
SUPERIOR
PART 3


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The technicians approached the cell cautiously, shuffling in one after another in their yellow HAZMAT suits. Natasha sat naked in the middle of the cell, her brown hair hanging over her shoulders. The cell itself was enormous, designed to contain a giantess, which made her look almost pitifully small in comparison. She was a petite thing, and she looked almost fragile sitting there... But everyone knew just how dangerous she could be.


The electronic door swung open with a pneumatic hiss. The technicians filed inside one by one, spreading out around the edge of the chamber. The overhead light beamed down on them, intense and oppressive. They approached Natasha cautiously, nervous she might lash out like she had before.


The technicians fanned out, readying their measuring implements. The lead technician glanced at the others, his voice slightly muffled through the suit's filter.
"Alright, let's proceed with the standard pre-contact diagnostics," he said. "Radiation, bioenergy, and neural readings. By the book."


One of the technicians crouched down in front of Natasha, close enough to reach out and touch her. He pulled a small wand-like device from his belt and swept it slowly in front of her chest. The display flickered with shifting numbers, settling into a steady pattern.
"Bioenergy levels are normal." He announced. "Same baseline as yesterday. No unexpected surges in any metric."


Another technician stepped forward, holding a flat black scanner in one hand. He hesitated for just a moment before reaching out and pressing his gloved palm against Natasha's forehead. She didn't react. He held up the device with his other hand, watching the readout while keeping a careful eye on the woman at the same time.
"Neural activity... within acceptable parameters. Cortisol elevated, but only slightly. She's calm enough."


The cell door hissed open again, and Dr. Morgan entered in her crisp white coat.
"Status report?" She said briskly.

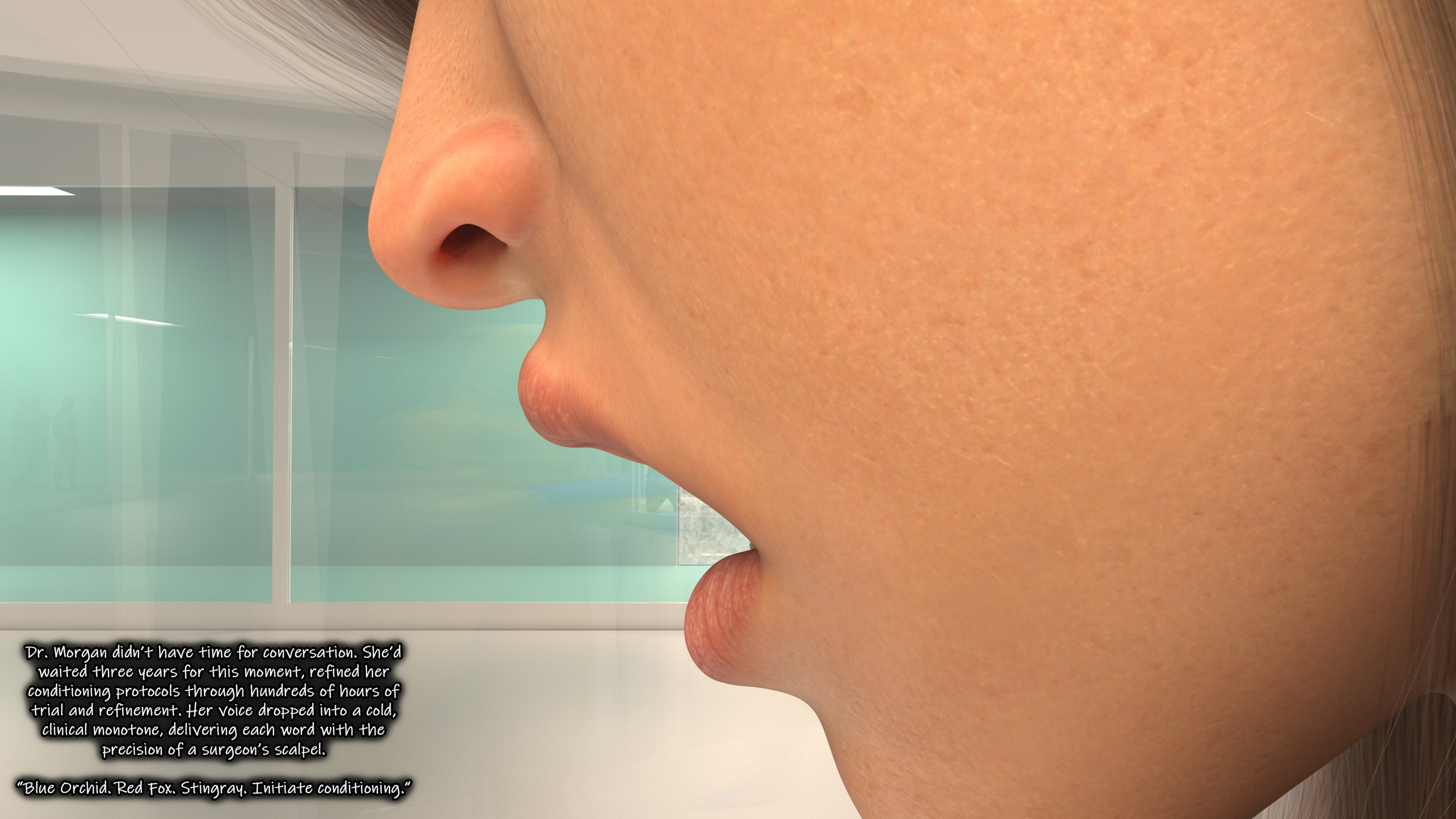

The lead technician turned. “Bioenergy and neural readings are nominal, Doctor. Subject is stable, but hasn’t responded to any stimuli. Same as she has been for the last forty-eight hours.”


Dr. Morgan nodded once and stepped forward. The technician closest to her quickly held up a hand, blocking her path.
"Doctor, you're not in a HAZMAT suit. Protocol requires-"
"Enough with the protocol." Dr. Morgan said flatly, taking the tablet computer out of his hand. "We can't afford any more delays. Stand down."


The technician stepped aside, glancing nervously at his colleagues. Dr. Morgan approached Natasha, holding her tablet computer in hand.
"Hello, Natasha." Dr. Morgan said.
Natasha groaned, took a deep breath, and lazily craned her head up to look at the woman. "What now? You going to run more tests? Go ahead. Poke me with needles, take samples, whatever. I'm sure the hundredth time will yield different results."


"Your attitude aside..." Dr. Morgan said curtly.
"I'm not here for any of that. Mila grew."


Natasha gasped. For the first time in months, she showed a hint of emotion. She stared up at Dr. Morgan, searching her face for some hint that this was all a joke, but found nothing.
"Y-You're serious?" she asked. "That little brat... She finally did it!"


Dr. Morgan didn't have time for conversation. She'd waited three years for this moment, refined her conditioning protocols through hundreds of hours of trial and refinement. Her voice dropped into a cold, clinical monotone, delivering each word with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel.
"Blue Orchid. Red Fox. Stingray. Initiate conditioning."


Natasha's reaction was immediate. The words had already burrowed inside her, and a high-pitched ringing began to build behind her eyes, growing louder with every passing second. Her hands flew up to her ears, pressing hard against the sides of her head. Her face contorted, the smug satisfaction draining away in an instant. But no matter how hard she pressed, she couldn't seem to relieve the pressure.
"Stop." She muttered. "Stop, that's enough!"


Dr. Morgan didn't stop. She continued in the same flat tone, as if reading from a textbook.
"You misunderstand, Natasha. Mila is no longer your sister. She is the enemy. She wants to destroy you. You must do whatever is necessary to prevent that. No matter the cost."


Natasha's face twisted into a grimace. She doubled over, clutching her head with both hands, her brunette hair spilling forward to curtain her face.
"No!" Her voice cracked. "I won't! You can't make me! She's my... sister!"


Outside the cell, Colonel Porter watched with his arms folded across his chest. A smile slowly spread across his face. He'd called this whole project a boondoggle six months ago. He'd told Morgan to her face that conditioning someone like Natasha was impossible. But watching Natasha writhe on the floor of her cell, overpowered by mere words... he was beginning to think he'd owed the doctor an apology.


Dr. Morgan didn't even glance toward the observation glass. Her focus remained absolute, locked onto her subject.
"She has already declared her intention to kill you, Natasha. You must kill Mila before she kills you." she said flatly. "Eliminate her by any means necessary."


The ringing in Natasha's ears reached a crescendo. The piercing whine seemed to come from inside her skull. She threw her head back and screamed, a screech that echoed through the cell. But somehow, even through her own screams, Natasha could still hear Dr. Morgan's voice. Soft. Steady. Burrowing deeper.
"Turquoise pearl. Velvet cake. Return to baseline."


The effect was instantaneous. Natasha's scream cut off mid-breath, as if someone had flipped a switch. Her hands fell limply to her sides, and her shoulders relaxed. Her face went smooth and slack, every trace of pain or anger wiped clean. She stared straight ahead with glassy eyes.
"Now stand up." Dr. Morgan ordered.


Natasha did as ordered, standing up with mechanical precision. She stood there, staring forward with blank eyes. Her face didn't betray the slightest hint of emotion.
Dr. Morgan scanned her up and down for a moment, saying nothing. Then, quietly: "Now stand perfectly still."


Natasha obeyed. She had already been standing in place, but now she was like a statue. She didn't make even the slightest movement.
Dr. Morgan began to circle her, moving slowly. Her eyes tracked every inch of Natasha's body with clinical precision. She studied the set of her shoulders, the angle of her jaw, the barely perceptible rise and fall of her chest. She was looking for any hint of the woman who had been screaming obscenities less than sixty seconds ago. To her own astonishment, she found nothing. What stood before her was little more than a blank slate, obedient and compliant.


Dr. Morgan completed the circuit, coming around behind Natasha. She stopped there, and watched the back of her head for a moment. Not a single muscle moved.
"Perfectly still." Dr. Morgan murmured. "Remarkable. This exceeds even my wildest expectations."


That was all the confirmation that Dr. Morgan needed. She turned toward the observation glass and raised her thumb.
"She's under control." Dr. Morgan called out, her voice carrying through the intercom. "There's no time to waste. Disable the suppression field."



Colonel Porter held his hand up to the console. He knew all the other safeguards had been dropped. He knew that his input was the final confirmation needed to lower the suppression field.

He held his finger up to the button, then hesitated. Pushing the button meant giving Natasha back her powers. If the conditioning wavered, they would have no way to restrain her. In any other circumstances, this would have been an insane action to take... And yet he had no other options.

Porter stood there for just a moment, taking in the weight of his choice. He reached down and flipped the cover off the switch. "Let's hope this works." He muttered, and pushed the button.


The white light overhead dimmed, cycling down through amber before settling into an ominous red glow. The ever-present hum suddenly stopped, and everything was eerily silent.
Dr. Morgan signaled the technicians with a hand signal, relieving them of their duties. The technicians shuffled toward the door in a single file. They knew what that red light meant, and none of them wanted to stay near Natasha for any longer than necessary.


Natasha watched them go.
From the outside, she looked like a living statue, bathed in red light. But behind those glassy eyes, something was waking up. The conditioning was real. She could feel it pressing down on her, heavy and all-encompassing. But that weight wasn't enough to fully drag her down. Natasha had spent three years doing nothing but thinking, and she had gotten very good at it.


She watched the line of yellow suits shuffle toward the exit. She glanced over to count them, finally moving her eyes.


The last technician paused at the threshold. Something made him hesitate, an animal instinct honed by months of working near someone so dangerous. He turned and looked back over his shoulder at her, and saw Natasha's gaze lazily lock onto him.


"I just saw her move!" He said, as the urgency quickly dawned on him. "Oh shit, she's growing!"


The growth started quickly. Within seconds, she was seven feet tall. The technician took a step back. Eight feet. He took another. Nine feet, and her head was brushing the ceiling.


The technician panicked. He did the first thing that came to mind, and grabbed her arm. He raised his free hand, making a fist.
Natasha looked down at him. The expression on her face wasn't anger, or amusement. It was the specific variety of contempt reserved for things so far beneath consideration that they didn't even deserve her acknowledgement. She looked at him the way a person looks at a fly that has landed on their hand.


Then, Natasha flicked her arm. All it took was a casual movement, like she was brushing crumbs off a table. The technician flew back, crashing through the reinforced glass wall and shattering it into a thousand pieces.


Natasha stepped through the broken wall, barely registering the glass as it crunched under her feet. She didn't glance back at the technicians still scrambling around inside the cell. They weren't worth the effort.
"Stop her!" Dr. Morgan's voice cut through the chaos, sharp and furious. "Do not let her reach that door!"


Natasha's eyes drifted to the far end of the corridor. The exit looked like a blast door, with galvanized steel plating. It looked like something designed to keep a tank out. She tilted her head, studying it with mild interest. Getting through that was going to be annoying.


While Natasha was mulling her options, the technicians caught up with her. Three of them swarmed around her legs, like children grabbing at a parent's ankles. Their gloved hands wrapped around her thighs, pulling on her in a vain effort to bring her down. Natasha looked down at them, then rolled her eyes. She didn't feel angry. She didn't feel much of anything, really. Just a low, quiet irritation, the kind you felt when a fly keeps buzzing around your head.



Natasha hoped that they'd simply realize the futility of their effort and leave, giving up out of sheer embarrassment. When it became clear that wasn't going to happen, she grudgingly accepted that she'd have to get rid of them herself.

Natasha resolved to remove them with as little effort as possible. Natasha swung her right arm down with a casual flick. The back of her hand connected with the nearest technician and sent him skidding across the floor. He didn't get back up.


The second one was still clinging to Natasha's left thigh when she turned and drove her open palm into his chest. The impact hit him hard enough to launch him straight off his feet. He crashed headfirst a moment later with a crunch that echoed through the chamber.


In spite of it all, the third technician still had his arms wrapped tight around her ankle. Natasha looked down at him for a moment, genuinely puzzled. She didn't understand what this one thought he was accomplishing.

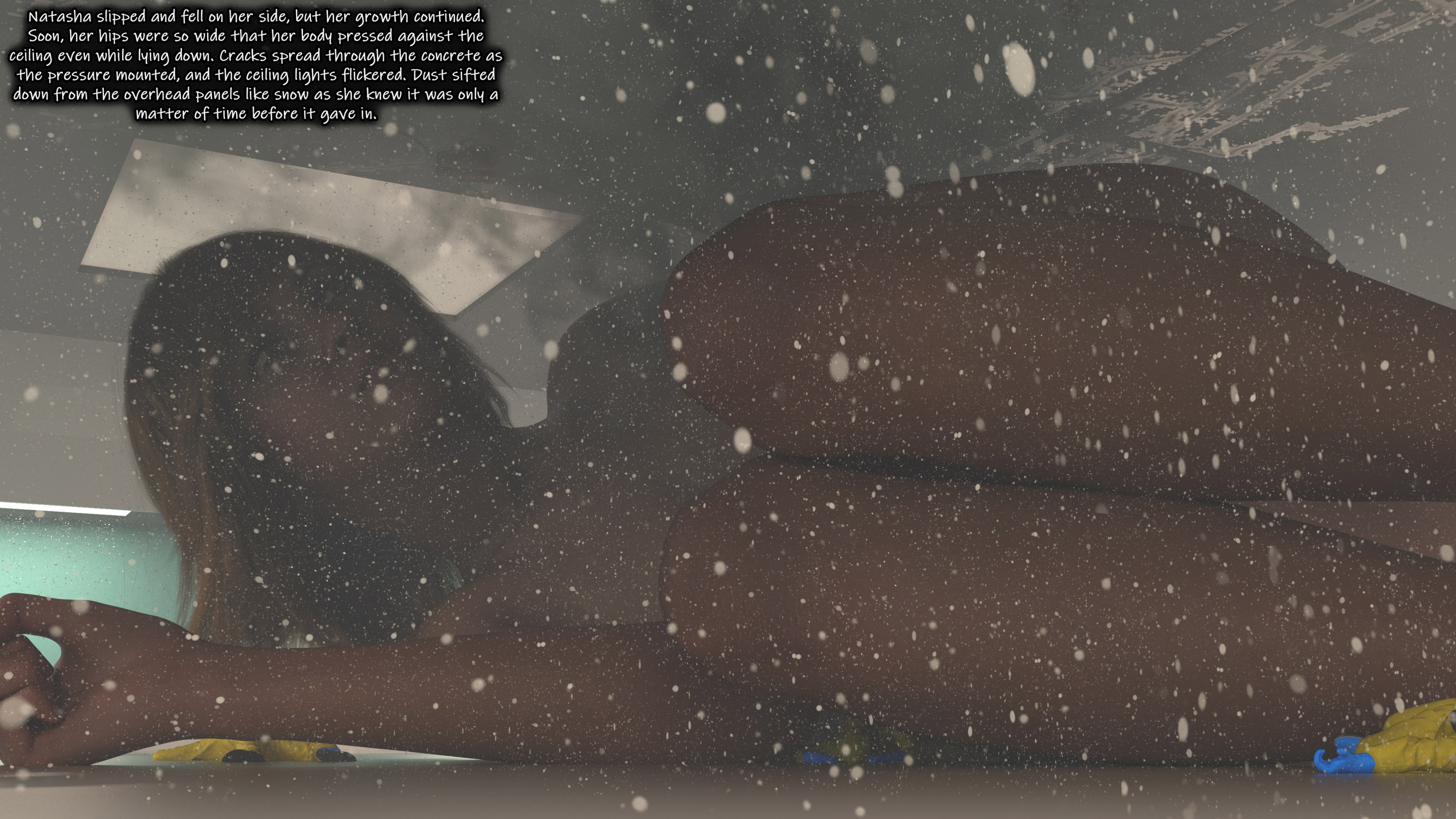

Natasha kicked her leg forward with a lazy, almost dismissive motion. The force was just enough to break the technician's grip and send him stumbling backwards. He lost his balance, landing flat on his back.


The technician lay on his back, staring up at Natasha and hoping she'd take mercy on him. She paused for a moment, looking down at him with that same detached expression. Then she lifted her foot, holding it above him. She was still growing, her head inching higher with every passing second.


Natasha set her foot down. The man in the yellow suit fell back, his head bouncing against the floor.


Dr. Morgan had seen enough. She'd watched years of meticulous work unravel in a matter of minutes. She understood exponential growth better than anyone in the building. She knew, with cold mathematical certainty, that she had maybe sixty seconds before Natasha outgrew the building.
She ran. Her heels hammered against the floor as she sprinted for the exit.


Behind her, she heard the deep groan of structural steel beginning to protest. Natasha was pushing against the ceiling, trying with all her strength to break through.
Dr. Morgan knew that the ceiling was made with reinforced concrete. It had been specially designed to hold Natasha. But Morgan knew that, in spite of all those precautions, it wouldn't hold her for long.


Natasha slipped and fell on her side, but her growth continued. Soon, her hips were so wide that her body pressed against the ceiling even while lying down. Cracks spread through the concrete as the pressure mounted, and the ceiling lights flickered. Dust sifted down from the overhead panels like snow as she knew it was only a matter of time before it gave in.


Dr. Morgan sprinted out of the building, running as fast as her heels would carry her. She could hear the sound of the building straining behind her. She knew it could be a matter of seconds before Natasha broke out, and she tried to brace herself.


The impact still caught her off-guard. The ground suddenly shook, knocking her off her feet. She stumbled, catching herself with one hand, and looked back.
A massive arm had punched through the reinforced concrete, and now it was lifting what remained of the roof higher into the air. Chunks of the roof sheered away in huge slabs, tumbling down the sides of the building. The rebar twisted and snapped, sending smaller pieces of debris falling to the ground below.
CAUTION
KEEP DOOR CLEAR
WARNING
STORAGE AREA
NO SMOKING OR OPEN FLAMES

Natasha rose, greeting the bright sunlight for the first time in ages. Pieces of the concrete roof slid off her shoulders and back, crashing down onto the shipping containers stacked around the facility. She straightened slowly, her dark hair tangled with dust and debris. She was the same size as the building now, maybe a little bigger. She looked out at the base, taking it all in without any particular interest.

A line of soldiers was running towards her from the far end of the yard. There were half a dozen of them in full tactical gear, carrying their rifles as they ran. Someone shouted an order and they stopped in place, opening fire simultaneously.




Natasha glanced at them. She reached down without any particular urgency and wrapped one hand around one of the large shipping containers stacked beside her. The metal groaned as she dented it, swinging the whole container over her head as easily as if it was a cardboard box. The bullets kept coming, pelting her across her arms and torso. She didn't flinch.


She threw the container, launching it across the yard. It tumbled end over end, trailing a thin scream of wind, and came down directly in front of the formation.
Natasha realized, to her disappointment, that all the soldiers were still alive. All of the noise and chaos had certainly startled them, but hadn't stopped them. She'd have to deal with them another way.
WARNING
RESTRICTED AREA
KEEP OUT


Dr. Morgan fell once again, landing hard on both palms. She looked back and saw Natasha's massive foot looming over her. For a moment she thought she was dead, and she closed her eyes tight. But when Natasha's foot came crashing down, she was still alive. She opened her eyes and saw that Natasha's foot had landed directly right behind her.


Natasha stood tall, scanning the base below her. She was thinking about walking away, when one of the soldiers started shooting at her. She looked over at him, firing from his little watchtower, and contemplated his fate.
Maybe she could have let it go, if he'd only fired a single magazine. That could have been excused as an impulsive fit of rage. But to fire a second magazine? That was different. He must have watched the first magazine do nothing, and still went through all the trouble of reloading, aiming his gun, and firing again. That was an act of stupidity so profound that it couldn't go unpunished.


Natasha started walking towards the soldier. She had just lifted her foot above a barracks, when the soldiers on the ground started to fire at her again. That was more than enough of an excuse for her to make a little detour.


Natasha stepped down on the barracks. She made a point to stomp down extra hard just in case there was anyone hiding inside. The arched metal building bent, then collapsed under her. Sure enough, she felt something soft and squishy crunch under her sole.


Natasha took another step, raising her foot above one of the soldiers. He stumbled back, firing his rifle wildly into the air as he fell.


She stepped down, crushing him just as easily.
The soldier in the watchtower fired at her again. Natasha stared condescendingly down at him. That must have been at least three reloads now. This was beyond the pale.


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Natasha raised her foot above the watchtower. Even as he ran, the stupid little soldier kept shooting at her. It was enough to annoy Natasha ever so slightly, which was all the reason she needed to kill someone at her size.


Natasha brought her foot down, stepping on the metal watchtower. The top crumpled under her weight, and the support beams twisted and snapped. The soldier lost his balance, tumbling down the stairs. She pressed down harder.


Dr. Morgan watched as Natasha casually crushed what remained of the tower. The other soldiers were still shooting at her, which could serve as a distraction. She might just have a chance to escape, if Natasha would only turn away for a moment.


Just when Dr. Morgan was about to make a run for it, Natasha looked her way. The giant woman's attention turned to the soldiers, who were still firing their rifles up at her. She gazed at them with what could only be described as a look of mild annoyance.


Natasha bent down, reaching out for one of the soldiers. Even as her hand approached, he just stood there, emptying his magazine into her palm. He never tried to run. Dr. Morgan didn't know if that made him brave or stupid, if there was even a difference.


Natasha grabbed the little solider, and raised him up to her mouth. Dr. Morgan immediately realized what was about to happen. She had seen footage of Natasha eating people, but she'd never seen it in person before. Watching Natasha shove the soldier into her mouth directly in front of her was far more terrifying.
The part that unnerved Dr. Morgan was just how calm Natasha was. She didn't seem even the least bit agitated. Her heart rate had rarely been elevated in the lab, and she seemed every bit as relaxed now.


A moment later Natasha bit down, chomping through the soldier with a meaty crunch. This, too, she did without the faintest hint of disgust or shame. The way she casually chewed, you would have thought she was eating a potato chip.
Dr. Morgan had been watching the display with her usual detached, analytical distance. That all ended the instant that Natasha looked over, and locked eyes with the doctor. There was no obvious look of surprise, just a smile that slowly spread across Natasha's lips, as she finished chewing her food, then swallowed. The doctor stood in place, too petrified to make the first move.


Natasha broke the uneasy tension, reaching out for Dr. Morgan. The doctor hopped to her feet, sprinting as quickly as she could manage in her heels.
It wasn't fast enough. Natasha's fingers closed around Dr. Morgan within a dozen steps. The giant hand swept down from above and grabbed hold of her.


The doctor felt the pressure of those fingers lock around her torso, squeezing just tightly enough to lift her away from the ground entirely. Her heels dangled in the air, kicking uselessly at nothing.
Natasha raised her to eye level without any particular urgency. She held the doctor at arm's length, studying her with the same clinical detachment that Dr. Morgan had spent years directing at her. The irony wasn't lost on either of them.
"You must have known it would end this way." Natasha said coldly.


Dr. Morgan's mind raced through the calculations with cold efficiency. She was thirty feet off the ground, held in the grip of the most dangerous person alive, with no backup and no weapon. She catalogued her options and arrived at a simple conclusion.
She had one move left.
"Blue Orchid." Dr. Morgan said, focusing every last ounce of her will into keeping her voice as steady and monotonous as it had been back in the cell. "Red Fox. Stingray."


Natasha looked down at the doctor with utter disbelief. "You still think you can control me with those nonsense commands?" she asked. "Your words cannot hurt me. Nothing can."



"Initiate conditioning," Dr. Morgan pressed on, ignoring her. "Turquoise Pearl. Velvet Cake." She was going through the full sequence now, every phrase she'd spent three years embedding, every trigger she'd tested and refined in that cell. "Mila is the enemy, Natasha. Doctor Morgan is to be kept safe from harm. Mila wants to destroy you. You must eliminate her. Kill Mila. Kill your sister before she kills you. Doctor Morgan will help you accomplish this. She will give you strength."

She knew it was a long shot. The conditioning had been designed for a controlled environment, with the subject restrained and the suppression field active. Delivering it out here, suspended in the air by the subject she was trying to condition, wasn't exactly in keeping with the protocols.

But then something happened.


A tremor ran through Natasha's jaw. Her head jerked back involuntarily, like something inside had shifted out of alignment. The giant woman grimaced in pain. It was clear she was fighting against the command ripping through her mind.
But it was just as clear she was losing that fight.


Natasha's grip slowly loosened. Dr. Morgan stared up at her, not daring to breathe. She couldn't tell if this would save her, or if she was simply prolonging the inevitable. Something behind those dark eyes was processing, rattling around in the architecture that Dr. Morgan had spent three years carefully constructing.


Then Natasha blinked again, and the moment passed. Her expression settled back into something smooth and unreadable.
The conditioning had been focused on ensuring Natasha could be used as a weapon. Everything else had been an afterthought for the doctor, even her own safety. This kind of scenario wasn't one they had planned for. All Dr. Morgan could do was hope that Natasha realized how valuable she would be to her, and would decide to spare her.


Those hopes started to fade when Natasha looked at Morgan, and her eyes narrowed. That gaze wasn't the glossy-eyed gaze that the conditioning aimed to invoke. It was a predatory stare, sharp and cunning. Dr. Morgan could sense where this was headed, but she was in uncharted waters. She tried to think of some command that might force Natasha to release her, but came up blank. With no other options, she tried to improvise.
"Opalescent Llama! Set me down... gently! Inverted pyramid... Uhh, return me to safety!" Her usual controlled demeanor was now completely shattered, replaced by complete and utter panic.


The commands seemed to have no effect. Natasha raised her hand above her mouth and opened wide. Dr. Morgan found herself looking straight into Natasha's cavernous maw. Then Natasha tilted her hand, and she started to fall. Her foot landed on Natasha's tongue. She tried to push against the inevitable, but quickly slipped.


The next thing she knew, Dr. Morgan was lying on top of her former test subject's big, wet tongue. Desperate, the Doctor threw out every idea that came to mind. "Umm, Bitter Orca! Just stop eating me now, your next meal will be delivered soon! No, shit... Okay, Mantis Toboggan! Dr. Morgan is poisonous, do not eat her! Oh no, Jesus, fuck!"


Natasha closed her mouth, and gulped her down. Everything went dark. The doctor, who had trapped Natasha in that torturous cell, was now trapped inside of Natasha. Only the doctor's time would be far less than the three years Natasha had endured. There was a certain irony that would have appealed to the doctor, if she weren't in a state of complete and utter panic.
For Dr. Morgan, this was the end. But for Natasha, it was just the beginning.


Back in the city, Mila stood at the heart of what had once been the greatest city in the world. The blocks around her had been reduced to smoking ruins, still trickling smoke into the late afternoon sky. From her vantage point, miles above the streets, it looked almost beautiful. Still, Mila barely registered any of it. She was looking over at the horizon now. For all the fun she'd already had, there was still so much more city out there, just waiting for her.


Mila lifted her foot, raising it into the air with a slow, lazy movement. She held it suspended for a moment while she searched for something interesting to step on. Something fun to crush.


She looked down at the city beneath her. The buildings looked so pathetic from up high: cheap little things that would break apart and crumble at her slightest touch. The little people running through the streets were less than ants. They were specks, microbes. Nothing. It was all so weak. She had expected far more from the greatest city in the world.


Mila lowered her foot onto a cluster of apartment blocks south of where she stood. Her foot covered a full city block and then some, the toes spilling over onto a row of brownstones. The buildings disappeared beneath her foot, vanishing into dark shadow.


She let her weight settle, slowly. Through the soft skin of her sole she felt the faint, almost imperceptible resistance of the buildings underneath. The penthouses gave first. She felt the gentle prick of antennas and water towers as they pressed into her sole for a moment before they snapped, then the slow give of the top floors caving inward.


Debris cascaded down the sides of the buildings, a waterfall of glass and concrete pouring into the streets below. Her foot pressed down further. The middle floors compressed first, sandwiching together with a low, distant rumble. She tilted her head, almost curious.


Then the buildings gave way all at once. The bottom floors finally buckled, and an entire block of apartments simply collapsed beneath her. The deep boom from their destruction reached her ears a half-second later. It was muted and distant, like the sound of thunder from far away.


Within seconds, there was nothing left. Where a neighborhood had once stood, there was now only a flat patch of rubble, pressed down into a perfect imprint of Mila's bare foot. Hundreds of people had been inside those buildings. People who'd thought their high-rises might shelter them. People who had nowhere else to run. None of them were alive anymore. Mila didn't even think about that. She didn't care enough to consider them or their plight.


She stared down at the ruin with the same vague disdain she'd worn all afternoon. It was almost too easy. No one was even trying to stop her anymore. They'd just given up. Though stomping around a helpless city had her own charm... this wasn't how it was supposed to be. She'd seen the footage of her sister's rampage a hundred times, and Natasha had always looked so engaged. The resistance that greeted Natasha just looked so satisfying to humiliate and destroy.
By contrast... Mila was feeling bored.


Maybe more destruction would help? She took another step deeper into the city.


Her foot rose again, this time settling over a cluster of taller buildings. They were maybe thirty or forty stories each, glass and steel office towers crammed together along an avenue. From above they looked like a stack of dominoes, all lined up and waiting for someone to tip them over.


She lowered her foot onto one in particular: a sleek office tower that stood even taller than its neighbors. It must have been close to fifty stories tall. From street level it would have been an impressive thing that stretched high into the sky. Up here, next to her, it didn't even reach the bottom of her shin. She watched her own toes settle over its roof with detached fascination. It amused her to think that everyone else thought these skinny little structures were big. They were nothing to her.


She pressed down. The tower folded under her foot with almost no resistance. The facade exploded outward in a glittering shower of glass as the structure flattened. The buildings on either side caught the edge of her foot and went down with it, support beams shearing under the spreading weight. A whole block of corporate office space simply ceased to exist in less time than it took her to exhale.


Mila lifted her foot and walked on, leaving the ruin behind her without even acknowledging it. The crater she'd made joined the dozens of others she'd already left scattered across Midtown, smoking testaments to her afternoon stroll.


She continued forward, her enormous strides covering blocks at a time. It was such a small city. She remembered marveling at how big it was when she lived down there. How long it took to get anywhere. Now she could walk across it in twenty steps. Maybe fifteen. The thought made her smile a little. The world really did get smaller the bigger you got.


She walked through more of the city, flattening more of it beneath her feet. Whole blocks vanished with each footfall, churches and bodegas and luxury condos all reduced to the same gray paste. She wasn't even aiming anymore. There was nothing worth aiming at. She didn't need to. Walking was all it took to leave a trail of destruction in her wake.


Eventually, her stride carried her south. She tilted her head, peering past the lower end of the island, and her eyes settled on the Financial District. A dense cluster of skyscrapers along the waterfront, gleaming in the late afternoon sun. They were the tallest things she could see, and somehow, miraculously, they were all still intact. They stood there, defiant, as if their wealth somehow meant they'd earned the right to remain standing.


Mila planted her hands on her hips and stared at them. "So arrogant," she murmured, her voice rolling like thunder over what was left of the city. "You look like you think you're special. We will see about that."


She took a step towards them. Her foot lifted high, and came down over a group of older office buildings that lay in her path. Compared to the gleaming towers ahead, they were old. Decrepit. Outdated. And filled with lowly wage slaves.
Compared to her, they didn't even register.


Her foot came down through them. There was no sense of stepping on them so much as stepping through them. It was like walking through thick grass. The buildings collapsed in on themselves, brick walls buckling outward and roofs caving in as her toes smashed right through them with only the smallest amount of resistance.


A moment later they were flat. Mila hadn't even looked down to confirm it. Her gaze was fixed on the towers in the distance. The faint pressure of the demolished buildings against her sole barely registered as a soft cushion underfoot. She wondered absently what she stepped on. But by the time the thought finished, she was already taking her next step. Whatever she'd just stepped on was gone anyway, so thinking about it after the fact was pointless.


Mila raised her foot above a row of old brick towers. Some part of her almost respected them for surviving so long, but only enough to make crushing them feel ever so slightly meaningful. They had outlived generations of tenants, weathered hurricanes and recessions and terrorist attacks. She wondered how old they were, and if they would perhaps qualify some of the older standing buildings in the city.
Not that any of that was going to save them from her.


Her foot came down. The towers gave way instantly, raining bricks onto the streets below. Clouds of red dust billowed up around her ankle, coating her skin in a fine powder. Mila wiggled her toes through the rubble, feeling the last few floors compressed into the foundation. There. Now they matched everything else.


Miles away, on the far side of the East River, Natasha emerged from the haze. She was several hundred feet tall now, but still painfully small compared to the figure looming over Manhattan in the distance. That overgrown airhead was facing the other way, fussing over some unimportant little district, oblivious to the world behind her.


Natasha tilted her head back and stared up at her sister. Mila's head was literally in the clouds. It just wasn't right. Natasha was the one who had done it first. Natasha was the one who'd been put in a cage for three years for daring to grow. Now her stupid little sister had stolen the sky from her, while she was still down here at street level.
"Look at you." Natasha murmured to herself. "Walking around like you own the place, but you don't. I do."


Natasha tilted her head back and stared up at her sister. Mila's head was literally in the clouds. It just wasn't right. Natasha was the one who had done it first. Natasha was the one who'd been put in a cage for three years for daring to grow. Now her stupid little sister had stolen the sky from her, while she was still down here at street level.


She turned her head slowly, scanning the horizon. Her eyes swept across the broken skyline of Manhattan, over the bridges, out toward Brooklyn and Queens. Smoke columns rose in dozens of places, blurring the view. She squinted into the haze, curious if it was all in her mind, or if she was really onto something.


But there was nothing to see, as far as she could tell. Hundreds of tiny boxes and thin spires spread out in every direction as far as she could see. The same little boring rectangles she'd been stomping on all afternoon. The same gray sprawl of buildings, the same distant glitter of glass. The same microscopic ants screaming for help beneath it all.
Nothing notable. Nothing worth her time.


Mila shrugged the feeling off. Of course she was being watched. Millions of people were staring at her right now, gawking from windows and rooftops and basements. Some of them were probably filming her. There were probably thousands... maybe even millions more watching her online. Even if none of them mattered... the sensation made sense.


She turned back toward the Financial District and resumed her stroll. The gleaming towers were tantalizingly close now. They didn't look nearly as impressive this close up. She could already picture how they'd look after she was done with them.


Far behind her, Natasha kept moving. Her foot fell onto a parked car, and she barely noticed it collapsing under her foot. Her attention was locked on the back of Mila's head, miles away. The jealousy burned in her chest like something alive, twisting and clawing at her ribs. She was supposed to be the bigger one. The one with her head in the clouds. Instead, she was still down here, scrambling to catch up. Utterly tiny in comparison.


Mila walked closer to the Financial District. The famous skyline had been on a thousand postcards and movie posters. She'd expected something grand, but up close, they looked disappointingly small.



In the streets below Mila, survivors watched the giantess move far above them. Her foot passed right over their apartment building, close enough that they could see the remnants of those she'd already stepped on clinging to her toes. They held their breath until her shadow moved on. Many a quiet thank you was whispered to whatever god they felt had spared them. They knew she might come back at any time. But for now, they were still alive, and that was something.


Mila took another step forward. The neighborhood beneath her foot, a quiet little stretch of walk-ups and corner stores, was simply ended. She didn't even glance down. The block was nothing, and the people in it were less than that.


She stepped into the Financial District. Her feet were surrounded now by fancy towers on every side. They felt dense, packed too tightly together for her liking. She had to step carefully, placing her feet in the narrow plazas and street intersections so as not to end the fun early by trampling everything at once. Part of her wanted to save these for later, and pick them off one at a time.


She turned to look back at one particular structure she'd just stepped past. It was an odd, asymmetrical little skyscraper. It looked almost like a Jenga tower midway through a game, with blocks pulled out at random and stacked back on at strange angles. She'd seen it in magazines before. Some famous architect had made it. Everyone who lived in it had paid a fortune for the privilege of doing so.


Mila looked back at the lopsided tower with a look of detached amusement. The few people still inside looked up through the glass and saw nothing but a wall of soft, descending flesh.


Natasha watched the display, seething at her sister's every movement. Mila had no idea how to use that kind of power. She was lumbering around aimlessly, destroying things without any purpose. Natasha would have done it better, she was sure of it.


Mila lowered her ass closer, savoring the moment. This was no ordinary run-down office building after all. This one was famous. It had been in the news.
It deserved a proper ending, not just another careless stomp. She wanted to feel every floor as it collapsed beneath her.


Mila sat down on top of the unusually-shaped structure. The roof crumpled under her cheeks first, and then the top floor, and then the next. She wiggled a little, settling in, and felt another half-dozen floors give way at once. It was like sinking into a very expensive cushion, aside from all the broken glass and screaming.


She rested her hands on her knees and looked around as she sat. The other buildings all stood there, shiny and stupid, waiting for her to visit them next. She could reach a dozen of them just by leaning forward.


Mila stretched her arm out toward a nearby tower at random, fingertips ready to give it a casual flick. She listened for the crescendo of screams from those inside when... that strange feeling hit her again. That unusual little prick on the back of her neck. She paused, hand still hovering, and frowned.


Mila turned her head, slower this time.
"Who's watching me?" she muttered.

Mila looked back over her shoulder one more time, ready to dismiss the feeling for good. But this time, her gaze caught on something that didn't belong. Her eyes drifted past the smoke, past the bridges, out toward the far side of the river. And there, walking through the wreckage of Brooklyn, was something just a bit taller than the other buildings.

And it was moving.


A figure was walking her way. A figure that stood taller than the buildings around her.
Mila's lips parted slightly. For a long moment she just stared, trying to make sense of what she was seeing. The figure was nowhere near big enough to threaten Mila, but she still had to be hundreds of feet tall in her own right. She knew right away there was only one person it could be, even if it seemed impossible.
"Natasha?" Mila murmured.


Natasha just kept walking, her feet crushing whatever was unfortunate enough to be in her path. Cars were flattened beneath her soles without so much as a glance. She had her eyes locked on Mila, and nothing else in the city mattered.
In Natasha's mind, the fury had crystallized into something cold and pure. Her airheaded, useless little sister was parading around Manhattan like she'd earned this. Natasha had spent three agonizing years in a glass cage. Now her crowning achievement would be reduced to a mere footnote. Mila had taken everything from her in a single afternoon.


Natasha reached the first tower of the Brooklyn Bridge. She climbed over the tower, her hands crunching down through the old stone as she pressed down on it. All the while she stared up at Mila, who looked back at her with growing unease.


Natasha cleared the bridge tower and dropped down onto the deck on the Manhattan side. She didn't even bother to look at the cars and people beneath her. None of them mattered. The only thing that mattered was getting revenge.


"Sister, is that you?" Mila called down, gesturing with one hand. Her voice was rich with mock delight. "Are you not going to say hello? Even a wave would be nice."


Natasha continued walking, stewing in rage as she stared at her sister. The city, the world, all of it belonged to her. For Mila to show her up like this was a humiliation... one too great to go unpunished.


Mila planted her hands on her hips, watching her sister approach. "So that's it? Well fuck me for hoping our reunion would be a little less... cold." she said dryly. "After all this time. Not even a smile? A friendly word? Not even a how have you been? I am crushed, Natasha. Truly."


She watched Natasha approach, and despite her airy tone, Mila felt something she hadn't felt all afternoon. A looming sense of apprehension.


Natasha was obviously tiny compared to her: knee-high if she stood on her toes. By every reasonable measure, she should have been beneath consideration. But Mila had watched the footage of her sister's rampage so many times she'd practically memorized it. She knew what Natasha was capable of.


Natasha stopped directly in front of Mila. She tilted her head all the way back to stare up at her sister's face, miles above. Her neck strained with the effort of looking up so high.
Mila looked down at her, raising one perfectly arched eyebrow. "Are you finally going to say something? Or have you lost your voice?"


Natasha said nothing. She just stared, tightening her fists until her fingers went white. Inside her head, a quiet, calm certainty settled over her. Mila had the advantage in height on her right now, but that meant nothing.


In every other way that mattered, Natasha was the superior. She had grown first. She had paid the price, and she had not only survived, but she was planning to thrive. Mila was little more than a cheap imitation, and Natasha was going to remind her of that.


Mila folded her arms defiantly. "You know, I really thought you would be happy for me." She began. "Your so-called little sister, finally living up to the Armana name. But here you are, sulking like I stole your boyfriend. Is that what this is? Nothing but petty jealousy?"


Natasha didn't bother to answer. Instead, she closed her eyes. She reached inward instead, down past the rage, down to that place she'd spent three years trying to access through the suppression field. In the lab, on her best days, she'd managed to coax out an extra inch or two before the alarms went off and the technicians flooded her cell with sedatives. A few inches, after weeks of concentration.


It had trained her to be more efficient, and stronger with her ability. Quicker to tap into it, and far more devastating each time she did. It was never enough to overpower the suppression field... but that was gone, now. There was nothing between her and the well of power bubbling deep inside her.
She opened it all at once.


The growth came like a flood breaking through a dam. Natasha's body surged upward in a smooth, accelerating rush. Her shoulders widened, and her legs lengthened. Her hair fluttered in the wind as she stretched toward the sky.
In the space of a few heartbeats, Natasha rose from knee-high to hip-high. Her eyes were closed, her face was calm, and her concentration was absolute.


Mila's eyes went wide. "Oh?"
She took an involuntary step back. The growth wasn't slowing. If anything, it was speeding up. One moment Natasha stood as tall as her hips, the next she was at her ribs, and the moment after that she was eye to eye with Mila's chest.


"That's enough now-" Mila said. Her voice had lost some of its airy lilt. "Natasha? You can stop. I get the point!"
The growth slowed. For a brief, blessed moment, it almost stopped entirely. Natasha hovered there, two heads shorter than her sister, breathing slowly. Mila exhaled. She could live with this, she decided. A sister who was a little smaller than her, who had to look up just slightly. That would be fine. That would be a perfectly acceptable family dynamic.


Then Natasha's growth resumed.
It came faster this time, surging through her in a fresh wave. Mila watched in disbelief as her sister grew past her chest, then her chin. In a matter of seconds, Natasha's eyes were level with her own.


Natasha closed her eyes. She reached back down for that place inside her chest, searching for the warmth that had carried her this far. But as hard as she tried, she couldn't find it again. The well of power had been smothered beneath a fiery inferno as rage creeped back into the forefront of her psyche. She tried to push the anger aside, but it was too much for her to control.


Natasha opened her eyes and glared up at her sister.

The fury in Natasha's eyes was something Mila had never seen before, not even in the old news footage. It wasn't the cold contempt that was ever-present on a bored Natasha's face that crushed people and building alike with aloof impunity. This was something raw, something that had been building for three years in her internment.


Mila was so focused on Natasha's face she never noticed her fist pulling back. With a burst of speed Natasha swung for her sister. Mila saw it coming in the nick of time, and only barely leaned back in time to avoid it. Natasha's knuckles grazed the air in front of her chin, close enough that she felt the wind rush by.


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She took a step back to reset her footing. Her heel came down somewhere in Midtown, and an entire block simply ceased to exist. A dozen apartment buildings compressed into a flat gray smear adorning her sole without her even glancing down.


Natasha was already winding up again, pulling her right fist back. Mila watched it closely, preparing to dodge it again. She thought she was ready.


She wasn't.
Natasha let the right hand fly, and Mila shifted her weight to dodge it. Then she followed up with a punch from her left hand, driving it hard into Mila's stomach. The impact was absolutely devastating. Mila folded forward with a grunt, all the air in her body expelled with that overwhelming strike.


Natasha's right hand came up on pure instinct. She caught Mila under the chin with an uppercut that snapped her sister's head back. It wasn't graceful. It wasn't elegant, but it landed clean.


Mila was staggered. Her head was spinning, and the blow had thrown her off-balance. She took an unsteady step backward, feeling for solid footing.


Mila stumbled back another half-step. Her foot swung up high as she windmilled for balance, raising her enormous sole above the skyline for a moment. Screams rang out from the streets below as the inevitable became obvious.


A second later, Mila's foot crashed down. Her foot ground through whatever was beneath it, erasing a dozen city streets without slowing down one iota. Neither sister noticed.


While Mila was still recovering, Natasha got in position to square up again. She pulled her left fist back, rolling her shoulder into it. She was ready to hit with absolutely everything she had.
Mila looked at the fist. Then she looked at her sister's face. She was getting too predictable.


Natasha swung her fist forward with all her might.
But the windup was too slow. Too obvious. Mila's hand snapped out and caught it with minimal effort. She held Natasha's fist in her palm, squeezing her knuckles tight.


Mila tilted her head, grinning at Natasha. "You know, I always thought you were the athletic one in the family. Very disappointing."


She used the grip on Natasha's fist to yank her forward, then wrapped her free arm around her sister's head, holding Natasha's head under her armpit. She pulled Natasha's face into her ribs, locking her into position.

"Come on now," Mila said through gritted teeth, straining to hold her. "Stop being so dramatic about all of this. You are embarrassing yourself."


Below them, hundreds of thousands of people were watching the uncaring giants grapple overhead. Their every move rattled the buildings on their very foundations, threatening to destroy them without a single touch.


The two of them lurched back and forth, neither one able to progress any further. Every time one of them shifted her weight, entire blocks suffered beneath their feet. Natasha drove her shoulder forward and they stumbled east, Mila's heel punching through a row of office towers that had survived up until now. The buildings shattered under them, collapsing in an instant. Neither giantess paid them any mind.


Mila tightened her grip, yanking Natasha's head down harder. Her right hand was wound deep in Natasha's dark hair, fingers locked in a fist. Her left hand grabbed Natasha's arm, twisting it up and locking it behind her back.


"I am trying to be patient with you." Mila grunted.
"But you are making it very, very difficult."


Her foot came down without warning on the corner of a glass tower that had been jutting up between them. The building shattered around her ankle, exploding outward in a cascade before her foot slammed down through the cloud of smoke a moment later.
The destruction didn't even break her stride.


Mila pushed Natasha down, driving a knee up hard into her sister's stomach. The impact was brutal, forcing the air out of Natasha's body all at once.


Natasha's mouth opened but nothing came out. Her knees buckled and she sagged forward, her whole weight suddenly hanging from Mila's grip on her hair and arm. For a moment she was completely limp, just trying to catch her breath after what felt like a sledgehammer strike directly to her chest.


Mila felt the dead weight and seized the opportunity. She grabbed at Natasha's torso with both hands, digging her fingers deep.
With the leverage of their two positions, she poured everything she had into forcing Natasha's body away, and threw her clean off her feet.


Natasha's body left her hands and spun sideways through the air, rotating slowly as she fell. She dropped like a felled tree, her trajectory carrying her east across what remained of Lower Manhattan. She had just enough time to register that she was falling, and no time to do anything to prevent it.


Natasha struck the city ass-first. The impact was devastating. Everything in a twelve-block radius was simply obliterated, driven flat into the bedrock by the force of her landing. Dust and debris erupted outward, filling the streets and shredding through buildings that hadn't been hit directly.


Natasha lay in the crater, staring up at the sky. Everything hurt. She rolled slowly onto her hands and knees, fragments of what had once been an entire neighborhood falling off her as she moved. She just started crawling forward, putting distance between herself and wherever Mila was standing.
She heard the footsteps approaching before she felt them. Heavy, fast, and coming directly for her.


The kick caught her in the ribs before she'd made it ten feet. She caught herself on her palms, teeth clenched, and fell to one knee in the middle of her attempt to rise.


Mila wasn't done just yet, though. She pulled her leg back, and swung it forward again, catching Natasha straight in the stomach even harder than the first kick. The force of it actually lifted the giantess slightly off the ground, rolling her a quarter-turn to the left.


Natasha rolled onto her back to get away, bowling over several additional blocks in the process. She was cringing as she looked back up, just in time to see Mila's enormous shadow falling across her.


Natasha watched as Mila raised her foot above her face. She knew what was coming, but her muscles were too sore to move out of the way.


A second later, Mila's foot slammed down. Natasha reached out at the last moment, barely catching Mila's foot before it hit her face. It took all her strength to hold the foot back, and Mila wasn't intent on giving up.


"When will you accept that I'm superior?" Mila asked. "You had your moment, now it's my time to shine. Just look at me. I'm better than you ever were!"


Natasha didn't like that. Her rage fueled her, giving her more strength. She twisted Mila's leg, eliciting a yelp of pain.


In an instant, Mila lost her footing. She stumbled forward, careening wildly in an attempt to regain her balance.


Natasha rose quickly, prepared to take advantage. All she had to do was watch and wait for Mila to fall. She was going to enjoy the show.


A moment later, Mila crashed into the ground. She landed in the middle of some projects, which her left breast effortlessly smashed straight through.


To Natasha's dismay, Mila managed to catch herself at the last moment. She was stunned, but not hurt. Not badly, anyway. Natasha stomped her way over to Mila, eager to rectify that mistake.


Mila struggled to get up. She was weakened and exhausted. She was more than ready to end the fight after that.


But Natasha wasn't so kind. She charged over, shoving her way between Mila's legs and reaching for her head. Mila fought back, grabbing a fistful of Natasha's hair.


Natasha didn't have a plan anymore. She was operating on a cocktail of instinct and rage. Decades of forgotten resentments welled up through her body, consuming her.
"I HATE YOU!" Natasha screamed, finally breaking her silence.


"What the hell is your problem?" Mila asked, tugging at her sister's hair. "That's the first thing you say? You're a terrible sister!"


Mila smashed her forearm across Natasha's face, breaking her sister's grip on her hair. It wasn't graceful, but it did the job.


"I'm going to kill you." Natasha said. She wasn't screaming anymore, but her eyes were simmering with fury.


"Like hell you are!" Mila planted her foot square in Natasha's face and shoved, hard. The kick itself didn't hurt, but carried enough force behind it to send the other giantess stumbling backward.


Natasha went down. Her ass hit first, and everything beneath her was obliterated. A dozen city blocks buried into the earth in a single, catastrophic instant.


A moment later her back came down too,
swallowing whole neighborhoods in an instant.


Mila didn't waste the opportunity. She clambered on top of her sister, pinning her down, and pulled her right fist back. Her knuckles were already scraped raw.
"What the hell is going on with you?" she demanded. "You were never like this before!"


Mila's fist smashed into her sister's face. Natasha grimaced in pain, and her head snapped to one side.


Mila pulled back her left fist, breathing hard. "Did you lose your fucking mind?" she shouted.


Then she pulled her arm back again, this time putting her entire body into the motion.
"Maybe I can beat some sense into you!"


Natasha grimaced. She looked back up at Mila with a look of complete and utter hatred.
"You can't beat me." Natasha growled through gritted teeth. "No one can!"


"We will see about that." Mila pulled her right fist back again, and got ready to delivery yet another punch.


Then she felt it. A pressure building beneath her, like sitting on a slowly inflating balloon. She looked down, but already knew what was happening.
Natasha was growing again.
"Okay." Mila said, raising both her hands. "Maybe this whole thing went too far, you know? We can talk this out."


Natasha didn't answer. For three years she had been careful, measured, rationing every fraction of her power under the suppression field. She was done being careful. She opened herself up to her rage completely, and let it pour through her like fuel into a fire.


The results were immediate. Natasha's body surged beneath Mila, doubling in size in a matter of seconds. Mila scrambled for footing, her knees sliding apart as the body beneath her spread outward in every direction.


The growth didn't slow. Natasha leaned forward, and the shift in her center of gravity was enough. Natasha planted one massive hand against Mila's chest and pushed.


Mila fell back. For one disorienting second, a hand closed around her breast. She had the absurd, fleeting thought that Natasha had changed her mind. That she was catching her.


She wasn't.
The hand that had caught her pushed downward and made sure that Mila's body slammed into the earth with extra force.


Mila's back hit the city with an impact like a tactical nuke. The shockwave rolled outward through the streets, toppling nearby buildings and ripping up the street in every direction.


Mila lay in the crater, staring straight up as she composed herself. The sky above her had changed. Something was blocking most of it.
"Sister?" she said.


Natasha stood over her. She hadn't stopped growing just because she'd overpowered Mila. She was enormous in a way that Mila, who had spent all afternoon thinking of herself as unstoppable, had not considered possible. The tallest skyscraper left standing in Manhattan didn't reach her knee. She was already several times Mila's height, and the gap was still widening.


Natasha stood perfectly still, looking down at her sister with an expression of total, absolute composure.
Mila opened her mouth. Nothing came out.


Natasha raised her foot. It rose slowly, deliberately, until it hung suspended directly above Mila's face. From down in the crater, Mila could see nothing else. The sole of her sister's foot filled her entire field of vision.
"Natasha." Mila's voice came out smaller than she intended. "Wait. Just wait. Let us talk about this. Please, I'm your sister."
Natasha's foot began to descend, giving Mila a view of what it was like for the people beneath either of them this entire afternoon.


Mila rolled to the side. She threw herself sideways, scrambling through the rubble as the foot came down behind her. The impact shook the earth hard enough that she could feel it in her bones. Where Mila's face had been a half-second earlier, there was now a crater packed with the compressed remains of several city blocks.


Mila kept moving. She got her hands under her, pushed herself forward, and scrabbled away. Another shadow fell across her. She looked back over her shoulder just in time to see Natasha's foot lifting again, patiently tracking her movement.
Mila threw herself flat. The foot came down inches from her leg. She flipped onto her back, gasping.


Natasha looked down at her.
From the ground, staring up at her sister's face impossibly far above, Mila felt something she hadn't felt since before she'd grown. Something small and cold and very quiet that she recognized, after a moment, as genuine fear.


Natasha raised her foot again. She took her time with it, giving Mila enough time to register what was about to happen.


Natasha's foot slammed down onto Mila's chest a moment later. She didn't stomp down as hard as she could, but it was more than enough. Mila yelped in pain. The foot was enormous, long enough to cover her from collarbone to stomach, and she was sure that her ribs would not appreciate another hit like that.

Mila shoved against her sister's foot with both hands, arms shaking. It took everything she had just to pry it away, and it was getting harder by the second. Even now, Natasha was still growing, and the toes grew slowly in Mila's palms. She could feel the warm foot widening, pressing down with an ever-increasing weight.




Natasha stared down from above the clouds, looking disdainfully at Mila. Her expression was unreadable. Not cruel, exactly. Just uninterested.


"Please, sister." Mila's voice came out strained, squeezed by the pressure on her chest. "I know you are still in there somewhere."


Natasha's only response was to raise her foot higher, repositioning it. It had grown enough now that it nearly covered Mila's entire upper body. She held it there for a moment, suspended, letting Mila look at it.


Then she pressed down again. Mila pushed back with all her strength, until she could feel the muscles in her arm burn from the strain. Neither of them said anything for a long moment. The ruined city around them was still reeling from everything it had endured so far.


Then Natasha stopped. She stared down at her sister's face, pale and straining far below, and something in her expression shifted almost imperceptibly. She moved her foot aside.
Mila gasped for air. She didn't have time to feel relieved.


Natasha's hands came down and closed around her waist, two enormous palms pressing in from either side. She lifted Mila off the ground with no particular effort, bringing her up through the clouds until they were level. Mila dangled there, her legs hanging, her hands gripping her sister's fingers by reflex.


Natasha pressed her palms together slowly. The pressure built in Mila's midsection like a vice tightening one thread at a time. Mila squirmed, twisting, trying in vain to pull away from her.


Natasha watched her sister squirm in her grip. All she had to do was close her hands the rest of the way. It would be over before Mila finished her next breath. All she had to do was squeeze, and Mila would be dead.


She pressed her thumbs into Mila's sternum. Mila grimaced in pain once again, but this time Natasha felt a moment of hesitation. This was what she was supposed to do, wasn't it? That was the point of all of this.


Mila stopped fighting. She looked up at Natasha, giving her a look that wasn't fear or anger, but sympathy. "I'm sorry, sister," she said. "I didn't mean to steal your spotlight."


"I am sorry, Natasha," Mila said. Her voice was rough and a little unsteady, but she held eye contact. "I did not mean to steal your spotlight. I know that is what this feels like. I know."


That just made Natasha angrier. She squeezed harder. She wanted to end this. She needed to end this. She could hear Dr. Morgan's clinical voice burrowing through her skull. Mila is a threat. Kill Mila. She had to kill Mila.


She squeezed harder. Mila writhed. The sound she made was small and pained and very human.
Natasha kept squeezing. But underneath the conditioning, underneath the rage, something was asking a quiet question. Not loudly. Not insistently. Just: Why?


She held the pressure for another second. Then another. And then, slowly, without entirely meaning to, she loosened her grip.
The anger slowly faded from her face. She looked at Mila, finally feeling something approaching sympathy.
"I'm... sorry." She finally said, after several seconds of awkward silence.


Mila reached up immediately and wrapped both hands around Natasha's thumbs, pulling them back. Natasha let her. "Are you going to stop now?" Mila asked, watching her sister's face carefully.


"I don't know," Natasha said. She lowered her hands until Mila's toes just barely brushed the rubble below.


Mila tried to ease backward, testing the grip. Natasha's fingers held, but gently now. It was more reflex than intent.
"There is no reason to fight." Mila said quietly. "We are family. We love each other. Yes?"
"Yes. We love each other," Natasha repeated. The words came out robotically, like she was repeating them without fully understanding what she was saying.


Mila slipped one hand free and rested it against the back of Natasha's fingers. "Try to look happy," she said. "The world is ours. Things couldn't be any better."


Frustration suddenly built up inside of Natasha, not at Mila but at something she couldn't pin down. It was something she couldn't see, something that was all around her. Then, all at once, she was gone.


She opened her eyes, and looked around. For the first time all day, she really looked. All that rage had blinded her to what was around her. Now, finally, she could see.


She was truly massive now. She could see all around her for miles, not just the city, but the countryside beyond it. It was an incredible sight, one that she had hardly even been able to see through all her hatred.


She looked down at Mila, with a look of embarrassment. "I am sorry that I acted like an idiot," Natasha apologized. "From now on, we will conquer the world together. Yes?"

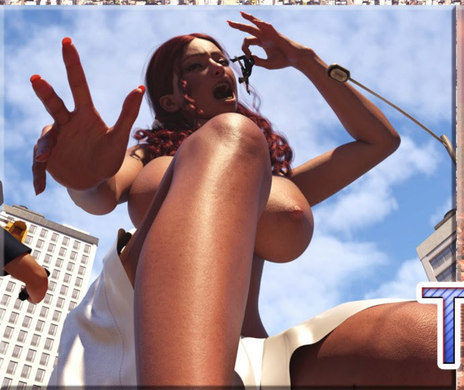

"That sounds like a good plan," Mila agreed.
"First New York, then the world."


END OF PART 3


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