**Reconstruction 15.2**

Looking around the security chamber, at Quinn, Karen, Sherrel, Taylor, Amelia, and Victoria, I sighed, letting Herb go. “So, you guys were listening in all of that?”

“Your earpiece was on,” Overwatch noted neutrally.

“Did you *kill* Eidolon?” Mouse asked incredulously.

“No, I shot him in the arm,” I dismissed.

Herb chuckled, “Not the first time.”

I shot the man withering glare, which wasn’t nearly as effective without eyes. “The first time was an accident, and *I expected him to have some kind of Brute power on when he was fucking* ***Mastering*** *me, okay?”*

Before they could ask, I told the others, “Not sure what it was, something to make me talk and answer his questions. I’ve still got traces of it, so don’t ask a question you *don’t want answered.*”

“Are you mad at me?” Herb asked immediately.

Just as quickly I replied, *“No.*” As he looked a little confused, I continued, “I’m *fucking furious.* Do you *know* how badly shit can go here? When everyone *knows* we’re this strong? What if Kayden got grabbed, and you needed our help, but you had to go back to your room and, by the time you did so, it was too late? What if we were wrong about the Endbringers and Khonsu decided *now* was a great time to start his rampage? I know you were never good about picking up your *fucking phone*, but this isn’t our old lives, where nothing really moved *that* fast, we’re in the *world* saving biz, and Superman can’t leave Darkseid to destroy Metropolis because he was having a ‘*me day.*’”

He winced, hanging his head, “Sorry dude, I-”

“No,” I interrupted. “Don’t fucking apologize, *get fucking better.* I needed your help, to fix a problem that *we* fucking caused, and your ass was AWOL.”

“At least you were able to handle it?” he smiled weakly. “Ya didn’t *really* need my help, did ya’?” He glanced around, seeing the angry looks around him. “Well, you’re still in one piece.”

I didn’t say anything, just shifting my costume from the full-body garment to a t-shirt and shorts, keeping the domino mask.

*“Fuck Vejy,”* Mouse whispered, as the others in the room looked horrified, even Quinn seeming taken aback.

I waved my golden-metal hand, “Yeah, *one piece.*” Looking down at myself, the golden metal covering my wounds took up nearly half my visible skin.

Amelia was next to me in a moment, not even asking as she grabbed my real hand, going still. *“You don’t have eyes?”* she nearly screamed.

I winced, “Did ya have to tell god and everybody? Fine. Warning, this looks a bit grizzly,” I stated, dismissing my mask. “How bad does it look, by the way? I can see, but mirrors don’t work for some reason.”

“Um, yer eyes are on fire,” Sherrel stated, looking a bit green. “or, like, they’re made of fire.”

Turning to Quinn, who I wanted to call something else for a moment, but I couldn’t say what it was, I asked, “Could you take a picture? I’d like to see what it looks like when I’m able to.”

Looking around at the others, their powers were obvious to my sight. Most of them I knew well, though Vehicle Tinkering was still new, the Chrome & Black Rubber Flames burning well, though somewhat pulled back, but not banked. It was rather locked down, forcing certain design trends in how it expressed itself. The trashy, Monster-Truck-on-Acid aesthetic had fit in with Skidmark’s gang of human filth, but to be locked into making it that way just seemed. . . *wrong.*

I couldn’t copy her power, but I could still See it, almost hearing it on the edge of perception. It wouldn’t become un-themed, I didn’t have that much pull, but letting it cycle once more, providing it with the energy to do so, allowing it to find a new way of expressing itself while functionally remaining the same, was allowable.

Letting it pull on me, Vehicle Tinkering flared, the Flames deepening. Shifting back and forth, the Flames resettled into new patterns, still the same colors, but different in ways that were hard to describe.

Then Panacea punched me.

“W̡̖͖͓̬̯̄ͯh̸͓̥̻̜͛ͧ͊̿̾̀̽a̷͚͇̿̆̀ͭ̎ͪ̄̆ţ̭̭̞͓͔̄͂͑͊̀͐̒͛?̠̆͊̏̇͜͜” I asked, and she glared at me. “What’d I do?” I reiterated.

“You were using your powers and being creepy. Stop using your powers when I’m healing you,” she informed me. “Now close your eyes so I can make them.”

That was an. . . *odd* way of putting it, but I tried to do so, suddenly feeling that I had eyelids, so that was a plus. “Creepy?” I inquired instead.

“You stopped talkin’ and were starin’ at Squealer,” Herb supplied. “Then your eyes went nuts. Then ya talked snake.”

I wanted to look at him incredulously, but Panacea’s firm grip on my arm reminded me not to. “You speak parseltongue?”

“Nah dude. *Like* a snake, all hissing and multilayered and shit,” he explained.

I shrugged, “If you say so. Sorry, things look a bit different without the mask and I got distracted.” Tapping into the bugs Taylor had in the room, I was able to see everything easy enough. “So, questions?”

“How’d you, ya know, lose. . .” Vicky trailed off, motioning towards her eyes.

Looking towards her, eyes still closed as I *felt* something there, which was very, *very* weird, I replied, “A Harvey, on of the bird-men, got too close. Their Talons could cut through practically anything, including me. Luckily, I don’t need eyes to *See.”*

Herb laughed, getting the joke at least. I made a mental note to see if Event Horizon was a thing on Earth Bet, and added. “With how my powers work, it actually made things easier, once I got used to it. Downright effective, actually.”

“*No taking out your eyes!”* Panacea informed me, before sighing, muttering to herself, *“what the fuck am I even saying.”*

“Not planning to?” I replied.

Quinn spoke up, “Then what happened? We had audio, but that didn’t help. Made things worse, if anything.”

“Well, I kept going,” I shrugged. “It got kinda meditative, actually. The walls gave way to caves and things got. . . they got. . .” I tried to remember exactly what happened. I could remember the broad strokes, but the finer details seemed to be slipping through my hands like the sands of distant memories, half-forgotten.

Shaking my head, I pressed on. “Things got weird, and I got to the bottom. The Birthing Chamber, and met what was creating the monsters. We talked, she was trying to continue the Cycle, but there’s no point. The Cycle’s Broken, and all her actions were for naught. She. . . didn’t take that well, nor did she take me well either. I tried to talk some sense into her, but A̞̠ͮͩ̔d̲͙͔͈̞͈̉͢͞ͅå̬̙͓͎̇̒͒p̶̧̦̰̭͉̹̫̺̊̆̃t̢̨̻̭̳̙̮̅̃ͣͬ͐̏̄ͥ̀a̲͍̩̬͍̺̔ͤ̌̌ͣͧͣ̓ͅͅt̙̖̞͑į̗͎̪͕̟̬̣ͯ̈͊̓ͧ̿̍͒o̧̺̲͓͈̘̦͕ͯͫ̕n̙̹̠͎̟̮̜͉ͫͩ̏̉ ͎̗̰̙̮̠̗͚ͪ̇̈̎͑͐ͤ̄R͉̾͂̍̍̆́ȩ̰̠̱̳̯͎̟͑ͯ̾ͬͨ͊͛͡ͅp̶ͦ̋ͥ̋̂̔ͮ͟҉̱̫̫l͛̽͂̽͏̫̯̀i̵̦̅̐̉͆ͪc̦̖̰̝̩̝̤͍̯ͫ͛͛ͦͫ̈́̒ͯ̿̕͠á̷̧̞͉̐̽͡ṭ̸̟̫̤̺̘̟͔̀ͥ̀͐̎̓̒̆͟ḯ̧̫̹̽̂͑o̲̝͙ͪ̂̔̃ͩ͘͢n̨͎̯͓̫͚̗̳͕̪͋̏ͦ͊̉ͫ, wouldn’t listen, and told me it was kill her, or she’d kill everyone else. So I did.”

I shrugged, “Then I passed out, woke up, talked you, talked with the Triumvirate, in their position as agents of Cauldron, and came home. Kind of a shit day, all round.”

Silence met my words.

“So. . . *yeah,”* I said, just to fill the empty space. “Pretty sure she was a clone, not Echidna herself, and either from Blasto himself, or something he was working on got messed with during the Endbringer attack, or something else entirely. I don’t know, and right now I don’t think it’s important. Does anyone know where Blasto is?”

Quinn shook his head, “He hasn’t been seen in over a month, but that is not uncommon for him.”

Nodding, I pressed on. “Okay, he’s involved somehow, but I don’t know how. What else. Oh, right, Break, this is Mouse Protector, who woke up from her Coma, and Squealer, who’ll be coming up with a new name shortly. Girls, this is Break, my friend from a while back and second to me in combat ability, though not my second in command, for. . . *numerous* reasons, today just being another of them.”

“I’m *really* sorry,” the man in questioned said, turning back to me.

Not turning to look at him, I replied, “And you’ve said that before, to the point that it’s meaningless. What’s the phrase? ‘Your actions speak so loud, I can’t hear what you’re saying’?” I sighed, “I needed you, man, and came stupidly close to dying, blind, alone, bleeding in the dark, surrounded by monsters from your worst nightmares. If Overwatch recorded the video feed, I suggest you watch it.”

Quinn nodded. “I Need a shower, I need to eat, and I need to sleep,” I stated. My face felt better, my headache gone, and I inquired, “Are my eyes back?”

“They are, but your other injuries-” Amy started to respond.

“Can wait. If you want to continue, please meet me in my room in an hour, and we can resume reconstructing my body there. Overwatch, you can lift the Biohazard protocols, as her spores died with her. Also, please talk with Herb and see if he wants to go back on vacation, or if we should bring the others home. Either way,” I held up a hand and grew a golden dagger from the ceiling, letting it break off under it’s own weight and catching it. Emblazoning it with my symbol, I passed it to the Changer standing beside me. “Take this with you. I’ll either ferry everyone back or I’ll be able to go to where you are if I need to get to you quickly. Again.”

Re-extending my costume, I covered up my metallic prosthetics, and the golden tears in my flesh. Moving a fly down, I saw that Panacea had healed my face completely, and opened my eyes. The color was a bit more vibrant, the rainbow whirlpools seeming a little deeper, and the schelra, the whites of my eyes, a little *too* white, but it was good enough. Extruding a domino mask, I slapped that on, nodded to the others, and walked out the door.

Having other people in Eclipse was something I was going to have to get used to. For once I was glad they were there, however, as I was near ravenous with hunger, and didn’t have to spend the time cooking, only grabbing some from the buffet. Demolishing my plate, I got two more, and was finishing when one of the people who was there approached me.

Silence descended on the cafeteria as he approached, an older man, maybe middle eastern, wearing standard office wear. “Mr. Vejovis?” he asked, and I looked up, finishing off the last of my meatloaf. He looked hesitant, but continued. “If you don’t mind me asking, what happened?”

“If you’ve got questions, ask Overwatch,” I told him, my voice carrying through the large space. “The basics are that our Precognitive Assets detected a threat from within the Red Zone of the ruins of Brockton Bay, which we moved on, trying, and failing, to get help from the PRT. Once we found there was a mutational aspect of it, spores primed to seed the countryside if a traditional attack was tried, we sealed the entrance after a team entered. We fought the creations within, killing the Master at the bottom, which caused her creations to decay to dust, rendering the bio-hazard safe. On our way out, we were met with the Triumvirate, who hadn’t broken the seal despite their best efforts. We discussed the broad strokes of what we had done, and returned. I’m still not fully healed, but she works best if you’ve eaten, hence why I’m here. It’s perfectly safe in here, and taking the way out that you came in through should not be an issue. Does that answer your question?”

The old man stared at me for a moment before nodding. “Yes, I believe it does. Thank you for protecting us.”

“Um, you’re welcome?” I replied. “It’s why I’m here. Um, keep up the good work here as well,” I told him, putting my tableware away. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I’d rather not keep Panacea waiting.”

After getting back to my room, I took a quick trip to the surface of the moon, re-applying the Teleportation Marks that’d started to fade. Growing a bit of metal up to form an almost engraved surface that matched my Mark I laid a second one inside, to see if that made a difference, then teleported back without an issue. While my costume was self-cleaning, I hadn’t realized that my hair was a mess, caked with blood, ash, and dust, but it all washed away easy enough.

Towling off, I heard a knock at my door, and a glance at the clock on the wall told me it’d been an hour, exactly, from when I’d left. Re-extending my costume for casual wear, I opened my front door, and saw not only Panacea but The Lady, Bug as well, both in casual clothes, though Taylor wore a domino mask like I did.

Motioning them inside, Amelia took charge. “Lie down on your bed. I’ve healed most of the damage to your spine, but I want as little pressure on it as possible when I work. Taylor,-”

“Getting the bugs for Biomass,” she interrupted.

“I damaged my spine?” I asked instead, the two girls grabbing chairs from the table off to the side and dragging them to my bed. “I want to say when, but it could be a number. Was it crushed, pierced, or sliced? And how come I’m not, you know, paralyzed?”

As the insects streamed in, I made a metal bowl to hold the biomass and directed them over to it. Taylor gave me an inquisitive look, then spotted it and nodded in thanks, having been moved them to her cupped hands originally. Amy, meanwhile, snorted. “All three, and you should’ve been You’ve healed some of it, but there are parts missing. You haven’t noticed you can’t feel pain below your shoulders?”

“Not really,” I replied honestly thinking about it. “Hmm, maybe it was this?” I asked in turn, manipulating the metal threaded throughout my body, tightly holding onto my bones to lift a leg and put it back down.”

*“Stop that,*” she rebuked, before nodding after a moment. “Probably.” Reaching into the bowl of bugs, they came apart under her touch, turning into a black-brown slurry which she scooped up. “Shirt off, and when I tap a piece of metal, retract it.”

I did so, and Taylor gasped, quietly. “I know,” Amy agreed, tapping on my metallic abdominals, where I’d been partially disemboweled by a Harvey, the only one of the six that’d been teleported in front of me that’d gotten close enough to hit. Retracting the metal, she poured the gooey substance in, and got to work.

“Want a boost?” I asked as she did her thing, and the fake-touch and feeling of substance of the metal was replaced by something that was more real in a way that was hard to describe.

She grumbled, “*I’m* fine, it’s *you* who needs to be healed.”

I shook my head, getting a glare from my healer. “Sorry. No, I meant do you want me to supercharge your power? I can’t do it for long, but it should help. Figured out how pretty recently.”

“The Leviathan fight,” Taylor stated, and I nodded slightly.

Panacea paused, looking between the two of us, then took a bracing breath. “Go for it.”

Bringing my own Biokinesis up, I reached out to her and started to pour power into her. Her eyes shifted color, her brown irises shifting to a swirling Bone White & Blood Red, burning with an inner light that sparked into a pair of small fires, heatlessly burning as the Flames of her power roared to life. Leaning forward to place a hand on my chest, her eyes narrowed. “Start retracting,” she commanded, and I did so, pulling back the metal that’d taken the place of my flesh.

She worked quickly, rapidly taking handfuls of Bio-slurry, not even pouring it into my wounds, but dropping it on my chest where it rippled and disappeared into my skin, an odd feeling, only for my wounds to start to regrow. She worked for a few minutes, and I Saw her power as it built greater and greater in intensity, burning ever brighter, it started to lose its form, the edges of her Flames becoming less defined, and I started to pull back on the power I was feeding into her.

Removing the last bit, the fires in her eyes winked out, and she blinked, glaring at me. “I wasn’t done!” she complained.

“You can keep going, but I said I could only do so for a bit,” I replied. “Your power was destabilizing.” I didn’t know how I knew that, only that it was true. Even now, her power was settling back down, but the Flames were just a bit brighter than they were before. “Besides,” I added, waving my reformed hand, “You’re almost there.”

“Fine,” she grouched. “This might hurt.”

“What mi-*fuck!”* I swore as I could suddenly feel the rest of my body in a way that I hadn’t realized I’d lost. It *hurt*, but it was more like I’d been severely beaten then how badly I’d known I’d been hurt. “Can I sit up at least?”

She nodded, and I swung my legs off the bed. I only had a few injuries left, and I offered Amelia my hand. She took it, and I retracted a bit of metal, wincing as I could now feel the pain of the wound, no longer covered by my power.

“Do me next!” Taylor suddenly asked, and both Amy and I looked at her. “Um, I mean, can you give my power a boost? *Please?*”

I shrugged, “I don’t see why not. I can only do it for people whose powers I already have, but sure. Take off your mask, though, I want to check something.”

She did so, and I repeated what I’d done with Amelia. Her eyes turned to a swirling mix of grey and yellow, before igniting into twin flames, her power spreading out further and further. Where before I could overpower her Arthropod Control, I knew if I tried now, it wouldn’t take more than a moment for her to completely override my commands. Her reach spread out as well, my own power hitching a ride, as it spread out to encompass the base, then the surrounding area, stretching out across the city further and further, millions upon millions of tiny lives all controlled in a single net, an enormous hive the likes of which the world had never seen, all working with one common purpose, to-

I cut the power and it shrunk down, though not in an instant, quickly retracting down to the top half of Eclipse, like it’d started. “Wow,” Taylor and I said in unison, both of us shaking our heads to clear our thoughts at the same moment as we tried to get over what just happened. “What-” we both said, looking at each other, feeling the same shock, surprise, and the beginnings of fear before we suppressed the power completely, and I blinked as Taylor shuddered.

“You were in sync,” Amelia said, and I started to agree, but saw that she also had a hand on Taylor’s arm as well. “What happened?”

“So,” I said, blinking a few more times to feel that I was *me* again, “Apparently doing so boosts her range and power, to the point that you get a feedback loop, or something.”

“Was I. . . Was I controlling you?” Taylor asked, a little fearfully.

I thought about it. “No, it was more like we’d merged a bit, though you probably could’ve if you wanted, though I could then pull the plug. Hmm, something to think about later. You almost done Amelia?”

She looked at me incredulously, before sighing deeply and grabbing another handful of bio-slurry. “Almost.” Replicating the ‘merge with skin’ trick, she grew the last of my wounds closed. Not getting another handful She sat for a moment. “How bad was it? Be honest,” she said, squeezing my hand to remind me that she could tell if I was lying.

“*Bad,*” I agreed. “I wasn’t lying, when they first got my eyes I thought I was going to die, and panicked a little. But I had to go down there.”

“We could’ve helped!” Taylor argued, and I shook my head.

“You saw what was down there. Did you think you could fight that?” I replied, trying not sound as scornful of the suggestion as it really warranted. *Did she think I cared so little about her, that I’d sacrifice her to get a small advantage*” “And you’d never make it inside, those spores would’ve *killed* you before you even tried, and turned you into god knows what!”

This time it was Amelia who replied, “They wouldn’t have killed me!”

Turning to look at her, I raised an eyebrow. Maybe it was the tired-ness, but while I appreciated the healing, I didn’t appreciate the childish stupidity, nor the accusations that I’d made the wrong call. “And you’ve not had a *tenth* of the combat training that Taylor has. *Her* I’d consider taking, if she had some kind of armor, and even then that would’ve been a mistake, with what I fought down there. *You’ve* made it clear that you don’t want to fight, and I’ve respected that, Panacea.”

“But-” she started to say, but I cut her off.

“*No.* You’ve made it *clear* you don’t want to be a fighter, that you want to stay behind and heal. I’m *okay* with that, but even if you got your bio-armor functional, you have *no* combat training and your only experience in *any* kind of live-fire scenario has been as a civilian, or as a *hostage*,” I told her. “I don’t *think* you’d break, if things got bad, but you might, and you heard what I told Alexandria. I can either respect what you say you want, or I can try to make you do what *I* think is best. You’ve been-”

*“Lee,”* Taylor said, and I paused. “We’re not blaming you for getting hurt.”

“Kinda what it sounds like,” I shot back.

“What? No!” Amy disagreed, and I gave her a disbelieving look. “I, okay, *yes,* but. . . You don’t have to do everything yourself!” she argued instead, holding tight to my hand.

“And when my allies decide to bunker down instead of send help, assuming I’ll fail; when the PRT does nothing, except treat me like an enemy after I save them, *again*; and when my friend blows me off, because he assumes that nothing will go wrong; and when no one else that *is* willing to help has the ability, either because they haven’t gotten that strong, or because they *refuse* to get that strong?” I asked. “Yeah, I kinda do.”

Taylor grabbed my other hand. “*I’m* not blaming you, I just don’t want to see you hurt!” she declared, and the *honesty-pain-frustration* coming off her helped underline your words, and took some of the wind out of my sails.

“I don’t want to see you hurt either!” Amelia argued, and I pulled my hands back.

I sighed, “Listen. This was. . . this was *bad.* An end-of-the-world scenario that I was *barely* able to stop. Cauldron handles most of them, but the actions of so many Precognitive Blindspots in this city has rendered their strongest cape useless. There’ll be things you can help with Taylor, like you helped when the nazis set up that ambush for me, *this* just wasn’t one of them. You weren’t ready for the Endbringer fight, which is why I had you stick with Amelia, and wasn’t that the right call?”

The bug controller nodded, and I continued, “I can take hits you can’t, so I put myself in more danger. If, *when*, we get you up to snuff, I’ll bring you with me for things as bad as this, but you’ve been training for, what, a *month?* I’m trying not to do everything myself, but there are things that I *have* to do myself, as I could pull it off, and the chance of you getting injured, or *dying* is too great.” I projected my feelings through our shared connection, and she nodded, understanding.

“And me?” Amelia asked, almost aggressively.

“What about you?” I asked in turn. “Even if I didn’t care about your well-being, I still wouldn’t take an untrained civilian into a combat scenario. You blaming me for getting hurt, when I did *everything I could think of* to ask for help, only to get turned down, isn’t warranted, or fair. What was I supposed to do, let the world burn while I sat safe in my bunker, until they got to me too?”

She obviously didn’t like what I was saying, and just reiterated, “I could’ve helped!”

I held up my reformed hand. “And you did, and I *do* appreciate the healing, but that’s *all* you’ve wanted to be, a *healer.* Not a combatant, not front-line aid, not anything but *back-line support*, and thus that’s all I will treat you as. That’s not a bad thing, I don’t think less of you for it, but that’s all you want to be, and I’ll respect those wishes.” I grew a steel cog from the ceiling, catching it as it broke off and dropped down. “This is you: formed as you wanted to be. Useful in your chosen profession, and *only* that.”

I grew another, of the exact same mass, but this time made the teeth razor sharp. Regrowing a glove, I caught it, and held it next to the first. “And this is The Lady, Bug: still useful in her position as intel gathering and battlefield control, but dangerous on her own as well. If I need scouting, or information gathering, or to harry a non-brutes, she’s *good* at that, but if I need backup in a low to moderate level combat scenario, a one to a four, maybe a five, in danger, I’d be comfortable bringing her along for that too. What that was?” I pointed towards the ruins of the lair I’d just cleared. “Was a nine, maybe even the lower end of ten. Endbringers are *mid* ten.”

“I’ll fight!” Panacea declared, and I looked at her disbelievingly. “I will!”

“Because you want to, or because you don’t want to be proven wrong?” I asked coolly, not liking how she was dodging the issue completely.

*“Lee,”* Taylor rebuked gently. “If she wants to try, let her try.”

Amelia glared at Taylor, “I’m not going to try, I’m going to fight.”

“You’re going to *train* is what you’re going to do,” I informed her, ignoring Taylor’s smile. “But I wasn’t joking about needing to get some sleep. We’ll start tomorrow at ten, wear something you can move in. With your power, we can go harder than normal, and we’re going to need to if you want to go anywhere close to a fight anytime soon.”