it was used in medical therapy, the doctors and engineers were forced to render the machines inert as soon as they were no longer needed.

And now, this.

Sandrine flinched as the assistant stuck a needle in her arm. Linda was clearly in some meditative detachment. Steve watched the operation and tried to understand. What kind of craziness was going on there? The young women were fit and strong, so much was clear. They had probably received a robust training and martial arts. Were they supposed to be suicide bombers? This cult didn't look like it would do something like this. Still, this meant trouble.

Alina was hesitating. She probably should act right now and just attack. People would get hurt, she would reveal her secret identity, but that was better than having out of control nanomachines in circulation. Maybe she could try something ...

"Steve, could you scout closer and maybe find a circuit breaker? We should stop this now."

The soldier nodded and sneaked off. Alina immediately retreated into the shadows, pulled off her clothes and activated her own nanomachines. The young woman was well aware that just stripping like that without context was weird, but what could she do? Her transformed physique was certain to destroy her outfit.

She immediately felt the power surge through her body. This was something she never could get enough. Alina sighed as her muscles started to expand and grow. Her heart beat strongly, every pump pushing energy through her body and turning her ever more powerful. She felt her muscles swell with strength, her shoulders spread and her arms tighten and grow.

The young hero stood up straight, feeling her muscles expand and harden. Soon, the growth subsided and she looked at her naked, idealized body. It was hard to deny that she was a goddess. She pulled out her disguise and slipped it on, when she suddenly heard a horrifying scream from the other side of the hall.

The two young women were going through their own transformation and it was clearly painful. The nanomachines had been pumped into

their bodies and were now rebuilding them.

Sandrine was shaking and shivering on her chair as her body was transforming. It was swelling and growing at an alarming rate. Her muscles, which had been trained, but otherwise pretty looked normal, were now getting bigger. In a few moments, she had gone from lanky teenager to fitness model to bodybuilder. She was in pain, but she was also staring at her transforming body.

Her friend, Linda, was going through the same. She was maybe a little plumper, but now, her muscles were growing and she was soon reaching titanic proportions. The effect was shocking. The two young women had gone from waifish to hypermuscular in mere moments and the growth was still continuing. It also spread to their faces, somehow transforming them.

Steve stared at this bizarre display. Their faces were somehow melting, slowly turning into impassive, generic visages. They were still screaming, but their expressions seemed completely calm and relaxed.

The other teenagers seemed intimidated by what was happening, but the cult leader was careful to keep them under control. He led them into a kind of prayer and soothed their panic.

And then, the screaming stopped. The two young women shook their heads, stared at their hypermuscular bodies and got up. The audience was captivated. It was clear that no one had expected this to happen. The two young women looked at each other. Their Amazonian bodies were truly amazing. Every muscle was perfectly defined and built up to perfection. However, their faces were confusing to them. They looked as if every piece of individuality had melted from them. Sandrine said:

"This is incredible." Then, after a pause, she asked: "What happened to my voice? It sounds odd ..."

Linda replied:

"You look strange. Your face ... My voice ..."

They sounded exactly the same. It was confusing. Indeed, the two girls had been turned into bizarre muscle twins. The cult leader took that opportunity and said:

"It worked perfectly. You are now the perfect agents of truth. Bring the outfits!"

Steve looked around. Alina had somehow disappeared and he had no idea how to shut this place down. It was surprisingly well-made. Also, the mutated teens had shocked him. This was crazy! What should he do now?

Heartbeat sent out her nanomachines. Time to find out what was going on! This cult was using her technology, so she had to find out where they got it from and how much they knew.

In front of the audience, the two young women slipped into their costumes. They were crimson, white and black and underlined their strength and powerful silhouettes. As they pulled down the masks, the other young people cheered. The cult leader stood in front of this pair of superpowered heavyweights and said:

"You are ready, you can now strike first. Go forth and bring destruction upon those liars!"

Behind them, a gate opened and they ran out, the cheers of the audience filling the hall.

Heartbeat stared at the report. The nanomachines were of the same make as hers. They came out of Lawrence Medical. Someone had taken them and given them to this cult. She nodded to herself. She had to act now.

While the cultists were still clamoring and the cult leader was telling them that they could watch the pair's actions as a stream on their phones, she sneaked over to Steve, who was still trying to find an opening.

The soldier stared at her as she suddenly turned up next to him. He whispered:

"Whoa. Where did you come from?"

"We need to act quickly. These guys are fools, but you need to take out the leader and the assistants. Don't kill them, we need to make them talk afterwards."

"Hey, lady, I don't know who you are and why you are here, but I'm not taking orders from you."

Heartbeat was impressed. This guy was completely unfazed by the fact that he was face to face with a hulking amazon woman. He looked at her, clearly impressed, then said:

"Also, you're Alina Lawrence. I don't know why you have the same technology as those crazies, but it's pretty obvious."

She was surprised.

"What gave you that idea?"

"Oh come on. You disappear and a huge superheroine shows up in your place. Twice. You investigate disappeared teenagers for no reason. You've hardly even tried to hide. The only thing is that your face looks different, but I guess that's a mask of some sort."

"Okay, I am impressed. We'll talk about that over drinks. But for now, will you do as I asked you?"

He sighed:

"Fine. I'll do the beating up, you stop those teens."

She nodded. Steve got up, cracked his knuckles and said:

"Okay, you fuckers, wanna get your asses handed?"

Moments later, Heartbeat was in hot pursuit. She had to find those two before they did any damage. She knew full well what a boosted body full of nanomachines could do. Thankfully, her own system had attached herself to them and she could follow them easily. As she jumped from building to building, she hesitated. Should she inform the police? If the young women were apprehended, there would be an investigation into the nanomachines. It wouldn't be hard to connect them to Lawrence Medical and that would spell trouble for her.

She decided that it was better to stop them alone first, deactivate the machines and extract them. This way, she could hope to find out what had gone wrong in her own backyard.

Screams alerted her that she had found the place. She stopped and stared. There was a mall and just now, a huge statue had been thrown out of the building's façade. It was pure luck that thing hadn't hit anybody, but the chaos was spreading fast.

Heartbeat braced herself and ran in. Inside, the devastation was shocking. The two young women were tearing that place apart, injuring the customers. It was a miracle no one had been killed yet. The costumed musclegirls laughed as they picked up a teenage boy and tossed him down to the fountain. Heartbeat shot forward and caught the young man, setting him down gently.

She pointed at them and declared:

"Give up right now or face the consequences!"

The two identical young women laughed. Their voices boomed through the hall.

"You're Heartbeat, aren't you? You're that goody two shoes useful idiot that still defends this rotten, perverted society. Nice to have you here! We were looking for someone our size!"

Heartbeat flexed her muscles.

"Bring it!"

Her two foes obliged. They pulled out the handrails of the stairs that led up there and swung them around like spears. One of them, maybe Sandrine, shouted:

"Let's face it, you have no chance against us! Our muscles are huge and we trained for this for months. We'll destroy you!"

The other one echoed:

"Run now, and you'll only be humiliated. Fight, and you'll be dead!"

Heartbeat taunted them:

"We'll see about that. Deep down, you're just a bunch of angry teenagers. No one's taking you seriously!"

The pair screamed and attacked. They ran and jumped, their powerful legs propelling them in the air. They bore down on Heartbeat, but the heroine jumped out of the way and sped up. She managed to get behind one of them and landed a mighty kick. The blow sent the gargantuan attacker stumbling. She was getting really angry now. The other one charged at Heartbeat, but years of experience and practice were paying off and she grabbed the railing and knelt down, twisting the steel bar. This gave the younger woman a kind of spin that made her stumble and crash into her "sibling".

The two musclewomen collided, screaming in frustration. They dropped their weapons and attacked again, trying to get Heartbeat into a pincer.

At the same time, Steve was having fun. These people were wildly incompetent. They were a bunch of teenagers with a little combat training, but they lacked both morale and experience. When he knocked one of them on his ass, those next to him recoiled, getting in the way of those coming after them. They practically fell for every trick in the book, short of pointing upwards and going "Oh!".

The trouble was, beating up a bunch of kids didn't help him get to the cult leader. For now, the guy was still watching the fight, but Steve was pretty certain he'd run for it the moment he understood that his dupes were unable to stop him. He had to act quickly.

Wading into the battle, Steve quickly drove a wedge into the youths. He didn't want to really hurt them, so he stopped his punches, but he had to be quick now. Pushing them aside, he broke through and slammed into the cult leader. The poor guy tried to dodge the attack, but was so surprised that he ended up with Steve's shoulder in his chest.

The soldier threw him to the ground and landed a good kick in his face. As the guy was out, his followers seemed a little disheartened. Steve looked at them, cocked his head and said:

"Run now and I won't hurt you ... much!"

Once he was alone, he picked up the cult leader, loaded him on his shoulders and left. The technicians had fled quickly enough, but he was quite certain he could make this guy tell him where to look.

At the mall, the two teenagers had finally managed to focus and were now putting Heartbeat in serious danger. They outflanked her and used their numerical advantage to force her into one of the shops. Heartbeat also couldn't help noticing that these two were stronger than her. Their muscles were amped up to eleven and every blow of their fists was devastating. For now, she had mostly managed to keep up and stay out

of harm's way, but she was tiring and she just couldn't see a way to defeat them.

The pair laughed:

"Is that all you got? We were scared of you, and now it turns out that you're a weakling."

"Yes! She's got big boobs and a nice costume, pretty face and everything, but it's all just show."

"You've got no chance against our strength. Look at those muscles! They're not for show, Heartbeat!"

They flexed, their huge muscles growing even larger under the strain. The pair laughed and showed off some more. Then, suddenly, they attacked and slammed into their opponent at full power. Heartbeat was thrown through a nearby wall and crashed into a clothes shop.

"God, I love being huge. This is so much better than being a weak-ass little girl!"

"You're right, sister. I adore this power!"

"So let's crush this stupid fuck!"

Just as the two gloated, Alina realized that a direct fight was pointless. She'd have to use a different tactic. With a thought, she undid her transformation. Her muscles collapsed and within a few moments, she was just her regular, naked self inside an oversized full-body suit. She slipped out of it quickly, grabbed a shirt and some pants and fled.

The two monstrous young women climbed through the hole, making it larger with blows of their fists.

"Where is she gone? Can you see her?"

"Hey, look at this!"

One of the huge musclewomen pointed at the outfit that laid there like shed skin.

"Yuck, that's her face and hair."

She squatted down to pick it up.

"That thing is gross."

"But that means that there's a naked musclewoman hiding in this store ..."

"Maybe not. Maybe it's the same as with us."

"But the leader said there was no going back!"

"She's probably using some different technology or something. Whatever, we gotta find her and crush her. And then, we break this place and destroy all those vapid assholes!"

Alina hid in one of the changing rooms, careful not to make a noise. She took out her phone and connected it to the nanomachines. If she couldn't defeat them by pure force, she'd have to use her smarts. She sent the cloud of miniature robots on them and had them infiltrate their system. It took a moment for them to connect, but now, she could try and take control.

She activated the code-breaking system. This would take a while. Outside, the teenagers were tearing the place apart. She heard them call out:

"Come out, you weakling!"

"Give up, coward! We're going to break you anyway!"

The phone was just running through the program, when it suddenly produced a blooping sound. Shit. Four eyes locked on the door of the

changing room. Alina aborted the program. There was just one thing she could try. The stomps came closer. If the nanomachines were made by her company, they had a failsafe included. One the company always installed as a safety precaution.

It was a matter of luck.

One of the hypermuscular teenagers broke open the cabin and stared at her, murder in her eyes.

Alina activated the failsafe and prayed.

There was a kind of hiss, and then, a shiver went through the bodies of the hypercharged berserker teens. They stood there, paralyzed. It was as if someone had pulled the plug. Alina gasped for air. Her heart was beating like crazy and she was feeling deeply uncomfortable. To be perfectly honest, she wanted to throw up. She had just evaded certain death and needed a little time to recover. The petrified young women stared at her, their eyes equally immobilized, but she could tell that they would have torn her limb from limb if only they could.

Outside, the police arrived and Alina took the opportunity to transform back into Heartbeat. She had to clear this up and try to get the nanomachines out of these young women before they recovered.

Flora looked at Paul. The young executive was shivering in his suit. She grinned like a predator.

"That was your third operation? A bunch of teenagers wrecking some stores in a mall?"

"The plan was for them to devastate the entire area."

"Well, that plan failed." She sighed dramatically. "Oh Paul, what do we do now? This was the third failure in a row, simply because you didn't take into account the most obvious problem."

"Uh ..."

"Paul, did you or didn't you know about this superheroine that has been protecting our city for months now?"

"Of course I knew. I thought we'd be rid of her by now and then, there would be panic and ..."

"What exactly did you do to be rid of her?" He wanted to say something, but she just interrupted him. "Nothing. Correct. You did absolutely nothing. But that's okay. It just means you wasted massive resources by ignoring an obvious problem." She turned to the other members. "I don't know about you, but I think we should get rid of this idiot. Before he comes up with a fourth operation."

One of the senior members nodded and said:

"This sounds good. Have him taken outside and silenced." He looked at Flora. "As far as I can see, you have diagnosed our problem correctly. Will you take care of it?"

"With pleasure. I will need to use Paul's resources, though."

"That's fine with us. Just get rid of our problem."

"I will."

Steve felt weird. He was wearing his good suit, but even his good suit was hardly good enough for this place. Somehow, he felt he should have gone for his uniform instead, but this was also making him uncomfortable. He had gone to the hairdresser, though, and clean-shaven and crew-cut as he was, he looked okay. He also brought flowers and chocolate, hoping at least one of them would work.

When he walked in, Alina got up and greeted him. She looked stunning. Wearing a very sleek black dress, her hair done up in a trendy fashion,

she appeared way beyond his level. However, she instantly made him comfortable by accepting the flowers and the chocolate with a gracious smile and a friendly thank you. She led him to the table quickly, by passing the maître d'hôtel and ordering a glass of wine for each.

"Do you mind if I choose the drinks?"

"Not at all. I have no idea how that works. Also, this place is way beyond my means."

"Don't worry. We won't split the bill."

Steve managed a smile. Then, he said:

"Okay. First of all, it is nice to see you. You look amazing."

"Thank you. The suit looks good on you. I like the rugged style, but this is very nice."

He laughed:

"God, I haven't been to a fancy joint like this in years."

"You'll enjoy it. Just assume that you own the place, then it'll be perfect."

He leaned back and said:

"I don't know if I'll be able to do that, but I'll try." He glanced around at the various very fancy people and added: "Do you wanna talk shop now?"

"Let's wait for the wine, shall we?"

The wine was excellent and they managed the entire meal without speaking of their heroics. Instead, they managed to find out about each other. It was weird. They had little in common at first: Alina came from an overly protective family, Steve was an army brat, squeezed out of his mother's womb to fight. In the same way, the Lawrences always had a

lot of money, while the Yakovsky family was often struggling. Having five siblings also meant way less attention for him.

Still, despite their differences, they were having a great time. It was probably because they shared similar personalities, who knew.

Anyway, by the time they had eaten, they were a little drunk but very happy. As they left, Steve said:

"We're going to have to take a taxi, but not mine ..."

"Better not. I'm pretty sure we'd manage to get home safely if we drove very carefully, but I wouldn't want to get arrested. That wouldn't look good on a champion of justice."

"Nope. That would actually be very awkward."

"Super awkward. Because of superheroes, you get that?"

"I get that."

They ended up at Alina's place and Steve was impressed. Living on the penthouse level of her own tower was way over the top. She didn't much care about it and led him through the huge living room to the bedroom.

"Wow. That place is huge."

Alina blushed:

"I know. It's a bit over the top."

"I don't mind. I like the view. Also, not having any neighbors that'll peek inside is a definite advantage."

She nodded and came closer to him.

"I think we should get you out of that tie. You look uncomfortable."

He smiled and let her undo the knot. Then they embraced. She said:

"This feels good."

"That's right. It's been years for me."

"For me too."

"Why? Am I missing a tragic backstory?"

"Not really. I just have this condition that makes my body a bit sensitive ..."

"So that's the secret origin of Heartbeat?"

She nodded:

"I have to be really careful if I don't want to change."

He grinned:

"That's fine then. Since I already know your secret identity, you can let loose. And I get to make love to a huge amazon woman."

"You'd like that?"

He nodded.

They climbed on the bed and got out of their clothes. Alina could see that Steve was very excited. She was too. She carefully undid the buttons of his shirt and grinned. What a sight for sore eyes! Steve was strong and he looked the way. Sure, there were a bunch of bruises from the last fights and a couple of older scars, but that man was quite amazing. He slipped out of his shirt and she touched his biceps.

"Nice."

"You know how it is ... You train, you beat people up, you get fit ..."

She laughed and said:

"That never worked with me."

She dropped her dress and revealed a pale, soft, yet slim body. Steve grinned when he saw the lacy underwear.

"Wow. I'm way beyond jackpot territory now ..."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

"It is."

Soon, they were naked, rolling in the sheets. It was fun and it was lighthearted. Neither knew what to make of this. Would they end up in a relationship or was this just an idiot fling? They didn't care.

Steve was hard in a moment and Alina fondled his balls. He grinned as he got on top of her. She kissed him and whispered:

"Be careful. I'm feeling that change coming ..."

He started to fuck her, gently at first, but as her heart rate went up, the transformation started. At first, Steve managed to ignore this and just continue, making her gasp and sigh, but then, he couldn't help noticing what was going on.

He was slowly getting lifted up by her growing muscles. The effect was shocking. Her thin, twig-like arms started rapidly filling with heavier and heavier muscles. Within a few moments, she went from nothing, to fitness model, to bodybuilder, to human tank. Her biceps swelled and swelled, first fist-sized, then baseballs, then coconuts and finally handball-sized masses of muscle. Her entire body was growing. Steve lost his rhythm when he noticed that her tiny, perky breasts were growing into humungous tits in the later parts of the alphabet. Her bulging abs grew against his own midsection, as her thighs grew bigger and bigger.

Steve was getting lifted up by her huge body, transfixed by the young woman's metamorphosis. She grinned, her neck turning into a thick, powerful collar of muscle. He managed a "Oh my God ... This is

incredible ...”, but she just enjoyed the show and once her transformation slowed down, she said:

“I love this. Please go on!”

He obliged, his hands holding to her thick lats.

“It is pretty obvious who she is, don’t you think?” Flora looked at the data. “She uses Lawrence Medical’s nanomachines which we have also acquired as part of our investment strategy. The fact that she has been around longer than their operation in medical applications suggests that she is an insider. And when you look at Alina Lawrence’s biographical data, ta-daa. She’s Heartbeat.”

The executive smiled at the other board members.

“So what I’m going to do is I’m going to crush her in public. And when she is humiliated and defeated, I’m going to unmask her and expose her identity. This will both destroy her and the public trust in her company. We’ll buy it up and use the crisis to finally make our cut.”

There were nods. A momentary drop in share value at Lawrence Medical would be a small price to pay to get full control of this revolutionary technology. The idea of selling it to the militaries and mercenary companies of the world was exhilarating.

“Okay, so we’re all in agreement. I’ll leave you now and you’ll hear more in the news.”

She stepped outside, eager to go to the lab. Now it was time to transform!

Steve lay on the bed next to this giant muscle woman that had seemingly appeared out of nowhere. He felt strangely safe next to her huge body. Also, fucking her felt awesome. She said:

“I liked that a lot. I never had sex this way, but I think I’m going to get used to it.”

He agreed. Then he said:

“Excuse me for bringing that up, but I still had to tell you what the cult leader told me.”

“Oh yes, I kinda forgot. Shoot.”

“That guy’s actually a second-rate actor who was asked to set up this organization for some guys that looked very businesslike. At first, he thought it was just a con, but when the transformation worked, he realized what he had gotten himself into. He said he had no idea of the real plan and I believe him. However, he also said that the equipment they used came from your company.”

“I thought as much. We have a problem here. There are shareholders that have influence on the board and I think they may have taken some of our technology. So I guess they are responsible for all this. I have no idea what they want, but I wouldn’t believe it’s over ...”

Flora relaxed. The nanomachines were inside her body now and she was ready to activate them. The helicopter had just deposited her on the pad on top of Lawrence Tower. Time to crash whatever party Heartbeat was attending now. As the helicopter left, she pulled the mask over her face. It felt odd for a moment, but with a little adjustment, she was ready. That full-body outfit was strange. Tight, but also flexible. Superheroes ... What a weird idea.

Well, showtime. She activated the nanomachines and felt the power

course through her veins.

The feeling was incredible. She hadn't expected it would be so amazing. On the one hand, it was a bit terrifying, but then, there was this promise of incredible power. Her heart beat heavy in her chest, pumping like an engine. She took deep breaths to keep it under control. And then, it happened. Slowly at first, there was a kind of pulsating energy running through her body. It was getting faster and with each beat, she felt her muscles grow. She looked at her arms and was astonished. Every time her chest seemed to contract, her biceps grew a bit. Toned from years at the gym at first, it soon turned into a fitness model's. Then it grew some more. And more. And even more. The transformation accelerated. Her muscles contracted and relaxed and she couldn't help moaning with pleasure. There was a certain pain in this, but she ignored it as good as she could. She looked down on herself and noticed how her chest was rising and falling. Every cycle made it bigger, stronger and heavier. She grinned as she noticed that her breasts followed suit. Well, this is where she'd get her superhero figure.

Just as she was getting used to it, the transformation abruptly stopped. She was confused for a moment, but then, it hit her once more at full power.

She almost came as her body stretched and literally exploded with muscle. The effect was shocking. As Flora recovered, she found that she was a good 6'8" tall and covered with colossal muscles. She was now a titaness of outrageous proportions and she felt ready to take on anybody.

Time to stop that Heartbeat dead.

Alina smiled as she climbed on top of Steve. Since she was bigger and stronger than him, having her on top was obvious. She said:

"Let's try it this way. I bet you wanna see what this body looks like from below."

Just as he wanted to respond, the alarms went off and there was a loud crash outside. They got up and checked the door of the bedroom. That's when Flora thundered into the living room.

"Come out, Heartbeat! Time to get what you deserve!"

Steve stared at the giantess that just made short work of the sofa. This woman was so utterly covered in insane muscles, he found it hard to take this all in.

"What the fuck is going on?"

Alina saw the attacker and said:

"I guess our opponents played their trump card. Please distract her for a moment while I get ready."

"Can't you just fight her like that? She'll crush me with her fists?"

"It's not that. She's way more powerful. I have to crank up my energy, and that's dangerous."

"Okay. I'll do what I can."

Steve stepped into the wrecked living room as calmly as he could.

"Who are you and what do you want?"

Flora saw the puny little man and laughed:

"Aren't you cute? A little toy for Heartbeat to fuck? Do you like big women? Because I'm way bigger and stronger than her!"

"Heartbeat?"

"Don't play dumb."

She charged him. Steve dodged out of the way, the turbulence that hulking woman created almost knocking him over. He grabbed a heavy piece of decorative art, some kind of oddly shaped marble thing, and threw it at her head.

Flora's arm shot out and she caught it in mid-air.

"Cute. But pointless."

She took the little statue in both hands and twisted with all her might. At first, nothing happened, but then, there was an almighty crack and she broke the thing in two, dust spraying everywhere. She threw it back at him and declared:

"You have no chance against the Annihilatrix!"

The black-clad giantess laughed and added:

"And now, I'm going to grind Heartbeat into dust."

She turned to the bedroom and kicked down the door. In complete disregard of his safety, Steve ran and jump-kicked into her back. It was like striking at a concrete wall. He crashed to the ground, rolled to his feet and got in defensive stance, only to find himself completely ignored.

"Come out, you coward!"

And out she came. Heartbeat crashed into the attacker at full force. Her muscles were swelling even as she hit Annihilatrix, pushing her back several feet. The huge woman laughed.

"Nice! I almost felt something."

That's when she got a good look at Heartbeat. The other woman was breathing heavily, but she was huge. Her muscles were still growing, but

she was really gigantic already. Alina had to concentrate. Being this huge and strong put an enormous strain on her body. She had to act quickly, otherwise it was all for nothing. She attacked.

The two monstrosly muscular women struggled. Fists rained upon muscular bodies, insanely powerful fingers fought to grapple at their massive arms. Every blow was powerful enough to destroy a car or crush a steel girder. Their enhanced bodies were pumping with energy.

Heartbeat was at an advantage. Her experience and her still growing power helped her. The Annihilatrix noticed this and cranked up her own body. Flora felt another surge of strength flood her. Crashing blows thundered through the apartment. The furniture was reduced to broken steel and busted wood. Steve had to scramble out of the way as the two enormous women struggled to force the other one into submission.

Under her costume, Alina was suffering. She was sweating, her heart was beating faster than ever before, her muscles were aching. She almost felt detached from herself. Still, she fought on, using any opening her foe offered her.

Flora was starting to panic. She was huge, she was strong, but she started to notice her lack of experience. Her giant body felt foreign to her and it was clear that Heartbeat knew what she was doing.

Well, she had an advantage at hand she could use.

Without warning, she released her grip and snatched Steve up. She held him up, her arms turning into a human rack.

"Stop right now or I rip him apart like a ragdoll!"

Alina stopped. Her heart was pounding up to her neck, her vision was getting blurry. She had to finish this quickly or she'd collapse. She stumbled.

"Feeling weak, huh? I thought you wouldn't be able to keep up. So, give up. Give up, and I'll let him live."

Steve yowled:

"Don't! You have to fight her!"

"Shut up, you weakling!" The Annihilatrix lowered him to threaten him with one giant fist.

That's when Alina attacked. She crashed right into her enemy, the face-pulverizing fist striking against her sides. The blow knocked the air out of her lungs, they both stumbled and the trio crashed through the window.

Steve realized that he was falling. The Annihilatrix was under him, disappearing faster, but he knew this was it. He would die. Well, it was a good life and the hours before ... Well, those were worth living. He was falling faster now. Thankfully, the tower was so high it took a moment to crash. Weirdly enough, he wondered why the windows hadn't been proofed for this. Maybe architects didn't think of superhero fights. That was probably it.

And then, she caught him by his leg. He could hear it break and the shock of being so abruptly stopped almost knocked him out.

Then he heard a voice above him:

"Hey, don't die yet. We still have a lot to do."

She dangled above him from one of the girders, her muscles slowly deflating as she pulled him closer.

"I love you."

"Me too. You're amazing."

The next days brought a lot of cleaning up. There were several arrests, Steve got a very advanced cast on his leg and treatment for a bad case of concussion. Alina had to rest, her last fight having completely overstrained her heart. Crime-fighting was out of the question for the both of them. Instead, they relaxed as good as they could, staying at a hotel since Alina's apartment had to be completely redone.

Alina managed to convince the cops that her company wasn't really involved in the crime spree and denied any involvement with Heartbeat. Steve gave a very detailed account of their night together which explained why Heartbeat was clearly a completely different person.

All in all, the pair was relieved that it all had gone well. The Annihilatrix, on the other hand, wasn't found. It was as if she had disappeared somewhere on the way down.

As Alina and Steve recuperated, an employee came to them and said:

"Someone has sent you this letter."

Steve took it and opened it. There was just a piece of paper in it.

It said "A".

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Roy Ellison writes weirdo erotic fiction. Despite evidence to the contrary, he insists it is about the characters and the plot.