

Switch

His breath tasted like fake fruit and bottom-shelf whiskey, but I stayed pressed against his lips like my life depended on it.

Our lives did depend on it.

Fireflies flickered through the smog-streaked alley. They sparkled with menace as they patrolled our wandering hands, their little electric eyes scanning the lines and curves of our bodies for any signs of trouble.

“Deeper,” his soft voice pleaded in our neuro channel. “Don’t let them see my face. They’ll pass soon.”

The tiny fireflies glowed and droned around our heads. He grabbed my stubbly chin with a smooth, sweaty hand and pulled my kiss further into him.

“What kind of shit have you gotten me into?” I thought into him.

“It’s nothing,” he murmured back into me. “You’ll be fine. Promise.”

“No, they’re watching us, I—”

I raised a hand to his chest to push away, but he slipped his fingers between mine.

He pulled me even tighter against his lips as he feathered a thumb across my ear.

“You’re a good boy.” His whisper was deep and breathy inside my brain. “Be a good boy for me?”

I ran my fingers through his dark, oiled hair with a moan. The fireflies fluttered around us. I buried his mouth into mine. His lips quivered across me, teasing at my tongue, rubbing down my hip until the fireflies were satisfied with what they saw: Just another 3am hookup. Just another seedy alleyway behind another roach-ridden gay bar. Nothing too unusual. No signs of trouble.

The fireflies zipped off into the sweaty night, but he grasped my head and held me even closer. Teeth gently sank into my lip, chewing me softly. The playful smell of sweet synthetic fruit still floated on his breath as he gripped my hips harder, kneaded at my hair, circled his tongue around mine, grinding his leather against my denim, flushing my cheeks, grinding faster, sinking deeper into me until suddenly—

“See?” He smirked as he nudged me away with his nose. “Told ya we’d be okay.”

“Ungggh.” I cleaned up my hair and wiped my lips dry. “You didn’t tell me you had fireflies looking for you.”

“Well they’re not looking for me specifically.” He tugged at the cuffs of his black jacket with a sorry sigh. His strange fruit flavor still filled my nose. “It’s complicated,” he chuckled with a frown.

“You can tell me about it if you want.” I have a bad habit of getting too close to strangers. “If you feel comfortable, I mean.”

“Nah.” He reached into his coat and pulled out his vape pen. “We’re having a fun night. Let’s keep it that way.”

“Well, I have to work tomorrow,” I lied. I just met him few hours ago—he was cute, but maybe not worth losing sleep over. “I can’t stay out too much longer anyways, or else—”

“You’re such a fuckin’ dork.” He puffed out a cloud of fake strawberry as he laughed. “It’s Saturday night.”

“Yeah, but—”

“I know you want more.” He stepped in close to me again. “Don’t you wanna find out what this whole vibe we have leads us to?”

“I—”

“Don’t you wanna have some more fun?”

“I mean—”

“I wanna show you somethin’ real fun.” Tiny lights and words twinkled on the surface of his wide, glassy eyes. “You don’t wanna have fun with me?”

“Sure. I like fun.” I leaned in closer to him. “What do you wanna show me?”

“There’s a spot,” he muttered as he stashed his vape back in his coat. “Not too far from here. Some condo under construction.” Little maps and video feeds scrolled across his glittering eyes. The smog in the alley thickened, sour stench of hot metal crawling down our throats.

“You wanna show me a construction site? A condo?” I squinted at him.

“There’s condos everywhere in this city, why would we—”

“We’re gonna climb it.” He rested his hand on my chin again. “At the top of this one building, all the light pollution from the city doesn’t load in. Dunno why, but it’s the only place in this sad fuckin’ city where you can see all the stars, and I want you to see—”

“No, I’m not gonna—”

“The sky’s pitch black, beautiful, full of stars. Just like you.”

I raised a brow. Maybe I should have pushed back against his goofy flirt. Maybe I should have brushed off his whole goofy plan. Maybe I should have just walked away. I probably should have just walked away. But all I did was raise a brow.

“It’s the middle of the night and there’s fireflies looking for you,” I laughed. “We’re not gonna—”

“It’s just a little urban exploration.” He grabbed my hand and feathered a thumb across my ear again. “You’ll be fine. Promise.”

“But I—”

“What, you not into urban exploration? Too scared?”

He knew exactly how to pierce through my thin skin. “Okay, fine,” I conceded. “But I’m not climbing up very high.”

“You’ll wanna climb all the way once you’re there,” he smirked.

“Sure I will.” I rolled my eyes with a smile. “Can we at least warp there?”

“Where’s the fun in that?” He scoffed. “All destination, no journey.”

“My legs are tired and I–”

“Half an hour ago you were bragging about how high your T level is. Now the toughest guy this side of town is too tired for a little walk?”

“I never said I was the toughest guy this–”

“C’mon,” he silenced me with a warm clasp of my hand. “We’ll walk fast.”

Lights flickered in his eyes as his soft fingers locked between mine, clutched me close, his sneaky smile holding me tight as a notice popped up on my eyes:

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> access_request@body.module(LEGS)
> ACCESS_GRANTED
> speed=MAX
```

With a few flicks of his eyes, he threw a hidden switch in our brains, hijacked our legs, we raced down the alley with impossible speed, our bodies slicing through thin sheets of midnight mist, bounding through the dim-lit streets and closed shops and vacant lots, all rushing by in a blur of pixels and haze, legs pumping faster, scenes struggling to render as we pounded against sidewalks, everything moving faster and faster and faster.

“HOW ARE WE RUNNING SO FAST?” I shouted above the speeding and howling of the streetlights. “WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO TO US?”

“Just enjoy the ride,” his smooth voice sailed into my head. “You’ll be fine. Promise.”

The AI-generated roads kept blasting by in flashes of shapes, colorless formless, breathless masses of light, crackling winds of static, our legs piloting us left, then right, then left and right and left and right, twisting us through the foggy grids and faded corridors of the dead city until suddenly—

“Here we are!” He pointed up as our feet slid to halt, all our weight sinking firm into the concrete. A tall, unfinished building loomed above us, cutting up into the dark sky. But I could barely turn my head, still shocked and spinning from being blown across town.

“What the fuck was that?!” I gasped. “Did you just hack the server?!”

“Technically not,” he giggled. “Just a tiny little loophole I know about. Try not to worry about it too much.”

“But you—”

“Look!” He nodded up at the building, a vertical maze of steel beams, dark windows, half-finished walls all rising from the ground in front of us. “See that outcropping way up there?” He pointed up again. “That’s where we’ve gotta go. Best view in town!”

“I’m not sure about this.” I closed my eyes and turned my head back down, still coming back into my senses. Everything about this guy screamed danger. But something about him kept pulling me along further. “You sure you know what you’re doing here?”

“Phh, of course,” his eyes twinkled as he turned down to me. “I’m showing the most beautiful man in town the most beautiful view in town.”

“Really?” I blushed and rolled my eyes so hard it hurt. “You can’t just keep charming me like this, you—”

“It’s a match made in heaven!” He laughed as he gently clasped my hand again. “Come, I’ll show you the best spot.”

Everything told me to stop, to turn around, to run home to my cozy little basement and call it a night. But my feet eagerly pattered across the ground with him. My hand weaved through his as he pulled me atop a steel platform, boosted me up a brick wall, crawled ahead through gaps and air ducts as he led us higher and higher up the tower.

“You good back there?” He called as we crept up some rickety scaffolding. “Legs not too tired, big guy?”

“I’m fine,” I laughed at his sly smile. “We’re up so high now!”

“Almost there,” he smiled back. We flung ourselves up and into an unfinished window, skipped over a short concrete ledge. “No fog all the way up here. No noise. I promise the stars are gonna look so gorgeous.”

“Oh yeah? How you so sure?”

“Look, if you don’t like the stars, I promise I’ll show you something else you might like instead.” He winked, coughed, brushed his messy black hair from his eyes.

Dust and dirt sullied our hands and our shirts. Streaks of paint and grease clung to our shoes and our knees. Sweat beaded down his slender neck, the taste of his strawberry flavored kiss still hanging from my breath as I—

“Hey, you good in there?” His voice cut into my thoughts. “Looks like you’re zonin’ out.”

“Oh! Ya, I’m good,” I clicked back into him and gazed up at the blank black sky. “No stars out there, though.”

“C’mon, just a little bit further.” He whisked me down an empty concrete hall, twisted us around a corner, bent and bounced up some loose stairs to the floor above, then held out his arms proudly at his secret stargazing spot.

“Did . . . did you bring this up here?” A tattered leather couch was pushed tight against some drywall. Spots and stains scattered across its old brown cushions and torn up armrests. Long steel beams jutted out into the warm night sky, pointing out at the distant lights of the city.

“Nope,” he grinned. “No idea how this got all the way up here. Told ya this was a strange place.” He flopped down on the tired couch and patted the rough leather next to him. “Come sit! Asking too many questions spoils all the mystery.”

My brain buzzed with danger again, but just beyond the steel beams peering off into the black horizon, I could see the full moon. I could see the tiny flecks of light. So many stars.

I shut my mouth and sat my ass down next to his.

“See?” He folded an arm around me. “Told ya we could see the stars from up here.”

The sky glittered and flickered and popped and burst with so many lights. It had been years–lifetimes since I had seen the stars.

“This is unreal!” I turned back to him. “How did you find this spot?”

He shrugged, tilted his head back out to the wall of stars. “Just stumbled upon it one night. It’s nice, isn’t it?”

“You stumbled upon it? Like you just bump into a construction site one night and decide to climb it?”

“Yeah. Pretty much.” He wrapped his arm tighter around me. “You like it here?”

“It’s nice,” I mumbled as the moon smiled and glowed down on his eyes. “It’s very nice. Do you think—”

His lips stopped my thoughts. His smooth hand was resting on my chin again. Moon and stars beamed down on our dirtied arms and sore feet. He pushed me deeper into the cracked leather, gently at first, sliding his hips over my leg as he pulled his kiss away.

“I like you,” he murmured. “You’re fun.” He gazed down into me, moonlight washing across his soft cheeks as he straddled me tight.

“You’re fun too,” I whispered back as he ran a hand up my thigh. “You a top? Bottom?”

His coat slid away from his shoulders. His sweet strawberry smell slid over my cheeks. “I can be whatever you need me to be,” he giggled.

His fingers rolled through my dusty hair, slipped up my waist, his lips nibbling all around my collar. His fingertips scanned all the valleys of my chest and my back as I shivered and moaned. My shirt slowly peeled away. Shoes bounced to the floor. Bare legs rubbed together, his clean shaven thighs locking into mine.

“This okay?” He tilted his head as he gently tugged at my briefs.

I nodded. I plunged my fingers further up his thigh, grabbed and grinded against him, feeling across his pulsing hips, my curious fingertips reading between his legs for any shafts or folds to stroke.

Nothing. Nothing but a blank slate of flesh.

“Oh no,” he whimpered. “I’m so, so sorry. I . . . I can’t control it sometimes.”

“You . . . can’t control it?” My nose froze against his. My hand hovered over his missing components. “What do you mean?”

“I’m so sorry.” He tried to push me back, but his strong arms deflated and dropped to his sides. His chest rounded and curved and swelled. “It’s not a big deal, I promise. I just—”

I jumped back in horror as his mouth melted and morphed, his hair oozing and growing and flowing out of his scalp, glistening bright in the full moon. His gentle fingers narrowed and quivered, trembled away from my chest, his lips plumping up, his eyes filling with tears.

“Are you okay?!” I gasped.

“I’m fine,” he cried. “I just really like you and sometimes I get too excited and I can’t control my body and I—”

She shrieked as her breasts loaded in. Her hips bulged out from her bones. Her black hair looped and twirled down her waist and her thighs. Her glossy flesh warped and her face glitched and her big round eyes filled with tears.

“Oh FUCK, you’re a Switch?!” I yelled, grasped at my shoes, throwing my pants back on, clawed my shirt off the fucked up couch. Looking back, I wish I could’ve held my shock in for the poor lady—maybe things would’ve ended differently for us.

“I’m sorry,” she pleaded.

“You’re switching!”

“I’m sorry!”

“You need to tell your partners that you’re a Switch, it’s so illegal for you to just change your–”

“I’m so sorry!” She shrieked again as a notice popped onto our eyes:

> SECURITY ALERT !
> ILLEGAL OBJECT DETECTED !
> DO NOT LEAVE THE AREA !
> SECURITY SWARM WILL ARRIVE IN:
> 00m 18s !

“Please help me,” she tugged at my collar. “Please just hold me until my nerves settle and then I can change back into–”

“Get away!” I pushed her off.

“FUCK YOU!” She shouted, pointing a sharp finger in my face. “A minute ago you were all fucking over me and now you won’t even hug me?!”

“I–”

“Piece of shit!” She hurried over to the gaping hole in the wall, paced right up to the ledge then stopped.

“I–I’m sorry,” I muttered. The shame started to load into my gut. Then it loaded into my brain.

She held her back to me for a moment. She sighed. She turned her head to pierce me with a bitter gaze. “I thought we had something,” her trembling voice bubbled up in my head.

She turned away from me again. She held in another wave of tears as we stared out at the stars together. Streaks of moonlight poured over her sad,

slumped shoulders and all the little dimples and pixels in her grainy skin. In the city far below, a hundred points of light joined together in a glowing neon cloud: a swarm of angry fireflies, scaling up the sides of our secret tower.

“I’m so sorry,” I spoke back into her. “This was the most fun I’ve had in years. Thank you for bringing me here.”

She peered out into the stars and over the ledge.

“I was having fun, too.”

With one quick jump off the ledge, she twisted and shifted and flashed, body parts loading in and out of reality as she sped toward the earth until all that was left of her was a brilliant, golden dragonfly, darting off into the night sky. Before I could blink an eye, a swarm of electric fireflies burst into the concrete hall, buzzing and flickering through the air all around me, hellbent on their target, dashing off into the starry night to hunt her down.

Never met a Switch until that night. Never got her name. Didn’t even ask about pronouns. I still feel ashamed about it to this day. I hope she’s doing okay? He’s doing okay? I hope they’re doing okay.

I went back to the spot where we almost fucked that night, but it was all different. Floors were all tiled, doors were locked. The couch was gone. The devs change the city so often that it’s hard to tell what’s real and what’s fake. But she felt real, even when he was switching into her.

Eventually, they finished building the tower. I daydream about buying a condo in it, but I’d never be able to make the down payment. Even basic income isn’t enough lately, so I’m stuck dreaming of that strange leather couch on my creaky little basement sofa for now.

Sometimes, my body feels more soft on the spots where she kissed me that night. Sometimes I look in the mirror and feel like those spots aren't quite real, but I don't know why. I think about her often, but I don't know why.

It's been so long since I've seen the stars.