

High rise brawl

Lumina city could be called plenty of things, both flattering and not as much. Cosmopolite, bustling, prosperous, crowded, huge, unorthodox.... During the day it was a sprawling monster of a city that threatened to swallow everything and everyone in and around it. A collection of titans of concrete, steel and crystal that rose skywards, but the designs were surprisingly lean and elegant, having a certain clean look that also held within a hub of science and research.

However, when the sun set and the night took over, the whole place became a glowing show of lights. Coming from a thousand different places, from neon lights to lamps within houses and buildings, all the way through street lamps, car lights and the reflection of all in the fountains and ponds that dotted some of the districts of the city. It was a gleaming parade of light and colour, it's beauty able to mesmerize anyone, while at the same time it was able to blot out the stars in the sky and drown the city in light.

And it was chaotic too, very much so and quite often. From mere rush hour traffic jams to other far less conventional scenarios and situations that could range across all of the imaginable spectrum. And a hulking monstrosity rampaging through part of it was rather fitting of the latter.

“Liv, watch it!”

Olivia did not manage to get out of the way in time as a massive fist caused her to crash next to the display window of a store, the alarms inside blaring as they turned on and joined the concert of sounds that part of the city currently suffered through. The purple woman immediately tried to stand up, but failed, being visibly disorientated, making her a perfect target for the beast.

The thing was massive, snarling as it charged again against its target, ready to deliver a much powerful blow. The ground shook as it rushed forward towards the stumbling

woman, only for it to fall to the side as a shot impacted on the side of its head, making it roar and snarl.

“Keep it pinned Claire!”

“Affirmative.”

Olivia’s world was a blurry mess, barely making the forms of her arms holding her up against the concrete as she tried to stand. Luckily, two arms picked her up, having her lean against a voluptuous chest as she was carried to a safe distance. And even though her sight only registered what felt like mirages and hallucinations, her brain started putting information together.

The one carrying her, the flashes of green and the pounding sound of shots against a target, the snarling and roaring. All of it came and went, her ears ringing as she was set down and taken by another pair of arms.

“Keep her safe until we deal with this!”

“Will do.” Answered a masculine voice. “And you lot better watch out for yourselves.”

Her sight was still blurred, but she could tell that she was given to someone else. The arms were different, stocky and firm, not as lean as Alyssa’s and definitely not as graceful, as she was made to sit down a bit harshly in the backseat of a car. The door was closed, the sounds from the outside reaching her muffled and distant, but reaching her nonetheless.

Claire continued focusing her barrage on the monster, which she had on the defensive. The beast snarled and roared, but it kept its head protected by the massive arms, while the bulk of the body seemingly hardened, soaking in the damage no matter how many plasma bolts she landed on it.

“Steady aim. One, two, one, two...”

She didn't say a word, keeping her calm and collected appearance, but her mind was not as much. It had half a dozen different questions and ideas racing around, covering pretty much every possible side. Timing the shots to make the monster pinned until Alyssa returned, trying to figure out where the hell Chloe was, whether there was any sort of back up in route to the site... and of course, Olivia.

They had tried to play it safe, but that had played against them. They thought it was a brainless threat, one that reacted on instinct, but Claire had grown serious doubts about that. Before they could react, it had stopped its rampage, glaring at them before roaring and pouncing at Olivia. It could have been a random target, yes...

"...or it somehow could have seen us coming, eliminating the threat considered an equal."

Regardless, it was a considerable setback. Her shots could keep it pinned, Alyssa could do some damage and Chloe... she could try and set up some sort of traps, anything to slow it down. But her plasma was not enough, the monster's massive bulk played against Alyssa, and Chloe's work would not stop it for long. Olivia on the other hand could match it, not in brutality or ferocity, or raw power for that matter, but her size and strength would keep the two of them in a deadlock.

"Olivia is safe!"

"Amethyst won't be completely safe until she leaves the hot zone."

"As safe as she can be then..." Alyssa said as she looked at their target. "Any ideas, Claire, Emerald?"

"We can keep it pinned like this, but we don't want this turning into a battle of attrition." Explained Claire, keeping her shots carefully timed as the two heard the roars unfazed. "We should try to go for a quick and overwhelming attack."

“Quick and overwhelming, huh? Luckily for us, I know how to throw a punch or two.” Smirked Alyssa. “And look damn well while doing so.”

“Minimize damage, Sapphire.”

“Got it.”

Alyssa inhaled and exhaled, steeling her nerves and her mind. She had been wanting to try different approaches for her moves for a while, and she had read somewhere that there was no better testing site than a battleground. She crouched, hands at the sides and eyes on her target.

“And one, and two...”

“And three!”

With that battle cry in her lips, she ran towards her target. The beast roared and snarled, violently clawing the air trying to reach her. However, her cry had successfully caught its attention, focusing on her and letting parts of the body wide open. Something Claire immediately caught on, as the blasts of plasma battered its right side with enough force to have it stand on the hind legs.

“Bingo.”

Claire had stopped her dash, but momentum still made every inch of her body tremble, something she would use in her favour. With a single powerful jump, she snuck inside the beast’s open guard, delivering a powerful punch and pushing it backwards. It slammed against the wall of the building behind it, and fell down on all fours; Being denied the killing blow as she was punched herself, landing some metres away from it.

“Oh, so that’s how it’s going to be.” She panted, getting some of her hair out of her face.

However, behind her bravado, Alyssa was concerned. She had aimed to knock it out with that punch, or at least immobilize it for good. And despite having connected and done

some damage, it was still standing. Sure, it was reeling from the attack, but the fight was still ongoing. Sirens could be heard not far, the police having formed a perimeter around the near area, and she was sure that distant sounds were helicopters inbound.

“Alright, here we go again.”

The tone of her thoughts wasn't any longer playful or jovial, instead a no-nonsense attitude taking over. It was taking too long to finish the fight, and while hurting, the thing was not going down. Them instead were racing against the clock, and to rub salt in the proverbial wound, Alyssa could see the hardened body of the beast regenerating each time one of Claire's shots landed.

Back on the offensive, Alyssa threw the best punches she could at her target. One, two, one, two. Her blows were timed and methodical, not leaving any openings for a counterattack. Right punch, left punch. Right, left, right, left. And Claire's shots followed her lead, adding additional pressure to the assault.

“Huh.” She panted in her mind. “Look at us, perfectly synchronized.”

Claire's gruelling training had paid off, and it showed. It was a vastly different attitude and technique from the bank robbery, now feeling so distant. But her own mind shoved those thoughts aside, as the beast had bulked up and seemed to be weathering their unrelenting barrage. And her arms were starting to feel a bit sore too.

“Can't.” Right punch.

“You.” Left punch.

“Just.” Right hook.

“Fall?!”

She had intended to deliver a powerful uppercut, but instead it was her who received the hit. The woman was sent flying backwards, her world spinning out of control and making

the clear blue sky among the blurry shapes of buildings and the muffled sound of Claire's voice. However, where she expected to be met with concrete or pavement, she instead collided against something much softer and that let out a grunt.

"That looked like it hurt."

As her sight became clearer, she was met with a familiar face. A petite frame, with crimson short and messy hair and red skin. She could make the feeling of four arms, and two different bodies holding her safely. In fact, there were two of them, identical to one another, and both with equally wide grins.

"Bet ya missed me."

"Yeah, we did..." Smile Alyssa groggily. "Thanks for the save."

She attempted to stand up, ready to fight if the beast jumped at them with wild fury, but Claire would not allow it, as she fired her plasma away. It was an unrelenting barrage, a never-ending thunderstorm of green lightning bolts that once again forced it on the defensive, snarling as it covered itself with its massive arms and hardened its body.

"Well done, Ruby." Said Claire, approaching them, eyes fixed on her target. "Mission accomplished?"

"You bet Sar- Emerald!" Said Chloe, all four of them puffing their chests with pride. "Not a soul inside the perimeter."

"That's one less thing to worry about." Said Alyssa as she sat on the ground. "Still, we got the elephant in the room."

"No luck?"

"It's surprisingly durable," Admitted Claire as she chipped away small parts of the body. "Its hardening and regeneration are making things difficult."

“And Li- Amethyst?”

“Safe with the cops.” Said Alyssa, standing up once again. “Delivered by yours truly.”

“Good to hear.” Said Chloe, letting out a sigh of relief. “Not going to lie though, she would come in really handy.”

“She got mauled by that thing, but she’s far tougher than she looks.”

“Still- watch out!”

The beast went on the offensive, throwing sizable chunks of the already cracked concrete and building and forcing them to dive out of the way. With the initiative on its side, it charged wildly against them, closing the distance too fast for comfort. Any shots Claire fired were simply ignored, but they were enough of an annoyance for it to answer with a volley of its own.

The beast jumped at her, sending sharp shards of pavement at her, but the verdant woman had avoided the debris easily. However, powering her shots to be precise and avoid collateral damage required focus, something a bit different than using her old firearms and that was easier if she remained on the spot. Which made her an easier target, as the beast now loomed over her, its maw wide open as it caught her off guard.

“Shit! Fire from the hip? Or would that be reck-”

“Like hell you will!”

Back-to-back, two clones of Chloe slammed against the side of its head, driving it off course and making it slam the ground. Looking to the side, Claire watched a third clone stand next to Alyssa ready to be launched should it be needed, the blue woman winking at her with her usual demeanour.

“Hell yeah, Double Launch is a go!” The other two clones cheered, high-fiving each other.

“They have their own way of being serious I guess...” Thought Claire shaking her head, although she did let out a small smile.

“Emerald, Ruby, new plan.” Said Alyssa.

Neither could quite tell what had caught their attention. Maybe the serious tone of Alyssa’s voice, maybe using their codenames instead of their names, the expression in her face, or a mix of all of them. But it was brief and to the point, as the beast rose again for a new round in the fighting.

Olivia put a hand over her eyes as she sat in the back of the car. She was still a bit dazed, no doubt due to the concussions of the attacks that had landed on her, but leagues better than when Alyssa had brought her to the police. And the Commissioner had done good in his word, as she had been safe inside one of the cruisers that would haul her to safety if things went wrong.

And if the symphony of noises she heard was anything to go by, it was not going all that well. Distant sounds of fighting, the blaring of police sirens, car horns, the Police Chief’s orders to the agents and the constant radio chatter. All of it came together to form a disturbing tune.

“Some air would do me good...”

Opening the door, she stepped outside, leaning against the cruiser. The police had formed a barricade with some of the cars, although they seemed to be spread thin. Looking around, she could see more of the cars in other intersections, and distant lights and sirens indicated the presence of more of them in the area.

“A perimeter...?”

“Out for some air?”

Turning around, she was met with the Chief. A veteran with plenty of years of service under his belt, as some grey hair showed, dressed in uniform that showed as much veterancy.

“Correct.” Said Olivia. “The effects of the concussions seem to be wearing off, so I might-”

“Re-join the fight?” The man finished with a dry voice. “The graveyard is full of heroes with an early grave, and that’s not happening in my watch.”

“With all due respect, leaving them alone against danger is out of the question, commissioner.”

“It’s admirable that you want to jump back in, but in the rush of things the effect of those hits might get worse.” He spoke. “There’s no shame in staying behind for recovery.”

“I... understand.”

The man seemed to want to say something else, but the arrival of a young agent interrupted him. Olivia looked at him discreetly, an athletic young lad, with dark short hair and fair skin dressed in his dark uniform. Although, he was a stark contrast with the commissioner, lacking much of the experience his superior had.

“Agent Cheng reporting.” The young man said. “I verified the claims of one of those women, no civilians in the area.”

“That’s a relief to hear. Well done, Cheng.”

“What’s the plan, sir?” Asked the agent.

“For now, keep it confined in the area, but if the Radiant Force can’t subdue it we might be in trouble.”

“The Radiant Force...” The man mumbled, shooting a short glare at Olivia.

“Is there a problem, Agent Cheng?” The woman asked as innocently and conciliatorily as possible. They didn’t need the water up their necks, but he seemed to have his own mind to speak.

“Not the place nor the moment.” Cut the commissioner, as the old man noticed an approaching figure. “Miss Payne, report.”

“Liv! Great to see you up again!” The crimson woman smiled. “We need you to take a look at this.”

Chloe carried something in her hands, it was a surprisingly solid substance, with a brownish colour and a distinctively muddy texture. Holding it in her hands, it was also surprisingly malleable, as she touched and poked giving it a spheric form.

“Interesting... Chloe, where did you get it?”

“From the Mass back there.” The petite woman answered. “It can also harden, and regenerates scary fast.”

“Hardening and regeneration... it seems some sort of... clay, I would say.”

“Clay?” Repeated Cheng.

“Correct. And not knowing to which point the regeneration and hardening can get, this fight might drag on longer than what any of us would like.” Olivia explained. “We need something to soften the clay and finally subdue it. Water or some liquid...”

“You leave that to us.” Said the commissioner. “Chloe, you lot keep that thing busy and we’ll soften it for you.”

“Yessir!”

“I’m going too.”

“What did I-”

“That I can’t just abide by theories and need to take action.” Olivia said. “Roughly paraphrasing your words, commissioner.” She added immediately.

The man remained silent for a moment, looking away at the direction where Claire and Alyssa were fighting.

“You keep it busy; we’ll back you up shortly.”

“Thank you, commissioner.” Nodded Olivia.

“Wooo! We’re back at full strength!”

As the two women ran off, the commissioner and agent Cheng stayed behind, behind the cover of the police cruisers. A saying went about a thin line between recklessness and bravery, and neither could quite say where the colourful bunch landed.

“Cheng, you’re with me. Call the boys in black, and tell them to bring the trucks.” The man said.

“Yes sir!” Answered the agent, immediately reaching for the radio to call for backup.

“We are going to make sure that thing can’t harden, so the details are these...”

The fight went on, as Alyssa and Claire tried to combine their abilities to achieve some sort of turning point, but the clay monster was proving to be stubbornly resilient. They had stepped up their game, coordinating their attacks as best they could without the beast noticing.

As the three clones of Chloe circled the beast like sharks, trying to find an opening to deal any damage they could, the air cracked with static as Claire fired away. Flashes of green

lit up the muzzles of her guns, her eyes set on her target, while Alyssa made the fight close and personal. Making sure Claire's bolts did not hit her by chance, Alyssa moved fluidly and swiftly, not caring anymore about looking good, but in doing so her actions were almost like those of a graceful dancer.

And yet, despite them managing to chip away part of its hardened armour, it would regenerate the damage at the smallest window of opportunity, fighting back and managing to keep them in a stalemate. And Chloe grew frustrated. All of them.

"Any openings yet?"

"That's a big no, Ruby 2."

"This is... pissing me off, not going to lie."

"Same here Ruby 3, but stick to the plan."

"We aren't going to let Emerald and Sapphire tango this on their own, are we?"

"Not a chance, Ruby 4." Answered the second clone. "But we are not throwing a wrench on the plan eith-."

"Coming through!"

The ground shook, time and again, in a steady cadence as Ruby 2 looked over her shoulder. She couldn't help herself as a cheeky smile crept into her face, as Ruby 1 sat on the shoulder of Olivia, whooping as the enlarged woman bashed her shoulder into the beast, throwing it off balance. Chloe took the chance to jump and kick its face, the beast roaring as the crimson woman retreated out of its reach and re-joined her clones.

"Alright girls, what did I miss?"

"Sapphire and Emerald are trying to chip down the armour..." Said Ruby 2.

"...but no luck so far." Finished Ruby 4.

“Working on it!” They heard Alyssa shout as she charged again and resumed the pummelling.

Olivia had managed to keep it pinned, both giants standing and locking arms, keeping the other in a deadlock. This in turn had allowed Claire to target its softer underbelly, now in the receiving end of a plasma bolts barrage, while Alyssa had gone for the legs, trying to immobilize it.

But the beast was not done yet, as with a snarl it flipped backwards, landing on its back and dragging along Olivia and throwing her to the ground. Neither let go, but now the violet giantess was on the defensive, as the clay monster snarled and tried to close the distance for a bite. Alyssa tried to intervene, but the beast saw it coming, kicking her and throwing her against Claire.

The emerald woman yelped; the worst being avoided thanks to Alyssa getting a hold of her friend as they both rocketed against a tree. The trunk shuddered and groaned with the crash, but the azure woman had managed to shield Claire from a hit that would have been far worse.

“Uugghh...” Alyssa creaked “when I said I wanted to get my hands on you, I didn’t mean it this way...”

“Not the moment Sapphire...” Claire groaned, standing up. “That hurt... but thanks.”

“Don’t mention it... some time with me later will do to make up for it.” Said Alyssa, forcing a smile and a wink. “This is going to hurt tomorrow morning...”

“Not the moment.”

“Aw... you still owe me though.”

Claire shook her head as she helped Alyssa up, the two re-joining the fight. Olivia was still locked in her stalemate, although thanks to the Chloe clones jumping on the beast she had managed to stand up, and now pushed back.

“The four of us and still nothing?! You kidding me?!”

“Don’t panic Ruby... uh...”

“Three. Ruby three.”

“Right.” Said Claire as she resumed her barrage.

“The commissioner said back would be here soon!” Huffed Olivia, earning a new roar that was cut short as Alyssa jumped and punched the beast.

Olivia gritted her teeth and focused on pushing back. In her berserk state, she was strong, but she was not going to back down. Still, Miriam’s call had been... disturbing, and that woman would have to answer for this. And for whatever was going on in the Vermillion Institute. She had to be defeated and contained, but with what Miriam had told her- Her thoughts were focused, besides the threat before her, in the blaring of sirens that sounded closer.

It wasn’t just the blaring of sirens, but also the rumbling of engines and the sound of tires over asphalt. The crimson clones looked behind her, part surprised, part dumbfounded. And the same applied to Alyssa and Claire. Not letting go, she moved around, just enough so that she could see what the back-up was.

Heading towards them were three riot trucks, painted in matte black and advancing side by side in formation. They stopped close, the inside unable to be seen by the Radiant Force, but the answer to the beast’s snarls and roars was deafening as the three opened fire with the water cannons.

“Agh!” Grunted Olivia as she was caught in the barrage.

She immediately picked on what the plan was. Warm water, a good way to soften clay, and the force of the water cannons helped her keep her enemy pinned. Seconds went by, turning into minutes as the fight seemed to have frozen in time, or that's how it felt, until the clay monster roared and shook off Olivia using the force of the water against her.

It was working, as the clay became softer and bloated, doubling down on the monstrous aspect as the body became disproportionated and amorphous. The clay monster flailed around, snarling as it dragged itself away from the water, the trucks advancing to give chase. However, it was not going to get caught again, as it threw itself at the façade of a building and tried to climb to escape.

“Oh, you won't!”

Olivia gave chase, jumping and clinging to it as it tried to escape, roaring at the sudden additional weight. Still, it was not enough to stop it, as with great effort it continued its climb upwards, with Olivia still holding on.

“So, we are not the only ones suffering from exhaustion...”

Olivia would have been relieved about that, but the beast used its soaking wet body as well as its attacker's against her, shaking her off and causing her to fall. Given her enlarged size, it wasn't much of a fall, but it still hurt. As Claire and Chloe rushed to her, Alyssa looked up, no way it was getting away. She scanned her surroundings; Claire, all of the versions of Chloe, Olivia, the trucks, debris...

“That will do.”

She rushed over to one of the few craters that now dotted the area, stopping before some debris. It was large enough to do the job, a stone bench before being partially smashed, so with a single move she picked it up and threw it at the retreating foe. It was a bullseye, one that also damaged the building's front, but a bullseye nonetheless. And yet, the clay monster carried on, clawing its way up.

“Shit... Amethyst, I need your help.”

“Yes?” Answered Olivia, now up and running again.

“I want you to throw me at it.”

“...excuse me?”

“Throw me at it.” Alyssa elaborated, never taking her eyes off the target. “Hurry!”

Olivia picked Alyssa in her hand, looking at her and then at the beast, making some quick calculus in her mind. Meanwhile Alyssa’s heart pounded like a hammer. Never in a million years would have she imagined something like this, but it was exciting, very exciting. Holding on, Olivia moved her hand and sent her rocketing towards the beast.

“Fastball!” She shouted in exhilaration.

The punch was solid and deafening, hitting its target with all of the intended force and even more, enough to send both of them inside the building and making a gap in what had been two different floors. Her whole body trembled, as adrenaline rushed through her system and her mind processed what they had just done. But it wasn’t enough, as the monster rose again, although notably dazed from the impact.

It was also visibly angry, pissed even, as it rose its deformed body to its full height, having trouble fitting and only making the whole bigger. And it was giving her a murderous glare. However, she also noticed that it had lost... mass, was it? It was just as big and bulky, but its legs seemed... off, lanky.

“...re we comeee!”

Its moment was cut as the four clones of Chloe smashed into it, making it tumble and having it lose focus and footing, almost making it fall to the street below. It panted heavily, and the hardening had been done away with, the hot water having done its job inhibiting some of its abilities.

“Hell yeah! Chloe Cluster!”

The quartet of crimson women cheered, something that was followed by more blasts. The air cracked again as plasma bolts hit its side, making its balance even more precarious, shooting a second murder glare this time at the one pulling the trigger. After that, and just as Claire and Olivia reached them, it moved above the building, the purple giantess shrinking down to her regular size.

“Sapphire, what did I tell you about recklessness?!” Scolded Claire.

“It was justified.”

“How?”

“I think I figured it out.” Said Alyssa. “It’s size and bulk? Hot air and façade.”

“Doesn’t seem that way to me.”

“It’s not regenerating either, and it looks... well, like it’s having to choose what parts to juice up. The legs were kind of lanky...”

“Nice little chat.” Cut one of the Chloe clones. “But we’re not done. Where is it?”

“On the roof, if the choppers are anything to go by.” Pointed Alyssa as they registered the sound of the rotors that circled around the building. “Licking its wounds before the next round. Too bad it’s not regenerating.”

“We should finish this now, before it gets out of the perimeter.” Said Claire.

“Then bunch up, Radiant Force” Said Alyssa “we’re going through with Emerald’s plan.”

She would have liked a safer environment for the first time, just like it had been with Olivia’s, Chloe’s and Claire’s powers. A controlled space where they could see and

measure the extent of the power, but it was not to be. But the saying went that no place like the battlefield for testing? She wasn't sure, but it did sound familiar.

She focused on them, weary and tired, but still ready to fight. If she recalled, they had mentioned they focused on their target before lending them their power, so she did. Closing her eyes, she made a quick image of each on her mind, all with the same azure colour.

“You’re about to be as bluetiful as me.”

With a playful tone, she blew a kiss at them, rolling their eyes collectively at her antics. There could be a giant monster roaming around, but Alyssa would remain Alyssa. She sent their way a thin mist of blue, latching on to them and making sure that they looked the part. Red, green and purple were all replaced by a familiar blue shade from head to toe.

“Reminds me of some of the camos I used in the past...”

“Yeah, yeah. That’s all good, but damn, I feel like punching through a mountain.” Smiled Chloe, cracking her knuckles.

“That feeling might be due to an adrenaline rush. Which should not be surprising given Sapphire’s endurance and resistance... and it feels quite good.”

“You are very welcome, ladies!”

“Then the plan is as follows, we fight it from the inside. The target is large and will rely on brute force to take us down, so we will use that against it. It will probably lack its regeneration, so it will try to take us down as quickly as possible.” Explained Claire, as a roar shook the air. “Understood?”

“Yeah!”

“Clear.”

“Understood. But about the mon-”

Olivia was cut short as the fight resumed, the clay monster coming from above and fully taking the space of the hole they had made. It was surprisingly fast for its size and form, a mountain of muscle with arms like bridge supports. It roared, showing a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth, delivering a powerful punch. The group avoided it, the beast’s limb getting stuck in the rubble and giving Claire an easy target.

Flashes of blue lit up the inside of the ruined building, as the air cracked with energy and the cadence of the shots started again. The shots were perfectly timed, impacting with additional force and making the beast stagger, needing to use a hand to keep itself from falling. But their hypothesis was right, as parts of the body were chipped off with each strike.

Freeing its limb, a second attack came, the arm twisting over itself in an inhuman way and catching Chloe in its grip. Luckily for the woman, the power lent allowed her to hold her ground and prevent the fist from closing. She huffed and panted, using her legs to give herself some breathing room, but she would not last long. And the fighting ground was awfully high.

“U-ugh... little... help?”

She didn’t have to wait, as Alyssa took impulse and jumped at one of the walls, using momentum to bounce off and deliver a powerful punch to the monster’s face. Clay splattered everywhere, the grip on Chloe loosening as she pushed back with her legs. And Alyssa’s punch was followed by Olivia, who had picked part of a column and now wielded it with both hands. The hit was loud and blunt, breaking part of the concrete pillar while Olivia had a wild smirk on her face.

“Exhilarating, much more than first anticipated...” She mumbled. “Time for even the score.”

From her position, Claire saw Alyssa following with more punches, Olivia backing down to get a good grip on the pillar. Meanwhile, Chloe had generated three copies of herself, fully breaking free keeping the left hand in place. If it didn't want to fall, it had to keep using the right arm for balance, which left it defenceless. But the assault didn't stop, as Alyssa kept punching and Olivia delivered from time-to-time powerful hits with the pillar, Chloe making sure the other hand remained useless.

Each hit only chipped away more and more of the clay body, making its size smaller and smaller. But, despite having her guns drawn, Claire had stopped firing. She was far more concerned with her friends. Alyssa was doing her job, as was Chloe, but Olivia...

"Didn't know she had that side to her..."

She could only watch as she swung away, hitting time and again, the clay being stumbling and clearly dazed from the beatdown. And she seemed to have something to say before turning blue, but now...

"We could use your barrage to finish this, Emerald!"

"..."

Claire did not answer, firing away, but she did so with care. Shots were carefully timed, aimed and powered, each of them a surgical strike that only chipped away at the clay bulk. In fact, a question was forming in the back of her mind, and she was not liking the answer.

Her dread became realized when Olivia used the concrete pillar as a javelin, hitting the beast's right arm while Alyssa delivered a powerful punch in its face. It staggered again, and this time the grip loosened, gravity doing its part. Chloe bailed from the hand, the beast flailing weakly and helplessly as it fell.

The group was silent, as the deformed bulk of the beast disappeared from their sight, followed by a loud and blunt hit shortly after. It should have been a moment of

celebration, but between their actions, the exhaustion and the outcome, they were content with simply sitting down.

“Amethyst, enlarge and bring us down.”

“O-oh? Yes, immediately.”

As their bodies returned to their normal colours, Olivia immediately complied. The way down was short and silent, as Claire’s glare and her hissing voice did not leave room for much discussion. And Olivia herself was starting to realize the situation, as next to the crater the clay thing had left was a single lone police cruiser.

Shrinking down to her usual size, they were met by the Commissioner, who was glaring at them. It was a conversation without words, but an exchange of glances between him and Claire seemed to somewhat defuse the situation. Meanwhile Olivia was going from slipping deeper into regret as the five of them walked into the crater, the Commissioner looking up and making sure no press helicopters circled above them.

Alyssa covered her mouth while Chloe bit her lower lip, Olivia looking away. In the centre of it, where the beast should have been, was a girl. A petite frame, made of a brownish clay, completely bare and for all to see. Her bob-cut hair was almost like it had been moulded to resemble a helmet of sorts, all of her looking like a life-sized version of what one would find in an artist’s studio.

“That was the call’s content?”

“...yes, it was from Miriam.”

“The one barricaded on the closed off institute?” Asked the Chief in a low voice.

“Yes.” Admitted Olivia. “She’s incredibly prideful and stubborn, so for her to ask for help... even without admitting to it.”

“Well... shit. This just got a lot more complicated and messier.” Stated the Commissioner. “And that place is off limits, *for everyone.*”

“I have no idea what she’s doing, but if things are-”

“Commissioner, we’ll be taking her with us in custody.” Interrupted Claire. “Any objections.”

“None.”

Claire nodded at Alyssa, who picked the girl in her arms, looking closely trying to discern if she was injured or simply unconscious.

“I’ll handle the hounds of the press.” Said the Commissioner walking to the cruiser. “Make sure this scene doesn’t repeat, Hunter.”

“Yes sir.”

It had been a nightmare, but it was over. With a sigh, the commissioner let his head hang in exhaustion and defeat. It was late in the night, and he still had to finish the reports of what had transpired. And then there was the damage done... he shuddered at the thought, simply sighing again and focusing back on the computer screen. However, a knock on the door stopped him.

“Go ahead.”

The door opened to reveal agent Cheng, the man in his civilian clothes and lacking uniform.

“You should have left a while ago, Cheng. What’s the hold up?”

“Could I speak freely, sir?”

“You are not in service right now, but permission granted.”

“I’ll be brief. With all due respect, what was that shitshow?”

“Can’t really tell which one you are referring to.”

“Everything. Having to rely on this Radiant Force thing to get it done, the whole circus with the press and the ambiguous answers... everything.”

“I see. Now let me ask, what do **you** think, Cheng?”

“My thoughts, Sir?”

The Commissioner nodded.

“We shouldn’t be relying on them.”

“And yet, they could be the help LCPD needs. Finally, someone that can lend us a hand with a larger margin to manoeuvre.”

“That’s what it’s come to? Relying on vigilantism? How long until a maniac following that trend causes some disgrace to happen?”

“Fair point, and I’m not fond of the idea either, but without them we would have been outmatched.”

“The riot trucks seemed to work.”

“Yes, but what would have happened if this group was not at the scene? I doubt they would have been able to manage on their own, not against that monster.”

“Wouldn’t the logical step be to ask for adequate equipment then? Something that levels the field?”

“And you believe the ones calling the shots would risk making a decision to a problem they don’t have the answer to?”

“...what about the press?”

“Vague answers, something they can interpret and twist at their own will, while giving us plenty of room to deny that interpretation.” The commissioner spoke. “They will say exactly what their audience wants, truth be damned. And they will do the impossible to get what they want.”

“...yeah, got it.”

“Anything else, Cheng?”

“No sir.”

“Then you are dismissed. Go get some rest.”

The young agent left, leaving the older man alone back with his devices and reports. He was a good kid, but still a kid nonetheless, with the idealism and naivete that brought along. Although, he had to admit he was a tiny bit envious of that idealism, something that his cynicism had long done away with. With a new sigh, he got back to work. Hopefully he could go home at some point during the night.

Olivia quietly entered the house, which seemed to be in complete silence. She had come back from delivering Miriam’s... experiment to a trusted colleague. She wouldn’t have minded having her around, maybe so that her current condition would not affect her that much by having Rosa, Kaitlin and Emmeryn. They were all the same age, so it could have been good for her, but she was not going to risk the chance of Miriam breaking in and taking her back. One break-in was more than enough.

She moved in complete silence, trying to make her way back unnoticed, but she was out of luck, as the lights of the hall turned on. And sure thing, at the end of it, arms crossed

on her chest, was Claire. Olivia could only give thanks that she was frozen in place, as the green woman waited in complete silence for her to approach. And despite not wanting to move, knowing what awaited her, she had to face it eventually. Because she was not keeping Claire up all night.

“...Claire.”

“Come with me.”

She followed in silence, the two women making their way back to one of the living rooms the mansion had. The silence and the quiet was comforting, and they were taking care not to wake anyone up. It had been a long day, a very long day.

“So” said Claire as she sat down in an armchair “anything to say?”

“...I... lost control.”

“You lost control.”

“When I received Miriam’s call, I got some... tunnel vision, you could say. She is not one to ask for help, and when she does, she will do so without stating it openly. So, when I put the pieces together...”

“You tried to think of a way to take her down before it got out of hand.”

“Yes. But I started overthinking things. Analysis paralysis.” The purple woman admitted.

“That’s when she caught me off-guard.”

“How are you holding up?”

“It’s nothing. I mean, I did go back to the fight so...”

“That’s not what I mean. And you know it.”

“I-”

“Hey girls.”

Both Olivia and Claire turned to the voice, Alyssa standing at the door of the living room. She was dressed in her night camisole, a piece of clothing that despite being completely opaque, did little to hide her physique. However, the sleeping mask on her forehead made her look more goofy than seductive. Without speaking a word, she walked to them and sat next to Olivia.

“Carry on, Olivia.”

“What do you want me to tell you, Claire? That I was angry? That I wanted some payback? Because it’s yes to both of them...”

Claire remained silent.

“I followed the Commissioner’s advice. Not to rely on theory constantly, and to take action. I feared something like this would happen, and I was right.”

“Liv, that was probably because of my power-”

“It’s not an excuse, Alyssa. What if next time I get carried away I’m several metres tall? What if I lose focus of collateral damage? You and Claire might be able to control the extent of damage, but if I miss a punch, I might obliterate part of a building in a single strike.”

“Olivia.”

“It’s not only the size, but also the adrenaline, the temper, the tunnel vision... What if I get carried away? And in doing so I hurt some bystander? Or a police agent? Or you girls? Or what if-”

“Liv, that’s enough.” Cut Claire. “Responsibility falls on both of us. You had some notable tunnel vision, I’ll give you that, but you’re human and a first timer in such a situation. I was an idiot for letting you all waltz into a fight like that without preparation.”

“That’s not fair Claire. We did fight that woman, Rorschette, and we rescued our guests. We know how to fight.”

“Rorschette was not a mountain of muscle gone berserk, Alyssa. And neither was the rescue of Kaitlin, Rosa and Emmeryn.”

“What’s the plan then?”

“Training.” Stated Claire, only to be met by a disappointed look from Alyssa. “Don’t give me that look. I’ll have to come up with something, but I’m not letting you girls get into situations like that again. Understood?”

“Yeah...”

“Understood.”

“Good. Then hit the bunk, it’s been a long day and we need some shut eye.”

The three women stood up, making their way towards their rooms with as little light as possible. It weighed heavily on the back of her mind, but with Claire’s input and some good night’s rest, maybe she could work on it tomorrow.

“By the way, Claire?”

“Yeah?”

Alyssa closed the distance as they kept walking, bringing her head right next to Claire’s ear. “You still owe me for taking the hit at the park.”

Olivia barely managed to stifle a giggle as Claire suddenly picked up the pace, Alyssa following right behind. Still the azure woman turned around to wink an eye at Olivia, before letting go of her prey and heading to her own room.