

Fall and rise

Some people are born lucky, and others are lucky to be born. Or so went the saying. Emilia Rorsch easily qualified among those in the first group. She had been blessed with beauty and elegance, as well as a natural talent in acting and, to top it off, the brains to make it work. Her career in the competitive world of acting stood as proof of that, having achieved quite the fame and fortune in her artistic endeavours. However, this was not as smooth sailing as plenty of people came to imagine and fantasize, as she had to keep a strict check on pretty much everything. From her eating habits to her sleep hours, ranging from regular exercise and legal business. Sure, she could easily have someone handle such hassle and troubling side of fame, but she had long decided she did not want to do so. She would take care of it personally, grasping the crazy maze that contracts and agreements could become in their wording, but she would not let everything she had achieved vanish before her and slip through her fingers due to sloth and relegating duties on someone else.

She sighed loudly, locking the fingers on her hands above her head as she stretched her torso and arms. She was sitting on her desk, wading through the seemingly never-ending mountain of fan e-mails, memorandums and offers. She did it herself, as diligently as ever, but boy could it get tiring and, above all, boring.

“No lazing around girl.”

It wasn't necessary, but she did remind herself to keep going, out of habit and to make sure things didn't pile up into an unsurmountable mountain of “to-do” list. And she was close to finishing with it. With renewed efforts, now that the end was in sight, she had a new go at it. The offers to take part in advertisements were as monotonous as they could be, the emails being pretty much clones of each other, sometimes with laughingly similar texts. She pitied the poor souls whose job was to send these, a crappy job, but someone had to do it. The memorandums were... well, they were pretty self-explanatory. Dates, hours and places she would have to be in the near future, with enough of them that it was tiresome to keep track of them all, but she managed. The fan mail was her favourite part to go through. There wasn't much of it usually, people preferring social media, but when she received some it was usually light hearted and entertaining to read. Texts about how she had inspired some new talents to try their hand and their luck in this line of work. She

felt somewhat guilty, as she knew how cruel and merciless it could get, but she wished them the best of luck.

- Ugh, finally!

Satisfied as the work load was finished, she turned off the computer and she stood up, stretching the whole of her body this time. The light popping and cracking noises gave away that she had been a while sitting and looking at the computer screen, but that was that. It was a beautiful afternoon outside, and she could really go for a walk around, to vent off and stretch her body some more. Wandering through her house, she made her way to her room, towards her wardrobe more exactly. She wasn't going to dress formally, but that didn't excuse a poor appearance. Opening the wardrobe, she was greeted by quite the collection of clothing. Dresses, gowns and other formal and beautiful pieces of clothing hung inside, while the more informal clothing was stored in selves under them. The door of the wardrobe had a full body mirror, one where she liked to admire herself.

"A girl can enjoy herself... this good look isn't exactly easy to keep..."

And, in her mind, she was right. She devoted to a flawless physical appearance, and so far, it had paid off. She was a gorgeous woman, with a lean body that had pronounced curves. Slender legs that gave way to sensual hips and rear, an hourglass torso crowned by a generous bust; lean arms that ended in delicate hands, and a pretty face that had a long and flowing dark mane behind it. Her dark eyes ran over her figure, currently dressed in a simple shirt that was starting to get old and a short skirt she used at home. But her pupils stopped for a moment as she saw a single white hair. She took the strand of hair in her hands, feeling the smooth delicacy of it as she tried to get a better look at the white hair. However, she let out a sigh of relief when the anomaly vanished, having been a mere trick of the light coming from outside. She changed herself, putting a dark blouse on her and some trousers that would not work with the warmth outside to have her sweating in no time. She tied her long hair in a ponytail, took her sunglasses and off she went.

She would walk in the area, not straying too far from home nor the nearby houses, just in case some overly enthusiastic fan decided to pull a spontaneous visit on her. It wasn't common, but it wasn't unheard of either, as the houses around belonged to different

famous personalities of different industries. Actors, musicians, artists, writers... some of them were quirky, interesting and genuinely nice people, and the rest of them were, in her eyes, a bunch of stuck-up pricks that had let fame get way over their heads. But still, she preferred to tread familiar ground, and the afternoon certainly helped lighten her mood. The sun and the light gave away that the afternoon was letting the evening take over, but the warmth, the breeze and the beautiful colours of the sunset made for fantastic vistas to take in. The exercise had been wonderful, allowing her to clear her head and relieve stress. But in the back of her mind the white hair still persisted. It had been nothing but a trick of the light, but so much effort had gone into her lifestyle and appearance that the thought of all eventually going away terrified her. Sure, she would eventually grow old, as everyone else did, and she still had plenty of time ahead of her to even begin to worry, but she would be lying to herself if she didn't admit that these thoughts worried her.

As she approached back home, near the main entrance, she spotted a parked car and a man that was seemingly looking around the place. A fan? Or some offer that wanted to be presented in the flesh? Or maybe someone that was genuinely lost and looking for directions? This last one was unlikely to say the least, considering the area had few roads and all merged into one, but it was a possibility.

- Excuse me, can I help you?

Reacting to her voice, the man turned to face her. The general impression was that of an average joe, fair skin, brown hair, not too tall and in business suit; but upon closer inspection as she approached him, he looked different. His hazel eyes looked around with surprising precision and confidence, his hair was perfectly combed and his suit looked expensive. Perhaps he wasn't a grunt on the job with fancy clothing after all.

- Oh, definitely, thanks for asking. -Said the man. – I'm looking for Emilia Rorsch, but I don't know if I'm on the right place.

- Oh, you are. In fact, you're looking at her. -She took off the sunglasses and let her hair free. – Not in the most formal attire for business though...

- Oh. Oh! Don't worry Miss Rorsch. – Said the man, realization dawning on him. – Could you spare a moment please?

- Sure. What can I help you with?

- The name's Ethan Cross, I work for a small company that specializes on beauty products and I would like...

- Look, if you have an offer send it via email. -She said, with some regret of allowing herself to be ambushed at her home.

- Wait! I would like for you to test a product that will keep your beauty for much, much longer.

That definitely caught her attention. She didn't need it, as she already took care of herself, and the "representative of a small company" was looking more like a scam artist by the moment, but there was something in the back of her mind that compelled her to listen. She could always have it go through the filter of the mail, if it was a legitimate offer, then there would be no problem.

- Well, then send the offer via email and I'll look into it.

- Allow me to insist on coming with me to try it. We... we are still lacking prestige and acknowledgement and for not so well-known companies it is somewhat of a hassle. -He admitted. – Truth is, we just want you to try and, speak about the results. Minimal paperwork. Just a signature and try it in situ. Should you find the results to your liking, simply spread the word.

- And if I do not like the result or there are unforeseen consequences?

- Then I will take care of things myself -said the man- along with receiving a generous monetary compensation, one that would be enough to cover for the expenses anything that would be needed.

That was a red flag if there was one. A potentially risky offer and with minimal paperwork involved? Monetary compensation, and a considerable one by sound of it, from a “small” company? That was enough to shut it down in place, regardless of what wonder product the man offered. But the thoughts at the back of her mind had gained strength and resolve, as the deal was, at the same time, strangely alluring. A beauty product that would help her keep her beauty for longer? Why not go ahead and have some time on her side before seriously looking into the problem, some years down the line? And the tone of the man had changed completely, going from the insecure to the convincing and confident in a moment. He could have made his place in the acting world if his skills were that good.

- Fine.

- Fantastic! Then I'll come to pick you up tomorrow morning. Deal?

- Deal, but I'll drive my own car. -She interjected. – Lead the way and I'll follow.

- Yes, of course.

- By the way, how's the company called?

- Oh? Oh, yeah. Sloppy introduction. -Said the man as he put the façade up again and searched for something in the pockets. – Here.

He handed her a small business card. A simple white card, with a direction on the back and the name on the front in a fancy and elaborate logo that was clear and easy to read.

- “Eternity” ... Can't say I have heard of it before.

-As said, small business looking for a slice of the pie. -Said the man as he approached the parked car. – I will come by tomorrow morning then, around 9.

Emilia nodded and watched as the man entered the car, started the engine and drove away, then entering her home to finish her day. The conversation and the following agreement had left her conflicted, but she would humour the man with this offer. If things went

south... well, she could push her weight around, although she disliked abusing her influence and fame.

She entered her home, disrobing and stepping into the shower. The feeling of the water running down her body was something she had always liked, as the water hugged her form and, in her eyes, accentuated her beautiful form. The shower also helped her relax, being something she actively sought when being under stress or overwork. Drying herself and using the hairdryer also contributed to this, giving her a chance to caress her terse and smooth skin as well as dry and comb her long dark mane into a smooth cascade of dark hair that flowed around her. And sometimes when she was alone, she liked to drop to towel or the bath robe and admire herself in the mirror, congratulating herself for her gorgeous beauty.

Dressing up in some comfortable clothes, she put her dinner together and ate while reading the news on a tablet she kept nearby. Politics, economics, sports... but one of the news caught her eye. The police had dropped the search for a missing woman, after months of searching, to come back empty handed. She shuddered to think what could have happened and headed off to bed.

“What a lovely note to end the day on...”

She shook these thoughts full of sarcasm out of her head, drifting off to sleep soon after. It seemed that the exercise and the work had tired her more than what she gave away at first glance, and she wanted to have plenty of time to prepare tomorrow morning for this beauty product that would help her.

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As agreed, they had met at 9 a.m. On that exact time, the same car stopped before her door, Emilia meeting Ethan and telling him to wait for her to bring out her own car. She drove out in her vehicle, an elegant black car that reflected the light of the rising sun on its forms, making it look even more graceful and stylized. A stark contrast to the vehicle the man drove, which seemed almost comically clunky when standing next to her own. She stopped next to the car and lowered her windows.

- Ready when you are.

- Let's get going then.

- Lead the way.

Nodding in agreement, the man drove away with Emilia in tow, the woman following close by. There was not much traffic, but better not risk separating or losing track of each other and waste time finding their way back. Now that she thought of it, she had not given her phone number away, and she hadn't taken note of the company's number, leaving the card back home.

"Better be safe..."

With these thoughts she kept close to the other car, as they made their way down different roads. They went through the city the skyscrapers and the avenues filled to the brim with advertisements and signals, while people kept going on with their days and lives. The luxurious hotels and expensive shops gave way to the not-so-accommodated residence of the middle class, skyscrapers and luxury being replaced by a sprawling jungle of apartment buildings, shopping malls and not-so-visually-engaging streets. And yet, she sometimes envied the lives of these people. They didn't live in luxury like her or her usual surroundings, but there was something alluring in those simpler lives, far from the hustle of the cameras and the gossiping. Finally, the suburbs came into sight, both cars driving by as they left them behind, the most downtrodden areas of the city and the ones that were further from the shining centre.

They were going surprisingly far, or at least further than she had expected at first, but the drive came to an end shortly after, as the car she followed left the road and entered a small industrial park that consisted of several warehouses, although most of them seemed empty. The car she followed stopped in a small parking before one of them, as she mimicked the action by parking the car nearby. As she got out and locked the car behind her, Ethan was already waiting for her. As she nodded at him, he walked off with the woman behind him, both of them entering the building. The inside was surprisingly tidy and clean, while a secretary worked behind a desk. The woman was a walking stereotype of her profession: tight white shirt, hair tied in an orderly bun with not one out of place, dark skirt and leggings with two black and shiny low high-heels; and the moment she saw

them she brought out a paper with something on it. Following the man, she approached the desk, the secretary carrying on with her duties as if they weren't there at all.

- Here we are. -Said the man. – Now, before we proceed, one signature on the paper. Would you kindly...

Emilia skimmed through the short text. It was an exact repetition of what she had been told yesterday, word by word. Taking the pen she was handed, she signed the form of agreement, the black ink handwriting blending almost perfectly with the form. However, Emilia winced in pain for a moment, as she looked at the small cut on the tip of one of her fingers. She had unwillingly poked a little too hard, a small dot of blood overlapping the ink that dotted the wound.

- Oh, do you need help with that? -Asked the man.

- Not at all. It's nothing. -Answered the woman as she brought a handkerchief from her purse to clean the small wound.

- Alright then, right this way.

The man started walking again with the brunette in tow. They left the entrance and the secretary behind, walking down hallways and rooms while Emilia put the handkerchief back in the purse. She hated cuts of her fingers, since even the smallest ones could let out enough blood to make it seem someone had lost a hand. Juggling with keys, phone, car keys and a pair of items more, she finally put everything in place, returning her attention to her surroundings, which had most certainly changed. How had she been so unaware of her surroundings? And when exactly had it changed so much? It felt like they were on another entirely different place. At some moment they had left the clean and orderly façade to enter a much more practical area, if the containers that were around were anything to go by. She did not recognize any of her surrounding, not the containers filled to the brim with chemical products nor the machines that hummed in a low tone, the only sound besides of the footsteps.

- How much longer Mr Cross?

- Worry not, we are here.

The man stopped next to a small drawer, which he opened and started searching for something inside. The woman looked around again. The place seemed creepy and sinister, similar to something that would be part of the props for a set in filming, but the place was very much real, and the moment to get out of the place could not come soon enough. And they were very much alone, not having seen or come across another soul ever since the entrance.

- Bingo! Now let's see...

Reacting to the sound of the voice, Emilia turned around to face him, but her actions grinded to an abrupt halt when she felt something puncture her shoulder. The man was holding a syringe firmly in his hand, and Emilia could only watch in horror, shock and disbelief how the silvery liquid was introduced in her body. It was only when every single drop was inside her that she seemed to regain control, tumbling backwards briefly before the strength of her legs failed her and sent her tumbling to the ground. Suddenly, defenceless and vulnerable, Emilia tried to get up, but her body wouldn't obey her command, only being able to look at the man that stood before her with all the hate and disdain she could muster, even if it was just to mask the terror that ran rampant through her mind.

- You... son of a... - She couldn't finish the sentence as she started coughing violently. – What did you do?!

- Exactly what I said. – Said the man in a cold tone.

Emilia's coughing worsened, as it became more and more violent and intense, the woman covering her mouth with an arm. It wasn't enough however, as she froze when she saw small droplets of blood fall to the ground, blood that was quickly taking a visibly abnormal blackish hue that soon enough turned into the black colour proper.

- Oh, dear. It seems you were just another failure... -Said the man in a tone that mixed cold indifference and cruel joke. – However, your assistance is much appreciated Miss Rorsch.

The man took a couple of steps back, the woman taking her hand off her mouth to try and insult him, to tell him she was going to ruin his life and raze it to the ground until there was nothing but ashes left. She wanted to shout the obscenest profanities she knew or she could put together on the spot, she wanted to do so many things to tear the façade of the man, and yet she did nothing. She could only stare in silent shock at her hand, as it changed before her very eyes. From the spot she had the tiny wound the change was sweeping through her at a terrifyingly swift pace, turning from a fair skin to a shiny black ink colour. The woman screamed in terror as her body lost form and consistency, her hand melting before her eyes as the change spread through her. She tried to stop it, or she would have liked to try to do so, but she could only stare and shriek in terror as her very self became undone without her being able to interfere. As the change swept through her bust, it spread into the other arm and down to her torso and legs, all of her taking the inky black sheen as her form lost definition and the woman melted into a puddle of black ink. Her eyes, fully black by now, let out inky tears as she tried to assimilate her condition, her screams dissolving into gargling sounds as her head, the last of her, was claimed and dissolved.

- Gather her belongings and take care of the car. It looks like she had quite the unfortunate accident.

The last she could make out was the voice of the man speaking to someone else, as after that her world became a black void.

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She didn't know how much time had passed. She didn't know where she was. What she knew was what she could do. The void started stirring and morphing, as she felt her body somehow come back. Maybe it was the intended result, maybe it was a side effect and an unforeseen consequence. Or maybe it was her will and her anger literally rising up and pushing her to keep moving forward. Regardless, for the first time in god-knew-how-

long, she breathed, then proceeding to cough as she came back to life. The room was dark and, more importantly, it was completely empty. Whether this was a testament of how long she had been out or the capacities of her aggressor she couldn't tell, but the dark night certainly didn't help with its minimal light. With laborious and jerky movements, she got back on her feet realizing that she was very much buck naked as she covered her intimate areas with her arms. The movements were jerky, and trying to cover her body didn't help her mobility. Besides, her body felt much too weird, her skin feeling slimy and her mouth having a sensation that mixed bizarre with uncomfortable. She needed to know exactly what they had done to her; she needed a mirror to look into. This proved to be much more difficult than first anticipated, as the place had been picked clean. She stopped looking for a mirror and started looking for anything that could serve as one, a reflective surface, a shard of crystal, a puddle of water; anything would do. However, her search came to an end when she spotted what seemed to be an old service room, probably part of the original warehouse and ignored by those that had come after. The door opened without any resistance or difficulty, allowing her to get in. The room even had a small lamp in along a rusty mirror, long forgotten by someone and most likely replaced. The moment she turned the dim light of the lamp on, reality hit her like a freight train.

She didn't want to believe it, but she knew well who the reflection that looked back at her was. Looking back was a woman that resembled Emilia Rorsch. Tall, lean and attractive. Well-endowed with sensual curves, an hourglass figure and plentiful breasts; and sporting a long and wavy black mane that seemed to flow around her. The main difference was that this woman had the shiny black inky sheen all over her. Inky eyes that shared colour with the rest of her body gazed back at her, adorned by a darker shade that mimicked eyeliner while glossy dark lips trembled at the sight. Her brunette mane had been replaced by what could only be described as a puddle of liquid ink, one that swirled and flowed behind and around her. Had the situation been any different, she could have found this reflection interesting, captivating or even alluring, but currently she could only look in disbelief and terror.

- Freak.

A single word coming from her mouth, with her voice. One that made the reflection's lips move in perfect synchronization, burning down any possible doubts or made up lies. That

was her, and she could not have her old life back. Anger and rage took over, as she recalled the lies and, most importantly, the last words of the man. The tone used angered her even more.

- Failure? -She giggled- I'll give you **failure**!

She punched the mirror with all of her strength, shattering it in plenty of shards and pieces, unable to look at herself again. Not that it was needed, as she was far more interested in her arm. Her fist had grown in size as well as forming a coat of armour of sorts around it. However, the moment she stopped wishing to smash the mirror and her anger subsided, her fist went back to normal, having suffered no damage at all and looking as delicate as ever and as monstrous as recently.

Her giggling became louder and changed tone, become a maniacal and unhinged laughter that echoed through the empty and abandoned warehouse with an eerie and menacing ring to it. Emilia Rorsch was gone for good, having been devoured by both greed and a cold void of ink, and here she was now, ready to carry the torch. Torch she would use to set things ablaze. Giggling and laughing, she wandered the warehouse, not caring about her nudity or modesty anymore, eventually making her way out and stepping into the empty and cold night.

- Oh, darling dear... -she cooed to no one and to one person exactly, wherever he was. - It might have worked so much better than any of us ever dreamed possible. You have indeed given me youth and beauty, and so much more... You might have just given yourself an eternity of torment... and I can't wait to see you burn.

The woman wandered off into the night, blending with the shadows and the dim light. She would hunt him to the end of the earth and the limits of the deepest circles of hell if she had to, but she would have her revenge. Emilia Rorsch was no more, and she would gladly avenge her. But before that, she needed a place to stay, she needed a place to practise and experiment and, first and foremost, she needed a new name. It came to her in a burst of creativity, but she was liking it more by the second. Where Emilia Rorsch had fallen, Rorschette had risen, and she had her goal clear.