

It was the week leading up to Agent's birthday, and Vanessa had meticulously, cautiously, and deliberately planned absolutely nothing for it. A "plan" was never in her cards; she much preferred to wing it. And she never did understand the concept of birthdays to begin with, considering her ageless nature. It merely confused her as to why Agent chose the same day every year to celebrate it.

Agent, this year, had planned ahead for Vanessa's lackadaisical perception of his special day and had elected to do something for himself for once. Gripping a small scrap of paper, he walked down the hall to the sitting room, where Vanessa was lounging across the couch. He gently held the scrap over her head, and she glanced up at it.

"What's this?" she asked, disinterested.

"A coupon," Agent explained, pointing to it. The handwriting was Vanessa's, definitely. "Good for one free request'."

Vanessa scoffed. "That was last year's present," she remarked. "And I didn't expect you to actually use it."

"There's no expiration date," Agent reminded Vanessa. "Thus I can use it today."

"You can't expect—"

"And further," Agent added. "There's no limitations to what I could get from you, no questions asked, no strings attached."

Vanessa sighed, rolling her eyes. "Alright, fine," she said, irritated about the whole mess. Doing another's will against her own was always frustrating. "What did you want?"

"I've held onto this coupon for a year to treat myself to something big," Agent explained. "And this year, I want to use the coupon to make myself cool."

Vanessa merely stared at her companion for several seconds, before she immediately, hysterically burst into laughter. Agent narrowed his eyes in an exhausted glance, as she continued to laugh and laugh.

Forty-five minutes later, she finally stopped laughing, calming herself. Then she looked to Agent, who had not changed his expression during the entire time. She paused briefly as she examined him.

"You're serious?" she asked, incredulously.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Agent asked. "I'm a perpetual doormat. It gets exhausting."

"Oh, darling," Vanessa sat up, gently stroking under his chin. "That's what makes you unique. Your kind-hearted nature and sincerity far outweigh your meek temperament."

Agent was caught off-guard. "That's...actually very nice of you," he said.

"Besides, some tasks are beyond even my limits."

"And there it is," Agent sighed at the backhanded statement. "Look, I just want you to try to make me on par with you, alright? Or at least close to it."

"You're asking for a miracle, but fine," Vanessa said as she sat up. She considered her options, as well as what she was working with. Agent had severe limitations, after all, so she had to work around them. "Just hold still."

Agent, excited despite himself, stood in place and waited for his gift. Vanessa stood six feet away from him, concentrating her energy into her hands, focusing. Then, she gave a singular jolt, zapping Agent with her might, the magic coursing through his body...

When Vanessa had finished, Agent stood in the same place. He opened his eyes, examining himself, and seeing...absolutely nothing new.

"What?" Agent asked, surprised. Even Vanessa blinked slightly. "You mean it didn't work?"

"We're talking about a major overhaul of your personality," Vanessa explained, although she too seemed unsure. "It might take a small while. Or..." She shrugged. "Maybe even I have my limits."

"Gee, thanks," Agent dryly commented. This earned a light ribbing from Vanessa.

"Oh, don't be like that, darling," she smirked. "You know I'm teasing. I'm sure my magic will give you a boost soon."

"I guess..." Agent said. He was still disappointed, however. "Maybe I'll just walk it off for now."

"You do that," Vanessa sighed. "Meanwhile, I suppose I can resume my research for myself—"

As Vanessa moved, she suddenly stumbled, barely catching herself on her own couch. Agent stepped forward to assist her up, but she waved him off, grumbling all the while.

"Tripping is beneath me..." she mused. "What did I even trip on, anyway? I levitate across these floors."

"Yeah, I never did see your feet," Agent nodded, the thought only just occurring to him. Vanessa merely stared in confusion.

"Haven't I disrobed for you before?" she asked, unsure. "I disrobed for a lot of people, but I can't keep track of these things."

Agent didn't have an answer to this one, in part due to his idle shock. "I...guess not," he said. "Anyway, like you said, you don't trip."

"Yeah," Vanessa nodded, confused. "How odd...But it's fine. I'll be in the library if you need me."

She wandered off, out of the room and down the hall. She was more troubled than she let on; tripping was something that just didn't happen for her. Did she...did she grow klutzy all of a sudden? She shook her head. No, that was far too out-there for her. She far too graceful, dignified and sexy to act like a klutz.

Perhaps a book would clear her mind from these negative thoughts?

She entered the library, examining her infinite bookshelves. Texts from all of space-time lined the shelves, in all languages, even in the language of the Old Ones themselves. Rather dull reading material, though; even the Old Ones weren't above making trashy dollar-store love novels and self-pleasuring memoirs.

Vanessa mused, trying to find a specific book in mind for her mood. Having an infinite library meant infinite choices, and far too little time to enjoy herself. Then she reached forward, allowing her willpower to decide for her.

She pulled out a strange text, with the cover on the back and the words reading from right to left. Akin to a comic book, the kind that Agent reads, but with a Japanese flair. She smiled, amused, as she levitated a chair towards her. A comfortable reading position.

She scarcely noticed the time passing as she was engrossed in her manga volume. When she finished with that one, she hurriedly grabbed the next. And the next. She made it through eighty-six volumes before Agent peeked his head inside, still none the worse for the wear.

"Hey, I haven't noticed any changes yet," Agent said. He took notice of the pile of manga volumes resting next to the excited witch, and he smiled. "Ah, finally got into that series, eh?"

"Hmm?" Vanessa was briefly jolted from her reading at Agent's words. She was more significantly jolted when she looked down at what she was reading. "GAH!" she shouted, tossing the light novel to the side. "What have I been doing?"

"You've apparently been reading the entire collected volumes of *Magical Star-Sign Dinosaur Kiwami*," Agent noted. He was surprised as Vanessa suddenly scrambled across the floor to inspect the volume she tossed.

"I didn't crease it, did I?" she asked. "Ah, I'm feeling just like Saekimo when she found out Hiroshi was her senpai in high school..."

Agent quickly clasped his hands over his ears. "Ugh, spoilers," he groaned.

Vanessa blinked. "What the hell did I just say?" she asked, uncertain. "And why am I reading and speaking like a nerd?"

Agent gave a bemused look, but nevertheless watched as Vanessa, panicked, inspected the manga, then carefully put it back onto her shelves in numerical order.

"This isn't right..." the witch muttered. "What's happening to me?"

Another blink, as Vanessa started touching her mouth. A lisp? Unheard of. But as she allowed her tongue to slip across her teeth, she was horrified by what she found. Metal prongs, adorning each individual tooth, connected by wires. Metal she couldn't eat with, and metal she couldn't eat period. She showed Agent what she had found.

Now even Agent was concerned. "So, uh..." he said. "I think I know what happened. You know that spell you cast? How it was supposed to make me as cool as you?"

"Of course," Vanessa said. Her eyes widened in realization. "Oh...Oh no. Don't tell me it made ME dorky instead because that was eathier?"

"Ignoring the implications of that," Agent sighed. "Look, is there some sort of counter-spell to fix this at all?"

"Um, well, uh..." Vanessa was getting flustered now, uncharacteristically so. She struggled to cast a spell, hand pointed outward. All that fired out were a pair of multi-sided dice that rattled against the floor. The clattered for a moment, then laid still. Vanessa inspected the roll.

"Critical failure," she lamented. "It'th no good, Agent. My magic'th locked out like thith."

"That...could pose a problem," Agent noted. The manor was held together primarily by her own magic. If Vanessa's mind-state and capacity for magic was altered, the manor would change as well, plus any inhabitants within. Except maybe Agent himself, as the spell was designed specifically with him in mind, but as the constant instead of the variable. He needed outside help, and fast—but carefully.

"Okay, I'll go find someone who can help," Agent offered to the afraid Vanessa. "You...stay here and read a bit more."

"Hurry," Vanessa encouraged. "Becauthe I feel like painting tabletop figurineth. And I have no idea what thothe are."

...

It took some coercion and promises to "perform unpaid maid labor for two weeks", but Agent successfully managed to convince the coolest mind he knew to assist. Alice was not magically-inclined, but she knew how to dodge Vanessa's magical residue well enough to repair and/or manipulate the spells into her own favor.

"This isn't exactly my specialty," Alice remarked, dryly. They were walking back to the manor from the outer portals; best not to teleport inside the manor, for fear of backfiring. "Fixing Vanessa's problems, I mean. This seems like such a wasted opportunity to me."

"I know, I know," Agent said, shaking his head. "But you know Vanessa. If we don't fix it now, it'll get worse."

Agent approached the front door, gently rapping his knuckles against the surface. Alice rolled her eyes; Agent practically lived here, so why bother knocking? She certainly wouldn't have.

When the door opened, they were both shocked by what they saw. It was still Vanessa, yes, but she had undergone additional metamorphosis while they were out. She had gained a bit extra weight, for example, evenly placed around her body. Her gothic dress had been replaced with a slightly more conservative wear, including a shirt with a pocket protector. Her glasses looked taped together haphazardly, and she had a highly awkward gait about her.

It was like a whole other person.

"Oh goth, hi, friendth!" she cheerfully greeted. "You're jutht in time to watch the Thpathe Voyagerth marathon!"

Alice was about to wordlessly turn around and leave before Agent gripped her collar.

"That sounds fun," he said, gesturing to the mouse aristocrat. He whispered to her. "Just play along."

"Oh joy," Alice said, barely able to bring herself to even pretend to half-ass her acting. "Space Voyagers, my favorite."

Vanessa giggled, ending in a snort. She stepped to the side to allow the duo inside. “You’ll totally FREAK when you thee Epithode Twenty-Eight-Dath-Nine. But no thpoilerth!”

The manor had, as predicted, reconstructed itself to befit Vanessa’s nerdy form. Rather than a darkened hall, they were met with a casual apartment, some clutter around, a leftover pizza box or two. There were bookshelves, some containing manga volumes, some containing packaged figurines designed to never be removed from their boxes under penalty of internet shaming. Posters of anime girl teams were on the walls, and Vanessa had plucked a half-finished box of Pocky to nibble on before she took a breath from her inhaler. An inhaler she did not have before, let alone knew how to operate.

“Thorry for the meth, by the way,” she said, apologetic. “I don’t get many vithitorth.”

“That’s fine,” Agent said, despite knowing Vanessa was gone for, quite literally, only five minutes. He was far too transfixed by the room itself, a nerd paradise. These were first-editions on the shelves, he noted. And on her desk...

“Is that the latest model of GamerRun?” he asked in utter shock. Yes, it was indeed a special computer designed for more computing for video games, more than even NASA could calculate. Yet here it was, on her table like it was nothing.

“Ohh yeah,” Vanessa said, giving a snort. “Gotta play thothe gameth in my infinity-p retholution.”

“Unreal...” Agent admired the rig for several seconds, until Alice gave him a firm nudge with her elbow.

“Focus,” she said. “You dragged me here for this.”

“R-right, sorry,” Agent said. “Vanessa, I think we should probably—*Is that a copy of Miraculous Comics Number One?*”

He immediately gravitated to a display case; indeed, a copy of the very first Miraculous Comics issue was kept under close guard, pristine and free of moisture problems. Not that it stopped Agent from practically salivating while in close proximity.

“Thpared no expenthe on thith,” Vanessa smiled. “Comic hithtory right here.”

Alice had to physically pry Agent away from the collectables, placing him nearer Vanessa’s desk. “Stay,” she instructed. “Now then, Vanessa. What do you say we put aside the stereotypical nerdiness and go back to your gothic witch self--”

“Poetry?”

Alice audibly groaned, and Vanessa gave a small “eep!” noise. She darted to Agent, who was inspecting notebooks that contained her handwriting.

“O-oh, thothe are jutht, you know...Thmall writingth,” Vanessa explained nervously. “Nothing thpecial.”

“Such flow and tempo...” Agent admired. “And your use of metaphors is truly akin to art.”

“I-it’s really nothing...” Vanessa was especially bashful, as she gently took the notebook from his hands. “I jutht like writing about thingth I wanna do, like, um...” She practically whispered the next words.

“...Make out.” Then she squealed lightly, embarrassed yet further. “Eee I actually thaid it!”

Agent was left a stammering mess, barely able to form a coherent sentence by now. Vanessa was briefly confused, giving her hand a wave across his face.

"Hello?" she asked, uncertain. She could see a clock behind him, and it was approaching the top of the hour. Her eyes widened. "Oh! The marathon ith thtarting thoon! I need to make the popcorn!"

She dashed out of the room, leaving a star-struck Agent and a disinterested Alice in her wake. The mouse sighed, approaching Agent once more.

"Finally, a break," she remarked. "I think I can feel my forehead growing larger by the second. Let's just cure her and be done with it."

Agent did not respond, still lost in his thoughts. Alice poked him firmly once more.

"Agent," she said, irritated. "Let's go already. I am not lowering my status for anything."

"Alice, listen to me," Agent said, in a tone of voice she hadn't heard from him before. "I have never been more serious in my life. I would like to have some time with this version of Vanessa."

Alice balked. "You specifically sought me out to get rid of this!" she said. "I'm not going to--"

"Just let me have this," Agent said, firmly.

For some reason, despite their differences in temperament and Alice's own dominant nature, she found herself backing down. Maybe it was fear, though that was doubtful. Perhaps some of it was...pity? Sympathy? It wasn't often Agent got to enjoy himself without being tormented, she supposed. Plus, this meant Vanessa wasn't irritating her with her pranks. She sighed, pinching her nose.

"We're doubling the length of time you're working for me," she said. "But fine."

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It didn't take long for Alice to equally degrade into a fellow nerd due to close proximity to the manor, although it meant she was back into a maid persona, reminiscent of where she started from in the first place. She insisted on calling it "cosplay", however.

Vanessa seemed all too eager to enjoy the viewing of her marathon with her friends, and Agent was pleased to go five minutes without being turned into something or belittled for his hobbies. It was nice to share interests with people again, he felt. Reassuring.

Eventually Vanessa grew bored of the show, as did the others. She then suggested a role-playing game of Monsters and Mazes, which excited the maid and original nerd. But they needed more friends to make a real event of it...Fortunately, Vanessa knew who to invite.

Despite the grumbling and disinterest, she somehow convinced Chess and Blaire to come visit the manor to attend the game. The manor's warped magic, coupled with the inclusion of a second nerdy girl, wound up exponentially powering the curse, and before they knew it, Chess and Blaire had regressed to far dorkier versions of themselves. They scarcely noticed the changes.

The end result was a table filled with four geek girls and one geek guy of varying levels of nerdy niches. Even Agent couldn't help but feel the magic welling up in front of him, his skin tingling. Had the spell

explicitly used him as a baseline, he might have been using an inhaler and gossiping about his husbando pick from the latest episode of a recent anime. Never mind that he already did the latter one with some of his friends; it'd be the first time he'd do so with boobs. But he shook his head to concentrate; Vanessa was speaking.

"You find yourthelveth in a foretht clearing," she said, setting the mood as the dungeon master. "Your party inthpecth the thurroundingth carefully, but there ith no clear path to civilization. But wait! A portion of woodth hath an opening between the treeth you can explore. What do you do?"

"Oh, um..." Blaire raised a nervous hand; she had taken on a more "keet" appearance. "I, um...cast for a perception check?"

Vanessa made a light gesture. "Roll for it."

Blaire did so, the clattering of dice audible on the table. She inspected her roll, then smiled gently. "Um, a seventeen," she said.

"You thee the path is narrow, but there ith no thign of enemieth," Vanessa explained. "However, you do notice a pitfall ahead. Good thing you could perceive it."

Agent tuned out briefly, thoughts wandering. He was happy, yes. Surrounded by friends sharing a similar enjoyment for his interests, and not bullying him for once. And Vanessa and the group seemed happy as well.

But they weren't themselves.

That was what was bothering Agent. The girls weren't themselves, but were instead under the influence of the curse. Dragging them down into a mindset they weren't usually comfortable being within, against their will. Granted, Agent typically saw his OWN mindset get dragged down by every one of the girls present at the table, but that was no excuse.

Still, it was nice to have at least a small bit of time with what could have been.

"Would you girls excuse me for a moment?" Agent asked, to the nods of everyone. He stood up, heading off to the bathroom to work in privacy.

That wish coupon...He pulled out the paper, inspecting it carefully. Maybe runes or a counter-spell may work, but...

"Oh, it can't be this easy..." he remarked. Nevertheless, he started to tug at the sides. The paper began to give, and the more he pulled, the more it tore. Within seconds, it was ripped clean in half. Then he did it again, turning it into fourths. Then eighths.

There was a ripple effect around Agent as he felt magic recede from all around him. Seconds later, there was the clattering of a table from outside the bathroom, with some muffled outrage. He nodded, disappointed yet satisfied. Things had surely gone back to normal.

When he stepped outside, he saw Alice, Blaire and Chess all glaring at an equally irritated Vanessa. All the girls were back to their more confident selves. The guests were mad at Vanessa. Vanessa was mad at Agent. And Agent was mad at himself.

"Okay, before we start hurting anyone, I take responsibility for this," Agent quickly said. Vanessa reacted with surprise, and the others turned their heads in shock. Alice less so than the others, as she was in the loop.

"Wait, you did this?" Chess asked, amazed. "How did you pull this off?"

"A wish coupon," Agent explained. Chess merely sighed.

"Those again?" she asked. "Figures. Well, whatever. We're back now."

"Never do this again, Agent," Blaire demanded. "This seriously cut into my business time."

"Sorry about all this, girls," Vanessa said, apologetic. "Hey, I'll see you on Saturday for cards, alright? Strip poker?"

"Sure, whatever," Blaire shrugged. "At least that's something I like."

Alice, Chess and Blaire all walked out the door with Vanessa waving them off. When she closed the door again, she turned her gaze towards Agent, like a parent about to scold her child when visitors had left. All Agent could do is wheel his feet around awkwardly and apologetically.

Then Vanessa sighed, exhausted. "Well, you DID turn me into a braces-wearing geek," she said. "But you also kept me from being turned into paste on Blaire's shelf, a maid for Alice, and/or unbirthed for Chess. So I suppose I should thank you."

"I guess I shouldn't have made that wish in the first place," Agent said, nodding. "It was my fault."

"Well, we all have our insecurities..." Vanessa gently ruffled Agent's hair. "Just be yourself. And let others be themselves. And if they wanna improve or change themselves, or you change yourself, the only one who can make that decision is the person changing." Then Vanessa paused. "Or me, darling. But that's just business."

"For what it's worth, it was fun," Agent smiled a bit, appreciative of the kind words. "It was nice to have friends with the same interests for once. For you to participate too."

"Well..." Vanessa stooped down to pick up a small die-cast figurine, discarded after the girls regained their senses of self. "I guess I can try to meet you halfway here. No promises, though."

"Just you trying is enough," Agent said. He approached and gave Vanessa a hug. The witch was surprised, but nevertheless reached around to give Agent a hug back, plus a face full of her boobs.

"Alright, alright, this doesn't leave the manor, I have a reputation to keep," Vanessa laughed, before letting go. "Now go have fun."

"Alright," Agent nodded. "Thank you."

He walked off to keep himself busy once more. Vanessa stood around a moment longer, inspecting the figurine idly. She, too, began to nod.

"You know," she said to herself. "I can sort of see the appeal."

Then she pocketed the figurine and walked to the library once more. Those manga volumes wouldn't finish themselves.