

Becoming One
By
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"I didn't know you were interested in racing," a relaxed man casually questioned the woman sitting across from him. Around them was the close quarters of an expensive private jet.

"I do quite a bit Jack." She answered while pondering something on her iPad. The woman wore a soft rose and white printed summer dress.

"Really since when Ava." Jack himself wore a pair of comfortable khaki slacks and cream golf shirt.

"Since I was a child to be quite honest."

"I didn't know that."

"Dad had been a quiet backer of an Indy Car team. After his death they were folded into a bigger team. Since then I've tried to keep abreast of the series."

"Interesting, when was the last time you went to a race?"

Ava did not respond right away. Briefly she peered out a window at the clouds speeding by. "A couple years ago I went to the Indianapolis 500."

"And I'm only just finding out about this now? We could have gone together and seen more?"

"Sorry, work has kept me so busy lately. After dad, I really wanted to complete his vision. Now that it's done, I've got the time," Ava admitted turning off her tablet to focus on him.

Jack didn't respond right away. "Ed would have been pleased."

"Thanks. I knew that last project had been his life's passion."

"He did invest a lot of resources into it. I think he would have enjoyed how you spun it off into its own entity. Do you plan on using it?"

"Me, go to space? Nah, I get sick on roller coasters, so using one of our rockets is out of the question. You?"

"Maybe, maybe after the space station is built."

"If we can get it built. It'll need a lot more funding," admitted Ava.

"I know you can raise those funds. So who're we meeting?"

"Drake Andrews."

"Him, I thought you disliked that arrogant little prick."

"I still do. Yet, I was hoping to woo him into contributing a few billion for the station. When he invited me to the race, I figured I'd give it a shot."

"Well it makes my skin crawl being near him," Jack admitted as he took a sip from his water.

"Yea same here, but what convinced me to go was he mentioned there would be a few of his friends there. People I hope might contribute."

"I'm not sure Ava, I don't trust him. As your friend and counsel, I'd advise you to be cautious around them."

"Agreed, but the project needs a lot more funding then what I can do alone," sighed Ava. Before she could comment further, the pilot announced they would be landing shortly. Both buckled themselves in and silently watched as the plane touched down at the Austin international airport.

The day was a typical warm breezy late spring day at the Circuit of the Americas outside of Austin Texas. The curvy hilly course was thronged with spectators eagerly waiting for the third race in the Indy car racing season. Each set of grandstands spaced throughout the course was slowly filling up as fans took their seats.

Down along the front stretch were numerous slim colorful open wheeled racecars lining up. Each was either being rolled out or tended to by their teams. While amid the hectic groups of people surrounding the cars were a few video crews interviewing the fire-suited drivers.

Yet beside the front stretch, over the pits and garage, was a set of hospitality suites. Each had groups of wealthy fans eagerly gossiping over the event to come. Most of the suites were rented by corporations entertaining their clients. However one across from the start-finish line, was the only one rented by a private party.

Inside that suite were a fair amount of casually dressed upper class people. Many hovered around the front windows pointing and staring at the race cars. A few were back browsing the bar and food table.

Ava and Jack casually entered to a boisterous welcome from Drake Andrews. The man was dressed in a set of comfortable slacks and polo shirt. His frame was lean and well muscled. Drake's cleanly shaved face had a sort of predatory smile.

"Ava, I'm so glad you took me up on my offer," greeted Drake as he shook her hand. The man had a strong grip. Though when he saw Jack, his smile slipped for a moment before coming back. "And you are," Drake directed to Jack.

"Oh, this is my friend and counsel, Jack Dempsey," Ava introduced him.

"It's nice to meet you Jack," Drake silkily responded. His eyes had a brief gleam of contemplation. "So what changed your mind Ava? I've been trying to get you to join me at the races for a while now."

Ava lightly smiled, "well with things slowing down at work, I decided it was a good time to see a race."

"You were quite a race fan if I remember right?"

"I still am, but I've never had the chance to really see one in a long time. Not since dad died."

"I'm again sorry to hear of his passing. Your father was a great man. He did so much for so many people," Drake spoke as a few other men and woman came over to join the conversation. Each silently appraised Jack and Ava. "But in any event, enjoy the race. We'll talk later when we're alone," Drake spoke to Ava while briefly pondering Jack.

While Jack went to the front and considered the racecars. One of Drake's guests, a federal politician, came over to gossip with him. As the two made small talk, Ava thought she saw the male politician give Jack an appreciative glance. She inwardly chuckled as she wondered if the politician knew Jack wasn't his type.

Meanwhile Ava wandered over to the hospitality table and disappointedly looked at it. Many years ago while in college Ava chose to become a vegetarian. Yet before her was a table laden with all sorts of cooked and smoked meats. She saw few vegetables available to her. Quelling the unease in her stomach, Ava chose a bottle of water.

Tactfully Ava approached a few people. At first she gossiped about the race. Yet she carefully swung the conversations over to raising money for the space station.

Then as the race began, Drake offered Ava a seat beside him. She came over and cheered with everyone else as the racecars roared past the start line beginning the race. Despite the glass between them and the action, the car's high powered engines still roared into the room.

"So, I've heard you're trying to raise funds for a space station," Drake gossiped while taking a sip from his Champaign.

"Yes. It was dad's dream that I'm trying to get going."

"You mean that space corporation you started?"

"Yep, that one. But now that we have a contract to ferry people into space, the next step is to build a space station. Something regular people could go and not need any government's help."

"That would be fun, but that's got to be expensive."

"Quite. Far more than I can afford myself."

"So you're looking for investors?"

"Yep, They'd get first dibs on going there, and would easily get a return on their investments."

"How much do you need to raise?"

"At least five hundred billion?"

"Wow, that's a steep amount!"

"Yes, but the chance to live in outer space is well worth it," promised Ava.

"I bet! I'll think on it."

For a moment the two went silent as they watched a pack of cars racing past. Each looked for their favorite driver. Then once things calmed down, Drake pondered Ava for a moment. "Say, Ava, I'm glad you're here."

"Thanks, it feels good to get out."

"Sure. But with you here, I also had a proposal for you?"

"Ok?"

"Have you, well, have you heard of a group called the Improved?"

Ava turned to ponder Drake before replying. "No, who're they?"

"Before I answer that, I have one other question. Do you remember those nanobot research programs that occurred decades ago?"

"Sure, they had the potential to heal people, re-grow limbs and such. But didn't they have a tendency to run amok?"

"Yes the early batches did."

"Wasn't it banned around the world?"

"You are correct. It still is. However, sometime after the world banned nanobots, someone created a controllable version."

That startled Ava a bit, "wait what? If someone had created a version that were controllable, why doesn't the public know about it? Something like that could save countless lives."

"True, but, the people who did it chose to keep it to themselves. They figured with the ban in place, they could control the market."

"Figures, if there's profit involved..."

"Quite, but back to my earlier question about the Improved. You see, some people discovered the controllable versions. With those machines fully under control, they used them to, well, improve themselves. To become more powerful."

Ava grimaced at hearing how such a breakthrough was being perverted by a select group of people. "Ok, but why are you telling me this?"

"Because Ava, everyone in this suite, with the exception of you and Jack, are Improved. We've been wanting to get you to join us. Trust me, it is quite enjoyable and you'll never see the world the same again," promised Drake as he looked her in the eyes.

"What, um, um," Ava stuttered out as she bolted up from her chair. "You want me to join the Improved?"

"Yes."

"I'm not sure, um, I don't think so?" Ava Began to back away from Drake. Jack saw Ava and quickly crossed over to see what was wrong. Briefly the two looked around to see that everyone in the room was casually looking at them with expectant expressions.

"What's wrong Ava," Jack asked.

"We're leaving," hurriedly spoke the woman.

"No, I don't think so," casually interjected Drake. He nodded to a few people. Quickly others rushed in and grabbed the two within their strong grips. One small petite woman came over and held onto Ava's arm. Yet her grip felt as if she was a heavy duty Olympic weight lifter. "Inject both of them. Ava will join us whether she wants to or not. Her friend Jack, on the other hand, should do quite nicely for our next party," Drake informed them. Before Ava or Jack could say anything,

someone plunged syringes into their necks causing each to pass out.

Ava groggily came awake atop a gurney. Above her was some sort of blaring medical light. While moving her head showed that she was in some sort of medical lab. There were a few white lab coated people moving around checking on things.

"Sir, she's coming awake," spoke up a female from somewhere behind her.

"Good good," responded Drake as he walked into Ava's field of vision. He leaned down to peer into her eyes silently. He was close enough that she could see that his teeth looked nothing like regular human teeth. If she wasn't mistaken, Drake's jaws seemed like shark's jaws. "I'm glad to see you survived the transport back home."

"I'm in Los Angeles," weakly stated Ava.

"On the outskirts, but yes," he informed her while peering into her eyes.

"Wha... what're you going to do to me?"

"Improving you. We're going to make you stronger, faster, and a bit more smarter. Trust me, you'll be thanking me in the end."

"But..."

"Hush, you'll need your strength for what's to come." Drake casually informed her before standing back up. He turned to face a lab coated man, "ok doctor, you can begin."

"Yes mister Andrews. We'll need to inject her with the nanobots and wait until they've propagated through her system."

"How long?"

"About five to ten minutes."

"Then you can initiate the transformation?"

"Yes sir."

"Good, but when will we modify her mind?"

"We'll have to do that separately. It's a complicated procedure and it can't be done at the same time as her change."

"Damn! I was hoping she'd accept the change without that."

Ava wanted to protest, yet her mind felt gauzy and at best all she could utter were a few slurred words. Lazily she peered at one of the lab coated men approach her with a syringe in his

hand. He took her arm, swabbed it, then injected the thing's contents into her.

Immediately the injection spot erupted with a fiery feeling. Rapidly she could feel the burning sensation slowly moved through her arm. Then as soon as it hit her heart, it exploded throughout her body.

Ava groggily noticed a strange and sudden rumbling sound from outside of the room. It seemed as if something had blown up. Then on top of that a small alarm began to blare away.

"What now," exclaimed Drake. "Report," he yelled into a radio.

"Sir we're under attack!"

"By who, the government?"

"No, but whoever they are, they're big and Improved."

"No other improved club would attack us?"

"Sir, not a club, monsters..." was all the other person got out before they started screaming.

"Start her procedure," Drake ordered before rushing out of the space.

"Yes sir," responded one. They pressed something causing the fiery pain to significantly increase. Abruptly something heavy impacted against an outside wall.

That sudden impact caused numerous things within the lab to become dislodged. One was an overhead fluorescent light fixture. The chains suspending it from the ceiling came undone allowing it to swing down and into the mainframe computer. Electricity arced out of the broken light fixture and into the computer.

"The computer's damaged," screamed one tech.

"Can we stop the procedure?"

"No, it's taken on a life of its own."

"She's gonna..."

"Yes and if we don't get out of here, we're going to be her meal," screamed a tech who followed the others out of the room.

Meanwhile Ava couldn't tell what was going on with her. The pain felt as if she was being dipped in molten metal. Then Ava began to feel all sorts of strange feelings from her lower end. On the one hand there seemed to be some sort of melting sensation. It felt as if her bones were becoming spongy. Before long her lower end extended beyond the table, touched the floor, and became far more flexible.

On top of that, Ava sensed that something strange was growing into her abdomen. Something that felt like an open space within her body. Even more was that it seemed like she could flex it open and closed.

Finally she noticed how her eyesight became much sharper. She felt how the straps holding her were weaker than before. Testing one arm, Ava found she could easily snap each strap.

Breaking the final straps binding her to the table, Ava sat up and peered at her lower end. What she saw nearly caused her to pass out. Her bottom half had transformed into a gigantic snake. It had blue green scales with brown stripes. Even more was that she had a large fanged maw in her belly. Finally the end of her tail even had a sharp spiked stinger.

While she was peering at her monstrous transformed body, Ava abruptly heard some strange sounds from the computer. Looking over she saw how the machine was so damaged that electrical arcs were lancing out from it. Finally with a plume of smoke, the machine died.

Then just as suddenly, Ava heard the battle outside intensify. Hesitantly, she got off the table only to fall to the floor. It took her a moment to work her new muscles in her tail. Before long she was upright and slithering towards the room's main door.

Carefully pushing open the door, she exited into a hastily emptied kitchen. Though the room looked more like a butcher's space than a kitchen. Yet when she took a closer look at the slaughtered meat, Ava horrifically realized it was not from animals, but from humans.

On the one hand Ava felt like she was going to throw up. Yet in the back of her mind, she felt a twinge of hunger. Something suggested all those human parts looked tasty. Yet the horror of the space kept her from ever considering the thought.

Abruptly something smashed into the other side of the kitchen's wall blasting it apart. The thing Ava saw seemed to defy her imagination. It sort of looked like a gigantic gorilla with not two, but four arms, a long scorpion tail, and some sort of man's torso emerging out where it's head would be. When the being turned to peer into the room, she saw a maw in his gorilla chest.

"Are you one of the Improved," the monster called out. His voice sounded rather human in comparison to his body.

"What, who," cried out Ava over the destruction.

"Hey Mara, get in here," the monster called out.

Smashing another bit of wall, a second monster pushed into the room. To Ava, it looked like a giant cross between a cat and lizard. Her main head had a mostly dinosaur appearance with six eyes. Plus her paws seemed more like hands than animals. Even more was that jutting out of the main body, by its shoulders, was a nude female torso that had two heads, horns, and four arms.

"What Jeb, oh," Mara exclaimed when she saw Ava.

"What's going on and what are you two," Ava exclaimed.

"We're, well, um, we used to be humans. It had been the Improved who transformed us into monsters," explained Jeb.

"I didn't expect to see someone like you here in Los Angeles," commented Mara.

"Did they purposely do that to you," Jeb added.

"No, um, they said they wanted to improve me! To make me one of them."

"Then instead you're just like us. We planned on destroying this Improved club. You're welcome to join us as we find more. There's got to be more around," Mara posed.

"What has happened to me? I mean I'm not even human anymore," Ava cried collapsing to the floor.

"We both know how you feel. Mara and I are trying to make them pay. I promise we know of a spot where you can get some non-human meat," Jeb promised.

Upon hearing they knew of meat that didn't come from humans caused both of Ava's mouths to water. She found it strange considering she had been a vegetarian before. "Any vegetables I can eat," Ava inquired.

"One thing about our changes is that we can only eat meat afterward. I once tried to eat some potatoes, but immediately threw up," responded Mara.

"Oh," she exclaimed as she finally recognized Jack's chopped up body among the body parts strewn around the bloody room. When she saw the gory bits of what had been her friend, Ava nearly collapsed. Crying she tried to comprehend what those monstrous butchers had done to him. "That had been my best friend," Ava cried around her streaming tears.

"Damn, these people have got to be stopped," angrily spat Mara as she led Ava out of the ruins. It was then that she realized it had been well into the night.

The monstrous trio slowly made their way out of the ruins and through the semi quiet city. Within moments they got to the dry concrete Los Angeles river channel. From there they carefully made their way further out of the busy city. Each mile allowed Ava to get more used to slithering.

Within a few hours they were able to exit out into what looked like some sort of state forest. There they continued on through the wilderness until they came close to a cattle ranch. Together they corralled a bunch of bovines together for a feast.

Ava hesitated a moment before letting her lower mouth dive into a beast and rip off chunks of meat. While it felt strange to be eating down by her abdomen, the taste of the bloody meat was sweet to her. Before long her stomach was nice and full.

The trio found a spot where they could hide. There they began discussing what they were going to do. Ava learned how insidious the Improved had become. About how they were all over the place. Plus she learned about the other two, how Mara had been an FBI agent and Jeb a private investigator.

While they had attacked the Improved center in Los Angeles, the two had no idea where the other clubs were. Ava wanted to make the Improved pay for what they did to her. The other two agreed and began to plan for how they were going to continue their war against the Improved.