

# ~ The Extraordinary Adventures of Brice Johnson, Bus Driver: The Second Adventure ~

by silverwriter01

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All characters are mine and mine alone. If they look like anybody you know or think you know, it's sheer coincidence. This story does contain some violence and sexual content. If you don't like either of those, please try your call again.

Synopsis: In this second adventure, Brice is busy with Thanksgiving Day preparations. She also has a new pet, a new best friend, and a new girlfriend. One of whom will betray her.

Dedicated to the folks on the Athenaeum chat. I love you guys. Also my deepest thanks to my wonderful, beautiful, talented editor/friend Michele. Yes, I'm sucking up.

Questions? Comments? Rude remarks? [silverwriter01@yahoo.com](mailto:silverwriter01@yahoo.com).

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Brice Johnson was just an ordinary person. She spent way too much time on the internet, spoiled her pets rotten, and hated washing the dishes. There were only a few things that were odd about her. The fact that she actually loved her job was one of them. She was a bus driver for International High School for Gifted Students.

However, Brice was currently doing something rather strange for an ordinary person. She was watching a women's soccer game. While that wasn't typically considered odd, the fact that the game was taking place in Brazil and she had flown her mother's SUV to the game was considerably peculiar.

Brice came from a long line of superheroes. Everyone she interacted with on a daily basis had some type of superpower. While some people called them freaks, or mutants, Brice had grown up in an environment where you were considered weird if you didn't have powers. Consequently, Brice didn't have any superpowers. She had been declared one hundred percent ordinary and had taken several tests to prove it. Everyone had declared her a baron: someone who should have powers but was barren.

Most barons avoided the superhero community as much as they could. Brice was right in the middle of it, being a school bus driver for the superhero high school. In fact, a powerful superhero was sitting beside Brice at that very moment. She glanced at the beautiful white-haired woman.

Noel wasn't well-known in the superhero community, but that didn't make her any less powerful. She had inherited a gift with ice from her mother, and had learned to be telepathic. Noel worked for a secret branch of the United Nations that worked together with superheroes to save the world. Noel had actually told Brice that she worked for a secret branch of a secret branch of that secret United Nations' branch, but if she told Brice any more she would have to kill her. Since

Brice knew Noel would enjoy killing her, she hadn't asked for any extra information. Noel's girlfriend was Alice Inferno, a teacher at International High.

Brice didn't know what to think of Noel. Although they had grown up together as next door neighbors, they had never interacted as children. When they were teenagers, they saw even less of each other since Noel had attended International High and Brice had gone to a local New Jersey private school. After they graduated from their separate schools, Brice hadn't seen Noel again until nearly a month ago.

Brice had practically drooled over the beautiful, nice, and polite woman in her mother's kitchen, but by the end of that same night Brice couldn't believe she had developed a crush on her. The real Noel was brutally honest, easily angered, and inconsiderate of other people. Brice wasn't even sure she liked Noel all that much, but here they were watching a soccer game together in Brazil.

"Is there a reason why we are we doing this?" Noel asked, keeping her eyes on the athletic women on the field.

"Well, number one, we're lesbians. Do we really need a reason to attend a women's soccer game?" Brice replied, "and besides, your girlfriend is the one making us do this. She thinks we will make the best of friends."

"Bullshit," Noel snorted.

Brice nodded in agreement. "As if I could truly become friends with someone who got me captured and almost killed by a group of supervillains."

"You're not dead are you? So quit complaining about it already."

Brice snickered at the look of exasperation on Noel's face. Brice had promised not to tell her mother, Marge, about that incident. However, she had found out the truth somehow. Since Brice's mother knew, Noel's mother knew. There were only two people in the world who could make Noel's life hell: her mother and her girlfriend. Noel's life hadn't been easy since the situation at the school.

The takeover at the high school had been Brice's first adventure. She had been awarded for her bravery, but Brice didn't think she deserved it. All she had done was take a few punches, lie to some supervillains, and take a pair of handcuffs off someone. Brice then recalled she saved a student's life by moving in the way of a poisoned dart lethal to superheroes, but Brice hadn't felt brave during any of that.

Sipping on a bottle of water, Brice decided that if she was stuck with Noel all afternoon she was going to get some enjoyment out of it. Brice had learned quickly that she enjoyed pushing Noel's buttons.

"It was kind of cute how you didn't argue too much when Alice told you we had to spend an afternoon together. In a pathetic sort of way, of course," Brice quipped happily.

Noel gasped in outrage, "Pathetic? You're calling me pathetic? I'm not the one who had to borrow her mother's car to take us to the game."

Brice shrugged, "The bus is getting a tune-up. At least I don't still live with my parents."

"You know damn well that's only where I keep my stuff when I'm not on a mission or at Alice's," Noel snarled, now standing up in the bleachers. She said, glaring down at Brice, "I have a smoking hot girlfriend, literally at times, and incredible abilities. What do you have, baron?"

Brice stood up, her eyes filled with anger. "I was able to help save your girlfriend's life because I'm a baron. You couldn't have saved her by yourself. And I have an incredible, beautiful girlfriend too."

Brice's first two sentences hit a sore spot. Noel shouted, "I would have been able to save her without your help!"

Brice leaned close to Noel's face and whispered, "That must suck for you. To have such 'incredible abilities' but to learn they were useless when it really mattered. To learn that you can be just as useless as a baron."

Ten minutes later, they were both sitting outside of the stadium on a curb. Brice was holding a napkin to her bleeding lip, and Noel was holding a piece of ice she had formed to her darkening eye. Noel had thrown the first punch, but Brice hadn't been caught off guard. It had taken the security guards five minutes to separate them before they were thrown out on their butts. Even though Brice didn't speak Portuguese, she was sure they had been ordered to never come back.

Brice said, "I feel better."

Noel looked at Brice with her good eye as if she was crazy. Brice inquired, "Well, don't you feel better?"

Noel thought for a moment and then said, sounding surprised, "Yeah, I think I do."

They helped each other to their feet and started walking towards the parking lot.

Noel remarked, "I think we'll get along just fine now, Brice."

"Why's that, Noel?"

"Because anyone who can throw a right cross like you has my respect."

Brice jested, "Will you respect me in the morning after Alice makes you sleep on the couch all night?"

Noel laughed, but Brice saw a hint of worry flash across her eyes. As they climbed into the SUV, Noel said, "If I recall right, you said you had a girlfriend before you tackled me to the ground. Give me details, woman."

Brice grinned. "Well, we met at the superhero hospital. I would have been okay with a regular hospital, but you know how my mom can get. Anyway, she was my doctor in the ER."

"Ah, it was love at first CT scan. Tell me more."

"I thought she was just being nice when she said I had beautiful eyes while checking to see if my pupils could dilate. It took me a few minutes to realize she was flirting with me," Brice said.

Noel rolled her eyes but motioned for Brice to continue.

"To make a long story short, she asked me out and I said yes. We've been seeing each other since."

"Have you slept with her yet?"

Brice blushed, "That's none of your business."

"I take that as a no."

Brice warned, "Don't make fun of the person whose driving."

"You wouldn't do anything. Your mother would kill you if you scratched her SUV," Noel said, nonchalantly. "So are you in love?"

"It's too soon to say I love you!" Brice exclaimed, "we haven't been dating that long."

"That doesn't mean a darn thing," Noel replied, "I told Alice I loved her by the end of our first mission together, and our mission only lasted 18 hours."

"Typical lesbian," Brice joked.

"What can I say? She melted my icy heart."

"That's so sweet," Brice mocked, "I think I just got a cavity."

Noel punched her in the arm and said, "Enough about me and Alice, tell me what your mom thinks of the good doctor."

Brice winced, "Well..."

Noel gasped, "You haven't told your mother yet?"

Brice flashed her a look, "I recall someone not telling her mother about her relationship."

"That was different," Noel said smoothly.

"How?"

"Just was," Noel stated, "so what's your girlfriend's name?"

"Oh, no," Brice said, "You're not running a background check on my girlfriend."

"I never said I was going to but now that you mention it, she could be dangerous. It wouldn't hurt to let me check, Brice. Can't have my new best friend killed by a psychopathic axe murderer or an undercover supervillain. Or worse! She could be a republican!"

"My girlfriend is not a supervillain. Or a republican!"

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Brice looked around the restaurant before she saw her girlfriend waving at her from a corner table. Brice walked over to the table and gave her a quick kiss before sitting down.

"You look beautiful," Brice said.

Amelia Delagado smiled, briefly, then noticed how Brice's cut lip from her fight with Noel. "What happened to your lip?" She gasped.

Brice gently touched her busted lip with her tongue. She said, "A friend and I got into a disagreement. We're better now. I'm fine."

Amelia was still frowning so Brice assured her again that she was fine.

When Amelia was satisfied, Brice then said, "Sorry I'm a little late. It took longer to do something than I had thought." It had taken Noel and Brice forever to convince Alice that they hadn't been fighting each other, but had actually been trying to break up a fight. Brice still wasn't sure Alice believed them, but Alice was probably thrilled they were working together.

Amelia said, "That's quite alright. I only just arrived myself."

"How was work?" Brice asked.

"Busy," Amelia sighed, "you'd be surprised how many superheroes hurt them just doing everyday things. I had a man come in who fell off of his roof and hurt his back. He's able to fly."

Brice laughed, "I'm sure he'll remember that next time."

"If only my patients were as cute as you. Working wouldn't be so bad then," Amelia flirted.

Brice tried not to blush, "Then wouldn't you want to go out with all of them?"

"Nope. It would just be easier on my eyes. I go out with you because you're cute inside and out."

Brice couldn't help but to blush then. She countered, "Well you're beautiful inside and out. Beautiful beats cute."

Amelia was a gorgeous woman of Hispanic descent with subtle curves and luscious lips. Brice found kissing her simply intoxicating. She had learn that Amelia wasn't an official superhero but she did have powers. Amelia's power was a special gift of sight. Amelia described it as being able to see in layers. Her gift was very useful as a doctor. Amelia was able to see through someone's clothes, skin, muscles, and bones. It had taken some time before Brice stopped feeling completely exposed around Amelia, even though Brice knew she probably was.

After dinner, Brice and Amelia went to go see a movie. Brice couldn't recall anything about the movie later on, but she could tell you about how great it was to hold Amelia's hand.

They spent twenty minutes after the movie kissing against Amelia's car. Brice had hoped Amelia would invite her over for a nightcap, but she had no such luck.

Amelia said, short of breath, "I better go. I have to work in the morning."

"Okay," Brice said with a heavy sigh, reluctantly letting her go.

Amelia kissed her cheek, "Call me tomorrow?"

"Of course."

Brice watched as Amelia started unlocking her car when Brice realized she hadn't asked Amelia the question she had been wanting to ask all night.

Brice sputtered her question, "Hey, umm, you're not a republican are you?"

Amelia flashed her an amused smile, "Democratic."

"Cool," Brice replied with silly smile. After one last kiss, she allowed Amelia to drive away before heading off to her own vehicle.

The next day, after Sunday lunch with her family, Brice's father took her to pick up her bus in the swamplands of Georgia, which is where the school currently resided. They chatted about various things, including how they were going to survive Thanksgiving dinner next week. Mark, also known as Morphous, asked Brice what he should get her mother for Christmas.

"I don't know, Dad. You've known her longer than I have. I'm sure she'll start dropping hints soon."

Mark nodded and then asked, "So when are you going to tell me about your girlfriend?"

Brice looked at him with wide-eyes, "What girlfriend?"

Her father merely gave her a look in reply.

Brice looked sheepishly at the floor of the helicopter, "Well, do you remember the doctor who saw me at the hospital?"

Mark nodded, and Brice proceeded to tell him all about Amelia . Brice asked, "Are you going to tell Ma? Because if she knows, she'll insist on meeting Amelia, and I don't think we're ready for that. We're nowhere near the meet-the-family stage of the relationship yet."

Mark solemnly replied, "I'm not going to lie to your mother, Brice."

Brice slumped in her seat, defeated.

"But if she doesn't ask, then I don't have to tell her," He continued with a wink at his daughter.

Brice beamed at her father, "Thanks Dad. You're the greatest."

"Now do you want to tell me how you really got those bruises? I don't believe the excuse you told your mother for an instant."

Brice said, in her best butch voice, "Well me and Noel had to figure out which of us is the bigger dyke. I won, of course." She made a show of sniffing and wiping her nose with her thumb.

Mark shook his head, but left it at that. When they arrived at the school, Brice kissed her father on the cheek before getting out of the helicopter . She was happy to have her bus back. She tried her hardest to be like her bus: ordinary looking on the outside but special on the inside. If she was seeing a psychiatrist, the shrink would tell her that she was already special. But Brice wasn't, and there was no comfort in her imaginary psychiatrist telling her otherwise.

Just as Brice was about to get into her bus, Felipe saw her and called out, "Hey, where are you going, amiga? There's a bus driver meeting in five minutes!"

"What?" Brice asked, looking confused, "what meeting? I didn't hear anything about a meeting."

"Yes, there's a meeting. Let's go."

Felipe led a bewildered Brice towards a classroom inside the school. On the way, Brice started to think this 'bus driver meeting' was really some kind of surprise for her . It was too late for a birthday party, so it had to be something else. Perhaps it was another award for bravery or something considering what she had gone through during the incident. She was all set to act surprised when she entered the room. However, it really was a bus driver meeting. Trying not to act disappointed, Brice took a seat and listened to the head of the bus driver department.

"The United Nations has come up with a new policy to keep another incident from happening. From now on, no student will be allowed on the bus without a unique identifying keyword."

"You mean a password?" Brice inquired.

"Yes, you could call it that if you like."

Brice tried not to show what she really thought of the new policy. Their secret branch of the United Nations had some of the most brilliant minds on the planet working for it, and the best security measure they could come up with was a password?

The head of the department continued about how the password would change every few weeks, and what to do in the case a student not knowing the password. The department head said, "Every bus rider will be given the password after a small DNA test to prove they are who they say they are. Are there any questions? Good. This meeting is adjourned."

Brice was glad the ridiculous meeting was over. She hated them since they were always rather boring. She was grateful to be heading home to her pets. She would then ride into town with Monty, and Python if he wanted to go, to get groceries. She hoped she would have time to get an hour of reading in. She had ordered a new book called *Thirteen Hours*, and it looked to be interesting to say the least.

Python, her cat, didn't want to go to town so only she took her dog Monty, who was always up for a ride. When they got back from town, they had a surprise waiting for them. Brice was carrying bags in from the bus when she heard an unfamiliar meow. She looked around and jumped when something started rubbing against her leg. She looked down to see a black and gold striped cat at her feet. It was a large adult cat, unlike her white kitten who was still growing. After placing down her bags, Brice bent over to pet her, "Well hello there. Who do you belong to?"

Brice stopped to think about how the cat got up her mountain. Brice had inherited the mountain from her grandfather. It was located in the middle of some land owned by the state of Tennessee. No one was allowed to hike through those mountains and anyone who flew over them would see a regular mountain, thanks to a camouflage shield her grandmother had given to her as a house warming present.

Brice scratched under the cat's chin and noticed the cat didn't have a collar. She said, rubbing its soft coat, "You have to belong to someone. Your coat is too well kept for you to be a stray. Well, how about you come inside with me? We'll look for your owners tomorrow."

Brice made flyers to put up in town when she had time the next day. She also scanned the internet to see if someone had lost a cat matching the new found cat's description. Before Brice left for work, she had decided to call the cat Empress, since she acted very high and mighty. Monty and Python didn't know what to think of her. Python in particular was unhappy with the changes because he was used to ruling the house.



Brice was happy that after this week of school, International High would be off for a week for Fall break. For her North American school kids it was known as Thanksgiving Break. She was planning to spend as much time as she could with Amelia. It was hard for them to find time to get together since Brice worked odd hours during the week and Amelia usually worked weekends.

That evening Brice flew her bus around the world, picking up her five riders who went to school during Eastern Hemisphere time, or E time as everyone called it. Her first pickup of the day was a senior who lived in Alabama. Greer Watson was a broody, dark-blond haired girl, with light blue eyes. She had a brother, John, who favored Greer greatly. John was only ten-years-old but was so gifted, he was allowed to attend International High early. John went to school during Western Hemisphere time, W time, and Brice simply adored him.

Brice couldn't say she and Greer had ever gotten along, but Greer seemed to warm up to her since the situation at the school. At least she no longer glared at Brice every time their eyes met.

When Greer got on the bus, Brice could tell she hadn't gotten much sleep. Even though Greer's eyes were barely open, Brice could see they were bloodshot.

"Are you okay?" Brice asked. The question had slipped out before she could stop it.

"I'm fine!" Greer barked.

"Okay," Brice replied in a long slow voice. Brice knew she should have known better. The lack of glaring didn't mean they were friends. Brice closed the bus's door and flew off to pick up her other riders.

Brice made it to the school, which was flying over Siberia, at 9:45pm exactly Eastern Standard Time. She let her kids off the bus then stepped off herself to stretch her legs.

"Looking good in that uniform Brice, as always," A voice behind her purred.

Brice spun around to find Alice Inferno looking her over. She tried not to blush. Alice looked gorgeous, as usual, with her ebony skin and wavy pressed hair. She seemed to emanate beauty.

Even while Brice mentally drooled over how gorgeous Alice was, she couldn't help but be a little envious. She would never be fiery beautiful like Alice, an icy gorgeous like Noel, or luscious like Amelia. Brice glanced around at the teenagers. Most of the students were good looking. Even Greer was stunningly beautiful when she smiled, and when she didn't, she had an angry sexy look going on. Brice shook that thought from her head quickly. It wasn't right to think about how a girl nine years her junior was sexy.

It didn't seem fair to Brice to be surrounded by outrageously beautiful women. She guessed it had something to do with the superhero genes. Her mother and father both were attractive people and her brother, Michael, had girls throwing themselves at him. Brice liked to think her hazel eyes were her best feature, but other than that, she was just medium height and had mousy brown

hair to her shoulders. She looked like an average woman. It was a side effect of being a baron, she guessed.

She could hear the inner psychiatrist saying, "Brice, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. You're..."

Brice grumbled, in her mind, "Yeah yeah, but no one's ever going to beg me to be on the cover of Vogue either."

Brice realized her attention had wandered from Alice, who had obviously just said something and was waiting for Brice to reply. Brice's shoulders slumped when she realized she would have to confess she hadn't heard a word Alice said.

"I'm sorry, Alice. I zoned out. What did you say?" Brice asked while feeling like a dork.

Alice merely smiled, "I said, I thought your lip was looking a lot better today. Noel's eye is also healing. She has been telling people she got it while fighting one hundred Brazilian terrorists armed only with only an icicle in a heat wave."

Brice didn't know whether to be flattered or insulted.

Alice asked, "How many angry fans was it again, Brice?"

Brice momentarily froze, and she was sure she looked like a deer caught in a pair of headlights. She cleared her throat and said, "20 or so." Uncertainty tinted her reply.

"Really?" Alice mused, "you said it was 10 the other day."

"Ah...well..." Brice fumbled. She sagged in visible relief when the school bell rang. "You should go to class, Ms. Inferno, before you're marked tardy."

"To be continued, Brice," Alice said as she walked away, a twinkle in her eye.

Brice shook her head and got back inside her bus. Exhausted, she drove home to get a few hours of sleep before having to pick up her students at 6 A.M.. She arrived home to find Monty and Python in a corner, curled tightly together, while Empress was comfortably stretched out on the couch.

"Monty, Python, you should go over and get to know Empress," Brice said, "we can't just throw her out, If I can't find her owners, she'll be staying with us awhile."

Monty barely wagged his tail at her, but Python gave her a hard look.

"Hmm, well, okay then. Time for bed."

Monty and Python took off at the speed of light towards Brice's room with Brice trailing after them. She left the door opened in case Empress wanted to come in and snuggle as well. Brice hung her uniform up and slid under her sheets. While she hadn't done that much work today, she had spent most of the day with her family. She enjoyed seeing her mother and father, but her relationship with her brother was awkward at best. He despised having a barren sister.

Her family had spent most of the day planning their family Thanksgiving dinner. It was the thing Brice dreaded the most every year, even more than her gynecology exams. Everybody from both sides of her family would come to celebrate Thanksgiving at her parents' house.

Thanksgiving probably wouldn't be so bad for Brice if she weren't the only one there who didn't have a super power. Superpowers plus family drama was a bad combination, and it was even worse for her because she was a baron. Thanksgiving dinner had stopped being pleasant for since she was nine-years-old.

Brice groaned as her mind reviewed each and everything Thanksgiving humiliation. She said, rolling over, "Stop thinking about it, Brice. It will be here soon enough."

Brice's alarm clock went off at exactly 4 A.M.. Brice groaned as she dragged herself out of bed. She gave her pets a jealous glare as they continued to sleep in her bed. She muttered as she stumbled to the shower, "You better be glad I have Xebreze, otherwise you'd be sleeping in another room."

Xebreze was a top secret air freshener that could remove any type of odors. It stripped pet odors right off of pets. Monty and Python always smelled like they had just been freshly laundered. She made a mental note to spray Empress when she got home that night.

Brice multitasked during her shower. She brushed her teeth as she wet her hair, and shaved her legs and underarms while letting the conditioner set. She did not, however, multitask when it came to trimming and shaving her pubic hair. Some things demanded a person's full attention. Running her hand through the trimmed hair to help the shower wash away cream and clippings, she hoped someone else's hand would be running through it soon. She smiled, "And I hope that someone's name is Amelia ."

After dressing, Brice munched on a piece of toast while she waited for her computer to boot up. Staring at the clutter on her computer desk, she noticed it seemed different. Had that CD been under the pad of post-its yesterday, and hadn't that pen been beside the mouse? Brice shrugged it off and checked her email.

"Hmm, do I want to try Online Christian Dating?" Brice asked aloud, "another time."

Deleting the spam in her inbox, she was left with six messages. Three were from her mother, two from her grandmother, and one from Amazon.com saying her books had shipped. Brice clicked the five emails from her relatives and snickered as she hit delete without reading them.

She already knew what they said. They were all about Thanksgiving. The ones from her mother talked about how Thanksgiving dinner was going to happen her way no matter what her mother-in-law, Helen, thought. The ones from her grandmother told her to ignore Marge, and they would be doing Thanksgiving dinner her way. Brice knew there would probably be ten more emails from them by the time she got back.

Brice didn't know how she always ended up in the middle of her grandmother's and her mother's debate. Although she was the one who got them to compromise, that usually didn't occur until the day before Thanksgiving. Brice didn't think her predicament was fair, but she had gotten used to life being unfair.

Humming a song she had picked up on a station while flying over Japan the day before, Brice went through her series of tests to gain access to the bus. After a final retina scan, she climbed the three black steps and sat down in her comfortable seat. She turned on the engine to let it warm up while she pulled up a school's location on one of her monitors.

"Hovering over Mali in Africa. Well, this should be fun."

Brice checked her mirrors and radars before taking off into the sky. The last thing anyone wanted was for a bus to collide with an airplane, like that one incident the bus driver for Asia had.

"Little late for you to be showing up," Brice informed a tropical storm as she fly around it in the Atlantic. "Hurricane season is almost over with, Joaquin."

Arriving a few minutes before the bell rang, she filled up her bus with the secret fuel formula. She didn't know what it was called, what the chemical components were, or how much it cost to make. All she knew was that it smelled really bad. She hated pumping the formula and, unfortunately, the fuel station was self-service.

Brice pulled around to the front of the school to park beside the other buses. Waiting for the bell to ring, she examined her nails. She decided they were getting a little too long, and that she would clip them when she got home.

Brice frowned in concern when she saw how exhausted Greer looked when her students got on the bus. Even the severe glare Greer gave her did not sooth her worries.

When Brice arrived at Greer's house, John was waiting at by road as usual. She stopped the bus and opened the door. She waited a moment before looking up at her mirror to see what was keeping Greer. Greer was asleep.

Blinking in surprise, she gave John a look before standing up to walk to the back of the bus. Standing over the exhausted young superhero, Brice put her hand on Greer's arm. She had planned to gently shake Greer awake. However, the moment her hand touched Greer's arm, Greer gasped loudly and her eyes flew open. Brice was pinned by Greer's bright blue eyes before Greer jerked awake.

"Umm, you're home," Brice said, needlessly, as the senior stood up with her book bag. She wondered if Greer had a premonition, or just disliked being woken up that way. Brice knew better than to ask. Greer wouldn't tell her and her theory was proven correct when Greer walked off the bus without saying a word.

"That went well," Brice said under her breath. By the time Brice was buckled up in her seat, John was buckled up behind her. "Where to John?"

"Can we have Japanese please?" John begged.

Brice couldn't help but laugh. "Japanese? For breakfast?"

"Why not?"

"Why not indeed," Brice replied while typing in the coordinates for Japan.

Once Brice started making preparations to land, a mechanical voice that Brice had long ago named Sarah said, "Please remain seated. Transformation in 10, 9, 8, 7..."

Brice leaned back in her seat while the bus started to shift. She held on tight to her armrests as she was lurched across bus along with all her equipment and monitors. The door to her right changed into a small window and a new door appeared on her left. Outside she knew the bus was changing its appearance as well. Anyone looking at the bus would think it was a normal Japanese school bus. While the school name printed on the side of the bus would seem familiar, no Japanese students would ever mistake it for their school bus.

Brice landed outside of a town she and John occasionally went to. Brice couldn't pronounce the town's name to save her life, but the town was just the right size for a bus to park along side a restaurant without anyone getting suspicious. Sarah reminded her as Brice started driving, "Please remember to drive on the left side of the road."

Brice and John treated themselves to as much food as they could eat before having to go pick the other students. Once out of Japan, her bus transformed itself into the standard yellow school bus of the United States. Anywhere Brice landed, her bus would transform into whatever it needed to blend in and not draw attention.

Later that evening, Brice went to pick her morning bunch of students. She happily smiled to herself. Her riders, while very active, were well-behaved. She heard tales of superhero students getting into fights on the bus and she did not look forward to the day she would have to break one up.

When she was alone with John, flying him back to his house, he inquired, "Brice, can you do me a favor?"

"Of course, John," She replied. She prayed it wasn't another premonition that lead to another adventure. She didn't think she could handle another one so soon.

"Tomorrow is Greer's birthday and I'd like to surprise her. I have five dollars saved up. Do you think you could buy her something for me?"

Brice blinked in surprise. She couldn't believe tomorrow was Greer's birthday. Pulling up her record of Greer, she confirmed it was the broody senior's birthday the next day, and that she would be turning nineteen. Brice wondered, "Nineteen? That's a bit old for a senior. Did she fail or miss a grade?"

"Please Brice?" John begged, drawing her attention back the present. "Sure, John. What would you like me to get her?"

"She really likes red M&M's, just like me. Could you get her as many as you can of them for this much?"

John handed Brice a five-dollar bill and Brice was left speechless at his love for his sister, "I'll do what I can."

Greer was waiting on the porch for her brother when Brice dropped him off. Brice couldn't help but to notice that Greer still looked exhausted. Brice asked as John got his book bag down from the overhead compartment, "John, does Greer like coffee?"

"Yeah. I make her a pot before coming outside in the morning. She likes it with black and she says I make the best coffee," John stated proudly.

Brice smiled at him, "I bet you do. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Bye, Brice"

Flying home, Brice received a text. She opened her cell phone to see Amelia had wrote, "Superheroes r idiots."

Brice laughed and thumbed a reply, "I've been saying that 4 years."

"Wanna meet me 4 dinner in 30mins? Will b on my dinner break"

Brice checked her schedule. "Sure. Where?"

In the hospital for superheroes' cafeteria, Brice and Amelia ate dinner. As they each ate slices of pumpkin pie, Amelia said, "I love pumpkin pie. My mom makes one every Thanksgiving."

"My grandmother makes some for Thanksgiving, too," Brice replied.

"Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays, but I got to work this year," Amelia said with a sigh, "what about you? Do you like Thanksgiving?"

Brice hesitated for a moment, not sure if she wanted to share how much of an ordeal Thanksgiving was for her.

"I like the idea of the holiday," Brice started carefully. She went on to explain how horrible that day of the year was for her. When she was done, Amelia was looking at her in sympathy.

She rested her hand on Brice's and said, "If you want, I'll give you a doctor's excuse and you can hide out at my house until it's over."

Brice laughed half-heartedly. "My mother would only accept me not showing up if I had been kidnapped by supervillains."

"I'm sure we could arrange something," Amelia teased, mischief in her eyes. Brice smiled back and said, "I'll be okay. It's just one day out of the year."

Brice left Amelia after a long kiss goodbye. She then went to the M&M's World store in Las Vegas. The three pound bag of red M&M's cost more than five dollars, but what John didn't know wouldn't hurt him.

Later that night, when she picked up a still exhausted Greer, Brice decided what her birthday present to Greer would be. Upon reaching the school, she once again had to wake Greer up. However this time she made sure not to touch her.

Once she was home, she played with her pets before going to bed. Whenever she stroked Empress and called her a good girl, the cat would purr loudly and arch its back. Monty and Python still weren't playing with Empress, and that worried Brice. She wondered if she would have to take her pets to work one day and see if the girl who could communicate with animals could get them to work out their differences.

The next morning, after waking up Greer to get off the bus, Brice gave John the giant bag of M&M's. His eyes widened and he threw himself at her, "Thank you, thank you, thank you. She's going to love it!" Brice couldn't help but to feel ten feet tall.

That night, before she picked up Greer, she made a stop in Columbia. When Greer stumbled up the stairs, Brice held out a large cup of steaming coffee that smelled like heaven to any body who loves coffee.

"Happy Birthday," Brice hesitantly said. She wasn't sure how Greer would react. Greer stared at the cup for the longest time before taking it from Brice. She said, before walking to the back of the bus, "Thank you."

Brice tried to hide her smile. While it had only been two soft words, Brice could tell they were heartfelt.

The rest of Brice's week passed quickly. She talked with Amelia everyday, if only to see how Amelia's day went, and tried to meet her for lunch or dinner whenever their schedules allowed it. Brice realized she really liked the doctor, even though they had only been dating for a month.

It was refreshing for Brice to find someone she didn't have to hide part of her life from. Brice's first girlfriend, on the other hand, was a girl named Carlye who went to Brice's high school in New Jersey. Brice thought it would last forever. She had been trying to find a way to tell Carlye about her family when she found out Carlye was cheating on her with foreign exchanged student named Madison. Unable to stand the sight of a heartbroken Brice, Marge had been a phone call away from having Madison deported. Lucky for Madison, Mark was able to calm his wife down.

Once Thanksgiving Break had started, Brice knew she would be at the mercy of her mother and grandmother. She couldn't have been more right. Marge called on Sunday and said, "Tomorrow morning you, your grandmother, and myself are going grocery shopping. I want you and the bus here at 7 A.M. sharp. You have no say in the matter. Love you." Marge had hung up the phone before Brice could reply.

Monday morning, Brice arrived at her parents' house just as her mother requested. Brice wore jeans and comfortable shoes since she knew it was going to be a long day. Brice wiped her feet as she knocked on the door. Her mother opened it and Brice could tell by the expression on her face that Helen was already there.

Marge tersely said, "Now that you're here, we can go."

"At least let the girl come in and have something to eat, Marge. Here, Brice, have some of my cookies."

Ignoring her mother's glare, Brice eagerly took some of the cookies Helen held out. Her grandmother made the best cookies in the world, and even her mother couldn't deny it.

Brice eyed her mother and grandmother wearily as she chewed. They were so different in appearances. Marge was petite and had long black hair which was beginning to gray. It was easy to see that her father had gotten his looks from his mother. Helen and Mark were both tall, lanky people with beautiful blonde hair.

Their attitudes were just as different as their appearances. Brice's mother was more of an act first think later type of person where as Helen always thought before acting. There were only two things they had in common. They were both superheroes, though Helen was retired, and they were both incredibly stubborn.

Helen poured Brice a glass of milk, which Brice dutifully drank but declined a second one. "Really, Brice, you should start drinking more milk. My doctor was telling me the other day that every woman has to worry about osteoporosis."

"That's interesting Grandma," Brice replied. Brice could see that her mother was about to lose her cool, "I think we should get going. It's best not to let the bus's engine get too cool."



"Okay, dear. Let me get my coat."

As Helen walked into the other room to get her coat, Brice whispered, "Ma, calm down, or I'm going to make you ride on top of the bus. It's going to be a long day, and let's try to make the best out of it. Now count to 112 by sixes."

Marge glared at her daughter for repeating the old anger management technique she was ordered to use. However, Brice could hear her counting under her breathe. She tried to hide a smirk.

Once on the bus, Brice had to listen to Marge and Helen argue about everything. First they argued about where to get the turkeys, and then where to get the hams. Next they argued about what types of potatoes to get, and then where to buy the cranberries. Brice tried her hardest not to side with either woman, but they kept dragging her into it. She was often asked, "What do you think, Brice?"

Halfway through the shopping trip, Helen said, "I think we should go to Mexico to get the corn. Let's stop at the bank so I can convert some money into pesos."

Marge argued, "Iowa has the best..."

"I'll go to the bank," Brice said, interrupting her mother before the two women could get into another argument. Marge sighed, "Well, I suppose I can convert some money for when we go to Japan. I want to make a cherry pie for dessert."

Brice saw Helen opening her mouth to speak and said before her grandmother had the chance to speak, "The bank it is then."

Brice parked in front of the superhero bank, which was located in Idaho. It was where every superhero went to get their paychecks cashed. It was also considered the safest bank in the world.

Little did Brice know, her second adventure was about to begin. From that moment into the next week, her life would be filled with things ordinary bus drivers did not have to deal with.

Sitting in her bus, Brice waited for her mother and grandmother. She looked around the small town. She wondered who in their right mind decided to put the bank to the superheroes in the middle of Idaho. Brice chuckled as she glanced up at the bank's weathered sign. It read, "The First Bank of Cowfield."

Just as she was thinking it was taking a long time for her mother and grandmother to come out of the bank, Brice noticed a man walking by her bus. It was his neon-green messenger bag that caught her attention, and Brice's eyes followed him as he walked into an alley. Brice thought nothing of it until she noticed a man wearing all black follow the other man into the alley. Brice wondered out loud, "Well, that didn't look right. Muggers don't really wear all black and follow people into alleys in broad daylight. Do they?"

She knew she wasn't strong like her mother, or fast like her grandmother, but Brice also knew that she could at least check to see if the messenger-bag-man was alright. If things didn't look good, Brice knew she could run into the bank and get her family.

Quickly locking the bus, she tried to appear casual as she walked over to the alley's entrance. She slowly peered into the alley. The man in black had caught up to the other man, and had apparently knocked him unconscious. He was going through the neon-green bag when Brice gasped, and his head jerked up to look at her.

"Come here," He growled. The air was knocked out of Brice as she was suddenly jerked through the air by an invisible force.

The man in black used his power to slam Brice against the wall and as she fought to avoid passing out from all the pain. She wondered why she couldn't have interrupted a normal mugging. Brice was almost certain she could handle knives and guns better than she could superpowers.

"I'll teach you to stick your nose where it doesn't belong. How about I cut it off as a reminder to you?" Brice's eyes widened as he wiped out a knife. She regretted her last thought. She now knew that she most definitely could not handle a knife.

"How about I remind you what pain feels like?" A strong female voice said. Brice gasped at her mother and grandmother standing in the alley in their superhero outfits. The mugger chuckled, "Majesta, isn't it? And oh look, Whirlwind. I thought you were retired."

"You're going to wish you had retired by the time I'm through with you," Helen retorted. Brice tried not to roll her eyes. Why did superheroes and villains always feel the need to exchange barbs before actually fighting?

"You won't do anything," The mugger confidently said, "you move and I'll crush this woman's skull. Not even you can move that fast enough to save her, Whirlwind."

Brice cried out as her head was slammed into the wall. The pressure on her head kept growing and she couldn't stop whimpering. If she had to compare it to the pain from the deadly serum she had been shot with, they would be equal. She didn't know how she was going to make it out of this one. Being a barren wasn't going to save her from having her head crushed.

"I may not be able to stop you, but I can stop all of us," A voice croaked. The pressure on Brice's head relieved just enough so that she could see the unconscious man was now conscious, although just barely. He held in his hand what appeared to be a glow-in-the-dark stick, but when he snapped it, it didn't just glow. Blue light poured out of it as if it was a strobe light.

The pressure on Brice's head went away immediately as both men, her mother, and grandmother fell to the ground. Brice held her head in her hands, waiting for the thick haze of pain to clear enough so she could move. As she sat in the field of blue light, she thanked whoever had discovered that superheroes, or anyone with highly mutated DNA, was vulnerable to

Ununseptium. Ununseptium was the source of the blue light now emitting from the stick, and when anyone with powers was exposed to the light, they felt drained of all their energy.

Now able to rise to her feet, Brice quickly went to her mother and grandmother. They looked furious but uninjured. Brice knew she had to get them out of the Ununseptium's light. Grabbing her mother's hands, she started pulling Marge down the alley. Once they were around the corner, Marge was up on her feet and had Brice in as tight of a hug as Brice could withstand.

Brice gasped, feeling her ribs squeezed together, "Ma! I have to get Grandma..."

"What were you thinking walking in on a mugging? You were almost killed! I could have lost you!" Marge cried.

Brice, fearing her ribs really would break, cried out, "Majesta! People are watching!"

Marge quickly let go of her daughter and turned to face the crowd growing around them. Marge waved her gloved hand and said, "Nothing to see here people. Just stopping a routine mugging."

"Sure, routine," Brice muttered as she went back to get her grandmother, and then the man who had cracked the light. Once his energy was returned, he whispered urgently to Majesta and Whirlwind. Marge appeared to be arguing fiercely under her breathe. Finally, she resigned, turned to Brice, and said in a serious voice, "Brice, the Ununseptium isn't going to last much longer and we need the USB drive the man in the alley stole. It's red. I'm going to need you to go in there and retrieve it. There's no time to waste."

Brice blinked, stunned. Her mother wanted her to go back in the alley with a mugger who had superpowers?

"Brice, please. There's really no time to waste. I'd do this myself if I could," Marge pleaded. Brice blinked again. Her mother never begged. Brice finally nodded and forced herself to walk back into the alley. Marge had been right, the blue light was fading.

It had been easy to walk back into the alley to get her grandmother and the other man. Now she had to force her feet to move. She knew it was an irrational fear. The mugger wouldn't be able to move or stop her, if she hurried. Finally, she stood over the man and stared down at him. His eyes were open and full of anger. He seemed to study Brice and his eyes widened as if he recognized her.

Deciding not to wait any longer, Brice started checking his pockets. She flinched as the man started to speak with a strained effort, "It...it's you...you...you're...the...one he wants..."

Brice could only stare at him in confusion. Who would want her? Realizing her time was running out, Brice quickly found the red USB drive and hurried back to her mother. The messenger-bag-man snatched it out of her hand and turned to leave. Helen frowned in disapproval as she caught him by the arm and said, "Where are your manners? Thank the young lady."

He looked ready to argue, but one look into the masked eyes of Whirlwind, and he changed his mind. He turned to Brice and said, "Thanks for the help. You just helped save the world."

Brice nodded but couldn't get her mind off what the mugger had said. Thinking of the mugger, Brice turned around to see the blue light fade away and the mugger jump to his feet. Fully expecting her mother or grandmother to run after him, she was more that surprised when they didn't. She stood there, flabbergasted, as they let him run away.

"You're not...you're not going after him?" Brice stammered, "what the hell! He just tried to kill us!"

Marge tried not to fidget but firmly said, "There are more important things to attend to. We have to get to Japan and get those cherries."

"And I want that corn," Helen said, "we best be going."

Brice dumbly followed them back to her bus. She couldn't believe what she had just witnessed. Why had they left him go?

Brice asked, as they loaded into the bus, "What took you so long in the bank?"

Helen flapped her hand, "Oh, it was nothing. We just had to take care of a small bank robbery. Everyone was worried that the bank robbers were there because it was the superhero bank, but in reality, they didn't know what they had gotten into. They thought they were robbing a small-town bank. Can you imagine?"

Later that evening, after her hellish day was finished, Brice watched the small bank robbery on the television. The news reporter said, "If anyone thought Whirlwind was retired, they should think again. Today, in a small Idaho bank, Whirlwind showed up to stop the robbers from stealing all the money. How she does it is just incredible. Please watch."

Brice watched as gunmen pointed guns at everyone in the bank. Brice thought it was the most ridiculous thing she had ever seen, since she could personally spot fifteen superheroes waiting in line to cash their paychecks. Brice saw a flash and Whirlwind, in her supersuit, stood before the criminals. Whirlwind simply put one hand on her hip and pointed her other hand to the ground. Helen said in the no-nonsense voice Brice often heard before, "Just what do you think you are doing? Put those guns down *right now*."

There was a breathless moment of wait before the robbers dropped their guns. Brice chuckled as she turned off the TV. Her grandmother had been right. Those robbers had no idea what they had gotten themselves into.

As she picked Python off of Monty's back, she said to the white cat, "I think we're going to have a nice Thanksgiving Break. I get to see Amelia more often and we can all spend some quality time together. Maybe then you'll get along better with Empress."

Empress meowed and started washing herself. Brice pretended not to see the glare Python sent her.

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Noel bounced on the bed where Alice sat reading. "I have tickets to a soccer game on Wednesday. Do you want to go with me?"

Alice merely turned the page of her book. She already knew where this conversation was heading. Ignoring the fact Noel had started playing her with knee, Alice replied, "You know I hate soccer. Why don't you invite Brice?"

"Brice," Noel tried to sneer, "why would I want to go with her?"

"Well, I'm certainly not going with you," Alice said. Already knowing what her lover wanted to hear she continued, "It would be good for you two to spend time together. I insist you invite Brice to the game."

"Fine," Noel sighed heavily as she reached for her phone, "I'll call her."

Alice listened as Noel called Brice. Noel made it sound as if it was all Alice's idea and from the smile that came across Noel's face, Brice had accepted. When the conversation ended, Noel said, trying not to sound excited, "I probably won't have a good time anyway."

Alice hid her smile. She knew Brice and Noel would make good friends. "Sure, sweetie. Say hi to Brice for me when you see her."

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The day of Thanksgiving, Brice awoke with a groan. She didn't mind that it was early in the morning, or that she hadn't gotten much sleep. However, she hadn't been awake for more than thirty-seven seconds and she already wished the day was over. She wondered if she could get out of dinner by saying she had swine flu. Brice sadly struck the idea from her head as she climbed out of bed. Marge would send paramedics to Brice's house, she would be injected with several vials, and at her parents' house before the turkey was cut.

After showering, while clad in her underwear, she stood in her large walk-in closet, trying to decide what to wear. Knowing what the day had planned for her, she picked comfortable clothing. Brice smirked as she pulled on a pair old jeans and sat on the bed to put on her tennis shoes. Her mother was going to be so jealous of her ability to wear jeans on this formal family occasion.

Still topless, Brice continued to look in her closet for a shirt. "I'm feeling butch," She said to Python, who was watching her from the bed. He yawned in reply. Brice put on a black, long-sleeved dress shirt. She then went over to her tie rack and choose the programmable silk tie her

father had given her three Christmases ago. She scrolled through the color selections before settling on an autumn orange in honor of the season.

Standing in front of her mirror, Brice carefully tied a half-Windsor knot. Looking herself over, she remarked to Monty, "I don't look half bad. Which, of course, implies nothing since I could look three-fourths bad." Her dog merely gave her a look of utmost love and devotion. That's why she had said that to Monty and not her cats.

Having packed her bus with all the items her mother requested the night before, she could only stall by making breakfast for her and her pets. Empress was washing her paws on the kitchen table while Monty and Python sat underneath it. Brice sighed as she put their food into their designated bowls, "Sooner or later you all are going to get along."

Slowly chewing on a piece of toast, Brice kept a wary eye on the clock. Her mother was going to call her any moment now to see if she was up. No sooner than she had finished thinking that, her phone rang. "You three behave while I'm gone," She firmly told her pets before pulling out her phone. She answered while walking towards the door, "Hi Ma."

"Are you awake?"

Brice rolled her eyes and locked her front door. "No, this is a recording."

"Are you on your way?" Marge asked tersely. Brice normally wouldn't let Marge get away with talking to her like that, but Brice knew her mother was just as stressed as she was, "I'm leaving now."

"Good," Marge said. There was a long pause and Brice thought her mother had hung up on her. About to pull the phone away from her ear, Marge said, "I'm sorry, Brice. Helen is already here. Drive safely. I love you."

"Same here, Ma," Brice replied with a small smile before hanging up.

Brice arrived at her parents' house thirty minutes later, driving safely as her mother requested. Brice parked her bus in the backyard. It was one of the perks from having the largest vehicle in the family.

Pulling the handle to open the bus's door, she could hear shouting from inside the house. Brice rested her head against the steering wheel and pulled out her cell phone. She sent Amelia a text, "I don't want 2 be here."

A minute later her phone beeped and Brice read, "I'm sorry ): Super busy. Exploding turkey injuries everywhere. U can make it. Eat a piece of pie 4 me. Call me later."

Brice smiled, not really feeling better, but it was nice to know Amelia cared.

"Need some help unloading?" Mark asked. He and Michael were standing at the foot of the bus. She snorted, "Cowards."

Mark grinned while Michael did his best to look disinterested. The three of them unloaded all the food Brice had brought. Michael grunted as he picked up a twenty-five pound bag of turkey, "Why do we need all this food anyway? We don't have that much family."

Mark also grunted as he picked up another heavy bag of frozen turkey. "Do I need to remind you of last year?"

"Oh yeah. Right," Michael said after remembering how one of their little cousins made all the food on the kitchen table spontaneously combust. After many years of experience, their family always had backup food prepared.

Marge stormed out of the house and shouted, "What's taking so long? I want that food in the house now!" She marched to the back of the bus and grabbed the two other turkeys, four fifteen-pounds bags of hams, and a six ten-pound bags of potatoes. She carried them inside the house as if they weighed nothing.

Once the food was inside, Mark and Michael were sentenced to cleaning the house while Brice was placed in the kitchen. Brice tried to watch her grandmother peel and slice potatoes, but that only made her eyes blur. Helen's power was speed. She finished one bag of potatoes in thirty seconds, and was now working on next bag. Helen asked, never pausing in what she was doing, "Could you be a dear, Brice, and get me another bowl?"

Brice did as she was asked for the next few hours. She somehow managed to keep her mother and grandmother from killing each other. After breaking up the thirteenth fight, she had enough. Brice shouted, "That's it! I give up! I'm not going to keep you two in line any longer! You're both adults, act like it! And see if I care if you two ruin Thanksgiving!"

She made a show of storming out of the kitchen and collapsed on the living room sofa, folding her arm over her eyes. Michael was sitting in one of the recliners in the room, texting on his blackberry. He observed, "You lasted a half an hour longer than you did last year."

"What can I say? I think they're mellowing with old age," Brice replied dryly, uncovering her eyes.

"Maybe," Michael said, "so how long do you give them?"

"They'll be fighting again in ten minutes," Brice answered without hesitation.

She and her brother stared at each other with serious expressions before breaking into grins. It felt good to smile with her brother, but Brice knew once their family showed up he would pretend like she didn't exist.

It turned out Brice's prediction was wrong. Marge and Helen didn't start fighting until fifteen minutes later. Brice ignored them by turning on the TV to watch the Macy's parade instead. After a few minutes of loud fighting, Mark appeared in the living room from wherever he had been hiding. He said, looking directly at Brice, "Someone should stop them."

"Not I said the bus driver."

Mark said, trying to sound firm and strict, "Brice..."

"Your wife, your mother. That guy is clearly lip-syncing his song. It sounds just like it does on the radio."

Mark looked pleadingly at her and then to his son. Michael just shook his head and Mark growled, "You kids aren't getting anything for Christmas."

Michael and Brice chuckled as their father walked into the kitchen looking ready to face his demise. A few minutes later the shouting quieted and Mark came out of the kitchen looking battle-worn.

Brice's family started arriving an hour later. First to arrive was Mark's brother and sister with their spouses. Then their children arrived with their kids. Brice and Michael were the youngest of their first cousins who already had children ranging from five to fifteen. Michael started talking with their fifteen-year-old cousin Craig, a flyer like himself. They were bragging about stunts they had done recently.

Brice attempted to distance herself from her family the best she could. She hated the small talk they repeated each year. How are you Brice? How's work? You still a baron?

While they didn't verbally ask the last question, it was always on their mind. Marge's and Mark's families had the longest recorded lines of superheroes, and when they got married, there was so much hope placed on firstborn Brice. They thought she would be greatest superhero yet, with a variety of powers. She had disappointed them, to say the least. When Michael showed he only had the ability to fly they no longer cared he had only had one power. At least he had a superpower.

Brice was able to momentarily avoid socializing by taking out the trash. She was stuffing white bags into the large roadside container when a familiar voice purred, "You look quite dashing in that shirt and tie, Brice."

Brice whirled around, still holding a bag of trash. She was shocked to see Alice, Noel, and Noel's mother, Jamie, standing in her parents' driveway, "Umm...thanks. What are you doing here?"

"Manners, Brice," Noel scolded, "you're dripping on your shoe."

Brice looked down to see the bag leaking onto her shoe.



"Shit," She swore as she turned around to finish putting the trash away. She honestly thought her day couldn't have gotten any worse, however, she should have known better. There was nothing like having Noel and Alice there to see the worst day of her year.

She turned back around and forced a smile, "Sorry about that. Nice to see you Ms. Snowplow."

"Brice, you can call me Jamie, " She laughed. Jamie looked like an older version of Noel, but with shorter white hair and laugh wrinkles on her face. Jamie had the aura of a laid back, easy going person, but Brice knew there had to be a strong will behind that aura to be the mother of Noel. "Your mother invited us and since it would only be me and my girls, we thought it would be nice to join you."

Noel corrected, "What she means to say is that she can't cook and she wanted Alice's first Thanksgiving with us be perfect."

Jamie pinned her daughter down with her eyes and asked, "You don't want Alice's first Thanksgiving with us to be nice?"

"I..I didn't say that," Noel stuttered. Any other day Brice would have been thrilled to see someone make Noel cower but today it did nothing for her.

Alice ignored the mother and daughter and said to Brice in her impossibly sexy accent, "I've never celebrated Thanksgiving before. I hope you don't mind."

"No," Brice lied, "of course not. Let's go in and introduce you to my family."

Walking inside the house, Marge seemed thrilled to spot an ally in Jamie. She rushed over and introduced Jamie, Noel, and Alice to everyone at the party. Even though Brice's mood was sinking fast, she did smirk when Michael's tongue seemed to become tied when he saw Alice in his house, "Miss...miss...Ms. Inferno. Hmm, hi."

"Hello Michael."

Brice noticed that Alice seemed to have that affect on every man in the house. What surprised her, though, was that Noel didn't seem to mind when Alice teased them, but she got furious every time she flirted a little too much with Brice.

Mark looked out the window and called to his wife, "Marge, I think your sister has arrived with your grandmother."

Brice groaned internally . Her great-grandmother, Edna, was ninety eight, and had started forgetting things several years ago. Edna would still be able to drive if it wasn't for being forgetful. Her powers of super vision and hearing had slowly faded with age until she had only slightly above average hearing and vision.

Brice felt ill. She knew she couldn't stay for dinner, not with Noel and Alice there. She quickly rushed into the kitchen where her mother and Jamie were setting up trays of appetizers. Marge seemed to be seething, "...and she thinks she can set a turkey cooker better than I can. I swear to God if it weren't for..."

"Mom, I have to go," Brice interrupted her mother's rant.

Marge replied without even looking at her daughter, "If I can't leave, you can't leave."

"But Mom..."

"Brice," Marge snapped, "I have to finish putting together a perfect Thanksgiving dinner in an hour, or I'll have to deal with the mother-in-law from Hell. Now, I know it's hard to get along with them, but they're your family."

"Mom," Brice begged.

Jamie frowned with concern while looking at Brice, who seemed to be a little pale, "Marge maybe she could..."

"No! Brice, I'm busy. God, it's not like you have no one to talk to. I don't care if you only talk to Noel and Alice the entire time, but you're staying."

Brice walked out of the kitchen, defeated. She turned to look at her bus in the backyard where her youngest cousins were playing. Her mother would never forgive her if she left. She made her way back to Alice and Noel, who were standing in a corner of the large living room.

Alice looked her over with concern, "Are you alright?"

A strong, but old, female voice asked before Brice had the chance to reply, "You're one of mine aren't you?"

Brice bit her tongue to keep from crying. She knew what was coming. It happened every year. She turned around and forced a smile, "Hi, Granny Edna."

"Yep, you're one of mine," Edna said while looking Brice over. She leaned on a cane, but she was still physically fit for someone nearly a hundred, "What's your name again? Dice? Yeah, that's right. Short for Dicey. You were named after my mother."

"Actually, my name's Brice."

Edna blinked and repeated, confused, "Brice? Brice? Who are you named after then? And why are you wearing a tie, girl?"

"I wasn't named for anyone, and I like ties," Brice wearily replied. She noticed Alice and Noel politely trying ignore what was happening.

"Hmm. You're one of those women, aren't you?" Edna stated. "doesn't like men? Yeah, it's obvious looking at you."

Noel couldn't help but snort as she heard that. It turned into a gasp of pain as Alice elbowed her in the ribs. Brice didn't get a chance to reply before Edna continued, "Nothing wrong with that. Many a women in my day made that choice. There were many a time when I was with my Alfred I wished I had made that choice."

It would have been amusing, but Brice had heard it several times before. She had come out to her great-grandmother every Thanksgiving for the past ten years, and Brice knew what was next.

"Tell me again, dear, what's your power?"

There it was. The question Edna asked her every year. Most of the time she lied, it was easier that way. It was humiliating, but Brice could usually hid her humiliation. However, when she saw Alice and Noel flinch at Edna's question, Brice felt her cheeks burn. She tried her best to ignore them; she didn't want to see the looks of pity on their faces.

"I'm super ordinary," Brice answered while internally begging her face to stop blushing.

Edna looked confused, "What dear?"

"Super ordinary. 110% ordinary in fact," Brice tried to force a laugh, "I'm a baron, Granny Edna."

"Oh," Edna said. Before Edna could say another word, Marge appeared from the kitchen to loudly state, "Dinner's ready. We've set up outside. Don't worry, we've set the yard's temperature to a comfortable setting."

Brice walked outside, not looking back at Edna, Alice, or Noel. They had set the backyard's temperature to a nice early fall setting. If they hadn't, cold winds would be blowing the food off tables and everybody would be stuck in the house.

One of Brice's aunts was calling to the kids who were standing in the far corner of the yard in a group. Brice frowned when she noticed most of her cousins were standing around her eleven-year-old cousin, Lily. Brice felt a wave of sympathy for Lily. The girl hadn't shown any sign of powers, and everyone was beginning to think she was a baron like Brice. While Brice couldn't hear what was going on, she could tell by Lily's upset face the other kids were picking on her. The other adults recognized this, too.

"Emily! Stewart! John!" The parents started sternly calling out names. But above their calls, another sound was growing. Lily had started yelling, "I won't be! I'm not!"

"I won't! I won't BE!"

Everyone exchanged glances. Everyone thought, "Was Lily getting louder?"

"I'm NOT! I won't BE!"

Everybody winced. She was getting louder, and that shout had hurt their ears. Before anyone could call out, Lily screamed, "I WON'T BE A BARON LIKE BRICE!"

It was like someone had tried to break the sound barrier right there in the yard. Luckily, Lily had screamed into the sky or she would have hurt her cousins. As it was, the sonic boom had knocked everyone off their feet. It had also knocked the tables and chairs over, including the table holding all the food.

Brice lay on the ground while her ears rang with the words her cousin had screamed. She decided that if the Earth swallowed her whole right then the day would end on a good note. Brice knew she wasn't blushing. Some things were too mortifying to blush about. She struggled to get up; her inner ears were still shaken from the boom.

Brice looked around. Lily looked shocked. Once Lily's mother and father were on their feet, they rushed to their daughter to wrap her in hugs. Brice was having a little trouble hearing, but she was sure they were saying things like, 'I'm so proud of you.'

As parents rushed over to check on and scold their kids, Brice moved to the food table. She started to push it upright but her grandmother stopped her. Helen tenderly said, "Let me take care of it, dear."

Brice nodded, watching her grandmother zip around picking up the table and wasted food. Helen couldn't have known she just hurt Brice worse. Brice couldn't help but to feel that she was too pathetic to pick up food off the ground.

Soon, Helen had the table reset with the backup food they had prepared, and everybody was eating at their tables. Everyone seemed to be talking, with the exception of the end of the table that Brice sat at with Noel, Alice, and Jamie. Brice could tell they wanted to say something, but they couldn't think of what to say. Brice knew Marge was stealing glances at her, and since her mother was being uncharacteristically quiet, Brice also knew Marge felt bad.

Brice looked around. Lily's mother hadn't stopped crying yet from happiness, and Lily was talking excitedly with her cousins. They seemed to be having a good time and eating heartily from their plates. She only picked at her food. Every year everyone raved about how wonderful the food tasted, but Brice had found it hard to eat for several years now. She had always managed to hide this fact, but she couldn't even pretend this year. It tasted like sawdust.

It was Noel who broke the silence. She slammed her cup down, startling everyone around her. She looked at Brice and snapped, "Look, baron, your bad mood is ruining my girlfriend's first Thanksgiving. You should be thankful you have a Thanksgiving to get ruined. Be thankful you have good food in front of you that you only pick at. Okay, so you're a baron, but I'm thankful you are. You being just that saved my girlfriend's life."

Brice felt her jaw unhinged. She didn't know what to do. She felt like punching Noel, but how could she after Noel had finished with such a nice compliment? Alice and Jamie seemed to be having the same predicament as Brice.

Noel jerked up her chin, "What? You want to hit me? Come on, try it."

Brice's dropped jaw slowly turned into a grin and she started laughing, "God, I hate you, buddy. You are the worst best friend a person could ask for."

Noel smirked, "You like me. Don't deny it."

Brice merely shook her head, still smiling. She found that her appetite had returned and she dug into her food. Everyone had been right to rave, it was delicious.

With Noel's comment breaking the ice, they started talking about this and that. Jamie seemed to think the best way to make up for her daughter's tactlessness was to tell embarrassing stories about her. Brice and Alice enjoyed Jamie's tales immensely. Brice enjoyed herself for the first time in years.

After everyone had helped themselves to dessert, Brice found a suddenly shy Lily by her side. Lily's mouth was moving but nothing seemed to come out. Brice smiled at the girl and said, with no hard feelings, "Congratulations, Lily."

Lily smiled meekly, "Thanks, Brice." Her smile fell a little, and she said, looking down at her feet, "I'm sorry about...what I did."

"It's fine. No harm done."

Lily's smile returned and she rushed off to play with her cousins. Brice couldn't be angry at the girl. She would have given anything to show powers like that when she was little. Brice could only hope Lily remembered the moments she thought she would be a baron, and treat people better for it in the future.

Brice soon found herself by a very sheepish looking Marge. Brice decided to forgive her mother before she said anything, "It's okay, Ma."

"It's not," Marge replied hotly. Brice was taken aback. Marge sighed, "It's not okay. I should have listened to you earlier. I didn't, and I'm so sorry. I was too busy trying to make this the perfect Thanksgiving that I couldn't even notice my daughter was having a miserable one. You've never enjoyed yourself, but I keep making you come. You wouldn't believe how Jamie chewed me out earlier. She pointed out what I couldn't see."

Brice looked over at the icy mother and daughter pair, and smiled as she remarked, "Must be something about that family. Noel pointed out something I couldn't see too. I have many blessings in my life, and I've been ignoring them. Today is a day to be thankful so...I'm going to be thankful."

Brice reached over and pulled her mother into a hug, "I'm thankful to have such a good mother."

Marge gingerly hugged her daughter, having long ago learned the right amount of pressure to use so not to hurt anybody. Sensing her mother was about to cry, Brice rested her chin on top of her mother's head and said, "And I'm thankful to be so tall compared to said good mother."

"Brat," Marge snarled as she let go of Brice. The harshness was lost as she discreetly tried to wipe a tear away. Brice merely smiled.

As the day wore on, people started to leave. Jamie, Alice, and Noel were the last to depart. Jamie grinned at Marge, "You regret inviting us?"

"Every second you were here," Marge replied as she hugged her friend warmly. As Jamie hugged Mark and Brice goodbye, Alice bent down to kiss Marge on the cheek and said, "Thank you having me. I had a good time."

Marge arched an eyebrow as a wave of warmth flowed into her cheek from the kiss. "That's some kiss you have there. I'm surprised you didn't melt this snowy girl away."

Alice smiled at Noel, "I melted her into me."

Brice groaned at the loving looks Alice and Noel exchanged, "Stop it. Watching you two look at each other is like eating funnel cake at a fair. It's sweet but sickening at the same time."

Noel growled as she lightly punched Brice in the arm. She might have intended to do it harder, but with her girlfriend and mother there, Noel knew better. Brice surprised Noel by pulling her into a hug, and before Noel could recover, Brice sneeringly whispered, "You're so whipped."

Noel gasped, outraged. Brice quickly ducked behind Alice as she shouted, "Take that back!"

Noel tried to grab Brice from around Alice, but one firm look from her girlfriend had her thinking.

Jamie sighed, "Kids. What are we going to do with them? Alice, please bring your icicle."

Alice wrapped an arm around Noel and tugged her away from Brice. She called over shoulder, "Thanks again for having us. It was great first Thanksgiving."

Marge called back, "You'll have to come back next year."

Brice went home later that afternoon with tons of leftovers for both herself, and her pets. They all dined on turkey and ham that night. She called Amelia before bed, and they talked for two hours about each other's day.

The next few days went by quickly for Brice. She braved Black Friday with her father at a superhero accessories store so he could get a pair black ceather pants her mother wanted. Ceather

had the same look and feel as leather, but it was made with synthetic material and it breathed like cotton.

Marge herself had long ago been banned from shopping on Black Friday, after an incident that started with the last set of silverware on sale and ended with a major press cover-up.

As Brice got ready for work Sunday night, after spending the day with Amelia at the Louvre, Brice realized Winter Break started Friday evening. The students had academic finals and power assessments Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, which was why they had had a week long break the week before, and then Friday would be a giant party. She wondered what she was going to do during the break.

"Should I set up a tree this year?" Brice asked her pets. She had never set up a tree before. It seemed sad to set up a tree for one, "We'll see."

Greer didn't seem to have rested as Brice requested. She looked as if she hadn't slept for a few days, and when Brice had to wake her up when they got to the school, she was sure Greer hadn't. The next few mornings, Brice brought Greer a cup of her favorite coffee as she done on her birthday. Greer would whisper her thanks with a tiny smile as she took the cup, and that made it all worth while for Brice to fly thirty minutes out of the way to get it.

John didn't seem to be as tired as his sister, but he looked worried. The only thing that would cheer him up was the mention of the last day of school before Winter Break. He was excited about it. He heard there would be a carnival with big rides.

Brice didn't know what to do. If she reported her feelings to a social worker, Brice was sure Greer and John would never forgive her. For all she knew, Greer was staying up all night playing World of Warcraft or something. She did, however, make herself a promise that if the situation didn't look better after Winter Break she would tell someone.

Thursday evening, Greer didn't get on the bus. Brice had found a large white note taped to the mailbox. In John's handwriting, she read that Greer was sick and couldn't go to school. Brice had never known Greer to be sick or to miss a day of school. Brice tried to shrug it off by saying it was the last day before the break. She was sure the school would be filled with fun, social activities that Greer wouldn't like. Brice hoped Greer had simply decided to skip the last day to sleep.

She took her other night kids to school, eyeing the huge rollercoaster set up on the complex. John's rumors had been right about the carnival and big rides. After delivering her riders, she flew home.

She fixed dinner for herself and her pets. As she was setting down Empress's bowl, the cat jumped at it hungrily. In the cat's rush to the food bowl, she scratched Brice's arm deep enough to make Brice bleed. Monty and Python started barking and hissing wildly at Empress, rushing to stand between her and Brice.

"Hey, that's enough. She didn't mean it," Brice called out while wiping away the blood on her arm with a paper napkin, "Monty, Python, I'm fine, now calm down."

She casually threw the bloody napkin towards the trashcan, not noticing that it missed. Brice went to bed after that, but even though she was tired, she found it was hard to go to sleep. She tossed and turned until her alarm clock went off.

After taking her night owls home, she swung by John and Greer's house to see if John wanted an early breakfast of flapjacks. Brice would need some Texas coffee if she wanted to make it through the day. Brice suddenly realized she was going to miss John, and Greer, over the break.

Brice's worried escalated when she found another note on the mailbox. This one said John wouldn't be going to school today, and it was signed Judy Watson, who was their mother. She knew John wouldn't miss the last day of school for anything. He had talked about it nonstop all week. She had to see what was wrong.

Brice locked her bus and headed for the Watson's front door. She wanted to know how sick John and Greer were, and if there was anything she could do to help. Her hand was raised to knock on the door when she heard a scream.

"No! Go away! We don't want any Gerber beans today!"

Startled by the scream, Brice took a step back. It was a woman's voice, but she didn't sound like Greer. Brice stepped forward again and she heard another scream along with the sounds of things crashing.

"Leave me alone! I don't want you here! This is not the Isle of Lesbo so go the hell away!"

Normally, Brice felt it was best to leave raving superheroes to other people, but John and Greer were involved. So she skipped knocking altogether and cautiously, opened the door.

"Hello?"

Brice caught sight of a frizzy blonde-haired woman before she had to close the door to protect herself from a barrage of flying objects.

"Judy Watson?" She called out.

The woman screamed, "Fortunate telling time is over! You just want something like everybody else! You! You! You want my children! You want to take them away from me!"

Brice cracked the door open to peer inside the house, "I just want to make sure they're okay. Are they okay?"

"They will be after I'm gone," The woman softly said.



Brice was barely able to make out what the woman said. This worried her, and Brice opened the door to see what the woman was doing. Brice gasped when she saw the woman holding a steak knife over her wrist.

Brice was astonished at how well she channeled one of her relatives to handle the situation. She didn't channel her mother with the 'a little less conversation, a little more action' approach. She didn't try her father's cool and calm reasoning. It was her grandmother's 'no-nonsense' approach.

"Just what do you think you are doing? Put down that knife *right now*," Brice ordered with one hand on her hip and the other pointing to the ground. The glare she gave Mrs. Watson would have made her mother and grandmother proud. When Judy hesitated, Brice hardened her glare and snapped her fingers before pointing down again, "Now!"

Brice tried not to act surprised when the woman dropped the knife. Judy Watson fell to the ground crying hysterically. After walking over to pick up the fallen knife, and to make sure there were no more sharp utensils around, Brice pulled out her cell phone and dialed 911-911-9111.

"Flo's Flower Shop, how may I help you?"

"I have a super 911 emergency."

"Hold while I connect you," There was a pause, "thank you for calling the superhero hotline. How may I help you?"

"I have a hysterical woman with unknown powers who just tried to attempt suicide. Can you arrange a medical vehicle to pick her up at this location?"

After confirming the medics were on their way, Brice didn't wait around for any other questions and hung up the phone. She knew they could track her location by her cell phone in a matter of nanoseconds. She instead called out, "John? Greer? Where are you?"

"Do you know where they are?" She asked the curled up woman on the floor. When the woman just kept crying, Brice muttered, "I guess not."

Brice wanted to search for them, but she knew she shouldn't leave their mom alone in cause Judy decided to try the knife act again. Brice waited five long minutes before she heard a helicopter landing in the yard. Finally, she could start searching. She tried upstairs first and went into a few rooms. Brice figured the one with the collection of action figures was John's room. Greer's room came as a surprise. Brice would have described it as a plain guest room. The only reason she knew it was Greer's room was because her book bag was on the floor.

Brice headed back downstairs where a big burly man in a medic's uniform tried to question her while another was shooting a sedative into Judy. Brice ignored the man and headed into what looked like the kitchen. It was the kitchen, and it was complete destroyed. Brice realized that Greer and John's rooms were probably the only rooms that weren't destroyed by their mother.

About to give up hope, Brice saw a closed door next to an open pantry that she guessed it was a door to a basement where she would find them.

Brice tried the handle, but found it locked from the inside. She then tried knocking on the door and calling their names. There was no reply. She finally called in the big man to help open the door. Brice placed her shoulder against the door and said, "You ready to help break it down?"

The man simply looked at her like she was an idiot. He pulled out a tiny gray box from his pocket and held it up to the door knob. As he pushed a little button, Brice watched as tiny probes came out of the front of the box and into the lock. Within seconds, the device had picked the lock. The man opened now unlocked door with a smug smile. Brice rolled her eyes and headed into the basement first. What she saw left her weak with relief.

Greer and John were lying on top of a pile of pillows and sleeping bags in the middle of the floor. They both were wearing large noise-canceling headphones. John appeared to be sleeping while Greer was reading in the dim basement light. Greer nearly jumped out of her skin when she looked up and saw Brice with the smug medic not far behind her. She yanked off her headphones and barked, "What in the hell are you doing here?"

Brice blinked at the harsh greeting and replied, "Nice to see you too."

Outside in the yard, Greer argued with the medics for the next thirty minutes about taking her mother to an asylum all the while they were strapping Judy down and giving her medication. She stated her mother was just having a bad day, and that she would be okay tomorrow. She lied so well that even Brice almost believed her, but the look on John's face said otherwise. The medics did seem to believe her, but stated that it was protocol. They said Judy would be released when she got better.

The big medic said to Brice, "We have to call child services. They can't stay in this home, it's a wreck."

Greer looked like she was going to explode. Her blue eyes went dark with anger as she hissed, "I'm nineteen-years-old, legally able to take care of my brother. You can take my mother away, but you're *not* taking my brother."

Brice's eyes widened when she saw her bus start to levitate. Brice didn't know what Greer was going to do, but she had the feeling she didn't want to find out.

"They can stay with me."

Brice winced when her bus dropped to the ground. The medics looked back to see the bus bouncing on its tires as its axles squeaked, and then back at Brice. Greer looked stunned.

"What?" A group of people resounded.

"They can stay with me," Brice said, "Greer's capable of taking care of herself and John. They just need a place to stay until their mother gets better."

Brice then focused on Greer, "John belongs with you. I have plenty of room as long, as you don't mind two cats and a dog. It's only until your mom gets better."

Greer looked hesitant. John finally tugged on her sleeve and said, "It will be okay, Greer. Can you say yes so I can go to school please? We're having a carnival today. Please?"

John's pleading did it. Greer finally agreed. Brice made a call to superhero child services and the school to inform them of what had happened. Since Brice was already declared suitable to take care of dozens of superhero children, giving her clearance to house two of them wasn't a problem. Greer and John packed their bags and loaded onto Brice's bus. Brice had to rush to pick up her other kids to get them to school on time. John waved goodbye happily before he disappeared inside the school.

Greer said, now that the bus was empty except for herself and Brice, "This is only temporary."

"You can stay as long as you need," Brice replied.

Greer was silent for a while. She then said, staring out the window, "I lied when I said my mother would be okay by tomorrow. She hasn't been okay in a long time. She's only peaceful when she sleeps."

"Is that why you go to school during the night? So you can watch her during the day?" Brice asked, looking at her through the large mirror above her.

Greer nodded, "She's only dangerous to herself, really. She'd never hurt John or me. It's just worse around Christmas time."

Brice decided to push her luck with Greer talking and asked, "Do you want to talk about it?"

Greer sighed, "No, but you deserve the whole story. My father died a few days before Christmas. That was a couple of years ago. My mother was devastated. She used to be a very powerful psychic; able to read the future at will. That's where John and I get our premonitions. She'd tell her findings to our father, who had a great gift for telekinetics, or to other superheroes so that they could save the day. My mother predicted that a supervillain would blow up a mall full of Christmas shoppers a few days before Christmas. My father rushed out to find the bomb. He was able to diffuse the bomb, but was shot in the back of the head by the supervillain."

Greer was repeating Brice's worst fear, that her mother or father would be killed doing their superhero duty. Her heart ached for Greer and her family. Greer took a shaky breath before continuing, "I can still remember my mom's scream..., my scream, and John's cries. We all saw it happen just minutes before it happened. There was... no way to stop it. There was nothing we could do but watch."

Greer wiped away an errant tear, "My mom went crazy. She was filled with so much grief. She never spoke of the future again. That's when I learned that trying to change the future will only lead to horrible things. My father changed the future, but died in the process."

Brice opened her mouth to speak, but Greer beat her to it, "But I no longer believe that. My father died a superhero. He knew when he took the title that he would be risking his life. I think that he was probably proud of the way he went. When John disobeyed me by hinting the future to you, he saved my life as much as you did. I'm grateful that he didn't listen to me. John and I have a gift, and we should use that gift to help others."

Brice had to blink away a few tears of her own. She softly said, "Spoken like a true superhero."

Greer gave a half-smile. There was a comfortable silence as Brice drove them home. Greer gasped as they prepared to land, "You never said you lived on top of a mountain!"

Brice shrugged and said, "My grandfather left it to me in his will. I own the whole mountain."

"You own the whole mountain," Greer repeated, "how did you get the top so flat?"

Brice had asked a friend of her parents if he would flatten the top of her mountain so she could have a house built up there without installing fancy bracing. He agreed, and that's what she told Greer.

As Brice and Greer carried her and John's things to the house, Brice asked, worried, "You don't mind pets do you?"

"No. I guess you're referring to that cat and dog you had on the bus for that week."

"Well, yes, and I have an adult cat called Empress. I only brought up the subject as a warning for my little babies. They're well trained, but Monty's still a puppy and Python is still a kitten. Puppies and kitties will be puppies and kitties."

Greer rolled her eyes but chuckled. Brice opened the door to her house and Greer watched as something black came flying out of what appeared to be the living room. Brice usually bent down to let Monty lick her face, but this time she ordered him to stop and sit. Whimpering, he did as he was told with his tail wagging a hundred miles per hour. Brice grinned and made introductions, "Monty, this is Greer. Greer this is my puppy, Monty."

Greer shook her head as she smiled, "I hate to break it to you, Brice, but that dog is not a puppy."

Brice frowned as she looked between Greer and Monty. She finally said with a pout on her lips, "He is a puppy. He's barely grown at all."

Greer laughed at Brice's denial, "Brice, that dog could have fit into my hand when I first saw him. Now he wouldn't be able to fit in both of our laps. And he's only going to get bigger. Do you see the size of his feet?"

Brice patted Monty's head and said to him while ignoring Greer, "Don't you listen to our new roommate. She doesn't know what she's talking about. You're just a puppy, aren't you?"

Greer shook her head with a smile as she watched Brice baby talk to her dog. She then noticed a white cat walked into the room. The cat eyed Greer for a long time before rubbing against her legs. "Well, Python likes you. And don't try to say he's not still a kitten."

Greer shook her head again. She knew Brice was never going to admit that her pets could and would grow up. Brice looked around.

"I wonder where Empress is. I'd like you to meet her."

Brice called out for her, but the cat did not appear. Brice shrugged, "She'll turn up later, I guess. She's very lofty."

Brice nodded at the nearby stairs and said, "The guest rooms are up here."

Brice's house had three bedrooms and two bathrooms. It was a little big for Brice to live in all by herself, but she liked having a view of the mountains from any window she looked out. Brice only used the bottom floor of her house, where her bedroom and the master bath were. The upstairs was only used as a storage area.

Greer and Brice carried the luggage upstairs. Brice let Greer decide which room would be whose. Both rooms had a full size bed and random boxes on the floor. Greer asked, looking out the bay window, "Do you ever get used to the view?"

Brice looked outside as well. She replied, "No, I never get tired of it. I know some people say these aren't really mountains, but I feel too tiny compared to the Rockies or the Himalayas. These blue mountains are just the right size for me."

Brice turned her attention back to the room and asked, "Would you mind helping me carrying these boxes down to the basement? Be careful, some of them are really heavy. Don't strain yourself."

Brice was about to pick up a box when they all started floating. She turned to look at a smirking Greer and grumbled, "Show off," She walked down the stairs as a train of boxes followed her. She called out for Empress as she waved the boxes down the stairs toward the basement.

"Just place them against that wall," She said, "Empress?"

Greer said, placing the boxes down gently with her power, "I'm sure she'll turn up."

Brice nodded as she closed the basement door. "Are you hungry? I can make a pretty good ham sandwich. Then it's nap time cause I'm dead tired."

As Brice lead Greer towards the kitchen, she once again wondered where Empress could have gone.

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"Kitty," A male voice greeted the woman that walked into his command room, "you've returned to us with good news, I hope."

"Oh, yes boss, I do have good news. I also got what you requested," Kitty replied, holding up a blood-stained napkin.

"Good Kitty."

Kitty purred happily at the compliment and then said, "She knows absolutely *nothing*, Virus...I mean boss."

Virus smiled, "That's exactly what I wanted to hear."

In Brice's next adventure:

Brice must survive the most dangerous adventure ever: Christmas.

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