

A man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark t-shirt and a textured, greyish-brown jacket, stands in the center of a city street at night. The street is illuminated with blue and purple light, and buildings with fire escapes are visible in the background. The scene is framed by ornate, light blue decorative borders in the corners.

MONSTROUS

Mayhem

BONUS SHORT

ALICE WINTERS

Alice Winters

*This short story should be read after *Monstrous Intent*

Lake

“You, me, date,” I say as I bust into the room Declan was trying to read in.

“Right now?”

“Right fucking now,” I decide as I walk up to his chair and grab his neck in my hand before leaning down real close. “My Dear Declan, you’re gonna go on a long and *hard* date with me.”

“Hmm...” His growl is enough to make me question if the date can take place in his bed. “Fine.”

“Ooh. I’ll get Sir Reginald ready.”

For some reason, that makes him hesitate. “Wait, no, Lake, you can’t just take your fish with you places. He’s quite happy in his stupid mansion that I haven’t actually seen him move around in. You could have put him in a cup, and it’d still seem like a giant world that he has no interest in exploring.”

I look over at Sir Reginald who is floating right in the middle of the large tank. Declan might be right in that I haven’t seen him move beyond finding different leaves to sleep on... near the surface of course so he doesn’t have too far for food. “He’s a man of the world now, Declan. You can’t sate his hunger for adventure leaving him boxed up at home. How cruel can you be?”

Declan glances over Sir Reginald then at me. “We’re going to a seafood restaurant.”

I gasp. “You would make him watch us eat his brethren? And you call me the monster.”

Declan lets out a huge sigh, tosses his book, and heads for the door.
“I’m hungry. Let’s go.”

“Ooh la la, so am I, you big sausage,” I say as I hurry after him.

Declan gives me a look like what I said could possibly have not been attractive. “Why?”

Tossing out my look of innocence, I hurry out to the car. “What?”

“Why?”

“Repeating things rarely helps your case. Oh! And I’m driving.”

“You don’t know how to drive. What if we die on the way there? Who will look after Fish Stick?”

I gasp. “I need a will.”

“Do not write a will for your fish,” Declan says.

“No, I need one, Declan. You’re Fish Daddy number one if I die, but if I die, I’m planning on taking you with me—”

“That’s not at all concerning,” he mutters.

“So then we’ll both be dead and someone will need to watch Sir Reginald. He’ll want to be at the funeral and the burial and everything for closure... I guess Emma.”

I pull out my phone.

Me: Will you be my fish’s mama if we die?

Emma: I’m scared.

Me: As you should be. It’s a big responsibility.

Emma: Do I get paid?

Me: You get all of Declan’s money.

Emma: Deal. I’ll buy him anything he wants.

Me: Good. Good.

“Are you threatening Emma?” Declan asks.

“No, just know that if you die and I die, all your money goes to Sir Reginald so Emma can properly care for him,” I explain.

“Wonderful. So glad I’ve worked hard all my life for a fish.”

“Me too,” I say as I reach over and squeeze his hand.

Honestly, I’m a little surprised when he squeezes it back, but he’s just reconfirming that he actually enjoys all the torture I put him through. Probably even loves it.

When Declan pulls up to the restaurant, I realize how packed it is. “I wonder if we should have made a reservation,” I say as I hear a noise in the backseat.

Declan’s head snaps around like a goddamn owl. It’s honestly impressive and weirdly sexy. “How did Mittens get in the back?”

“I assumed you brought her. How did you not hear her scurrying around back there?” I ask, refusing to admit that I also had not heard the wee beastie. She must have been sleeping.

But now that she’s here, clearly, she wants to come along with us, so I grab Declan’s bag and start stuffing her into it as Declan tries reaching for me.

“What are you doing?” Declan asks as I hold bag and beast out of his reach.

“Getting ready to eat. What’s it look like?”

“Do not bring her in.”

“She’ll get cold out in the car. How savage can you be?”

“Her coat is plenty thick. She’ll be fine.”

“She’ll freeze to death.”

“She was literally *napping* in the car when we came out here.”

I refuse to acknowledge that fact as I urge her inside. She’s oblivious as she slinks into the backpack ready to go. Once she’s situated, I hop out

of the car and hurry inside where I can't even *move* there are so many people crowding the door. "This is ridiculous," I grumble. "I wanted shrimp. Delicious shrimp scampi how dare you forsake me?"

Declan uses his manly looks to part the sea of people as I make sure to walk as close to his ass as possible with the ruse of doing it to keep from losing him when I really just wanted to touch dat ass.

When we reach the hostess, she plasters on her "I hate my fucking life, but I want money" smile. "Welcome to Klaus Seafood, do you have a reservation?"

"We don't."

"Aw, well maybe you should have made a reservation. The wait time is currently about two hours. Would you like to wait?" Oh. I'm wrong. She doesn't just hate her life, she hates us too.

Declan sighs. "I guess we could walk over to the mall or something while we wait?"

"So are you waiting?" she asks, clearly coated with patience. It's dripping off her.

"Fine, fine. I shall starve a little longer," I say as Declan gives her his first name.

As Declan turns to face the packed crowd before the door, I get an absolutely brilliant idea as I feel Mittens squirm.

I pull the backpack around and look Declan right in the eyes. "Don't do it," he says. Why's it such a turn on how well he can read me?

Slowly, I unzip the backpack.

"Lake..."

"Do you want to eat now... or in two hours?" I ask quietly.

Declan doesn't answer, and if Declan doesn't answer that means he agrees with me.

Mittens doesn't wait for an answer before popping out and landing on the only empty spot in a ten foot radius.

A woman's head.

"Oh no. It's a tiny monster!" I announce.

Boy I have never seen a group of people scatter so quickly. Honestly, I was expecting a few people to turn around, glance around for the supposed monster. Maybe one or two shift backwards, but instead, it was like I got to watch forty people poof! disappear.

Mittens is like a lioness on a wounded gazelle as she springs off the woman, onto another who clearly hadn't gotten the memo. The woman assumes her life is over as she *screams* and Mitten looks offended since she'd just innocently been on her way to check out the fish tank near the door.

In a quick attempt at escaping the awkward situation, she springboards off the woman's head and lands onto a man's face, like she's planning on sucking his soul out. Blind, he takes off running.

Slowly, ever so slowly, I turn to lock eyes with Declan.

"Is this a good time to say 'Whoops'?" I ask.

"At least you didn't sneeze," he grumbles.

I decide that maybe I'll help the situation. "Everyone, it's okay! I'm a monster hunter," I say as I pull out my finger guns and take off after Mittens. "It's FINE. It's a harmless level one! Look how cute she is."

The "cute" monster snatches up someone's lobster tail and growls like a feral beastie as she smacks at the confused couple with both front paws. I rush after her before she starts a blood letting. I pull my coat off and toss it over Mittens, bundling it as I hold it above my head. "It's okay! I've detained it," I say before rushing outside. Not quite sure what else to do with her, I shove her back into the backpack.

She gives no shits. She's too busy chowing down on her lobster tail in Declan's bag.

Since Declan hasn't returned, I head back inside to see if we've possibly moved up in line.

Moved up might be an understatement as I hear crickets as I walk in. The only people left are the ones far enough from the entrance that they didn't witness the happenings and the staff who've come staggering out in confusion.

Declan's eyes are wide as I guiltily walk over to him. "What the fuck have we done?" he whispers.

"It was an accident," I whisper back.

A woman comes rushing up to us. "Oh we're so lucky you were here. Please, right this way," she says as she ushers us over to a cleared table. By the glasses on the ground, it kind of looks like the previous people cleared it with their panicked bodies. "Let us get you a table right now. I'm so sorry for the inconvenience and thankful you two were here to help."

"Of course," I say before shifting my wide eyes onto Declan.

"I'm going to get you a menu and some drinks and a meal. It's all on us," she assures us.

"Uh-huh..." I whisper as she hurries off. "Declan... Declan... what have you done?"

His eyes snap onto mine. "What have I done? It was your idea."

"Yeah, but that's why we do things together. It's my job to come up with absolutely horrible ideas and yours to tell me no!"

"I... didn't think they'd panic like that. She's so tiny. It's not like they never see them out on the streets." His eyes shift down. "Dear god, Lake, don't tell me she's in the bag."

"Okay, then I won't tell you."

“Why’d you bring her back in?”

“I didn’t want her to get cold!”

The feasting sounds emanating from the backpack are hopefully only audible to my sensitive ears.

The woman is back and passing us drink menus and food menus and compliments that stab me right where it hurts. “You saved our lives,” she declares.

“HA HA. It was just a little level one. They can’t do anything. Haha...”

“Ha ha!” Declan answers.

Oh no. I think I broke him.

“Ha ha!” the woman says.

Why’d this become so awkward?

“You know what? I love this, but we actually decided we had a hungering for McDonald’s,” I say.

“What?” she asks in surprise. “No, please... it’s on the house. Please. Anything you want. We have lobster tail with the most delicious sauce. We have swordfish Milanese, lightly breaded.”

“Ha...” I shift my eyes to Declan’s who goes, “I’m allergic to shellfish.”

She looks startled. “Why... Why’d you come here then?”

“I forgot,” he says.

“Me too. I’m allergic too,” I say.

Dear god. I see the hostess holding a tablet which she waves to the manager. She’s eyeing the bag. Oh no...

I lean forward. “Excuse me a moment,” I say as I whisper to Declan
“SHE KNOWS.”

“She can’t know.”

The hostess is locking eyes onto us. The other woman is trying to push the menus into our hands. She's telling us about specials. I'm feeling like a true monster as I hear Mittens crunching lobster shell.

"Oh... oh my god. My allergy... I'm dying," I say as I pull out my wallet, chuck a hundred dollars on the table and run.

Declan's too cool to run. He saunters out the door as I jump into the car and wait for him to shimmy his fine ass on into the driver's seat.

"So... Hey, sexy," I say.

"Hey," he says as he backs out and starts driving.

"How was your day today?"

"It was pretty good. I just enjoyed the day off. I read for a bit. Illegally participated in ruining a seafood business. You know, the usual stuff."

"They'll be fine. Did you see how much they were charging for food?" I say. "We actually did the guests a favor."

"Did we?" he asks as he pulls into a chicken place. We decide that the drive-through is the fun place to be and order. Mittens is lying in the backseat, clearly pleased with her meal as she grooms herself. I toss the coat over her so no one sees her as we collect our food.

"Want to have a picnic?" I ask.

"It's too cold for Mittens to be in the car but fine to have a picnic?" he asks as he pulls out onto the road.

"Correct."

He shrugs and drives half a mile to a small park where he parks. We leave Mittens behind this time as I find a nice empty spot and toss a blanket down we had in the trunk. Declan sits down as I sit facing him and pull his chicken sandwich out before passing it over.

I clear my throat as I unwrap it. “Here we have a grand chicken breaded with... breaded between two fluffy bread buns. I like your buns.”

“That took a turn.”

“We have potatoes cut into elongated shafts with a dusting of seasonings and tossed in a fryer.”

“Tell me more.”

“Within this cup we have the root of all beers with solid water cubes.”

“Sounds fancy.”

“Thank you. It’s only the best for you,” I assure him.

Declan shakes his head before taking a bite. “I bet this is so much better than those steaks and shrimp doused in butter sauce.”

“Has to be,” I say as I bite into mine and realize quite quickly that Mittens made out. “My favorite part is how my saliva gets sucked into the chicken and I have to take sips of the root beer to get it down.”

“Ah? Yeah, mine is the crunch the bread makes with that unique... blackened taste.”

I lean back and glance up at him. “I’m sorry for making a mess of our date... I’m well aware that I’m sometimes a bit... irrational when it comes to decisions.”

Declan shrugs. “Eh. I mean... did you see the way they ran?”

I grin at him. “They were so fast.”

“Predinner show at the finest.”

“Do you ever think we’re bad people?”

Declan glances at me. “Us?”

“Yeah.”

“Hold on, I’m thinking back to stuffing a body in a cupboard, abducting a terrified man, cutting his finger off, forcing a teenager to drive

us, stealing a car from another teenager... no, I think we're good," Declan says.

"Me too." I fall onto his lap while crunching on the chicken that was clearly made with hatred and a dash of spice. Not good spice. Just spice.

"What are you doing?" he asks as he glances down at me.

"Touching you. You like it, don't you?"

He stares at me, too stubborn to admit it. "You're going to choke eating like that."

"I'm pretty sure you'd save me."

"You sound very confident for a man who'd once been threatened by me."

"Those were just like meet cutes. They're all the rage now," I assure him.

"Ah of course."

As I finish my sandwich, I grab a fry and aim it toward his mouth. He reluctantly takes it. "You're just making me eat the cardboard fries because you don't want them."

"Mittens made out."

"She sure as fuck did."

"That's alright, my company was better," I say as I roll into him, grabbing him and biting his side.

"What are you doing?"

"Nibbling."

"Why?"

"Because when we get home, I'm going to do a whole lot more than nibble."

Declan stares at me for a long moment. "What the hell are we still doing here choking on this shit for?"

“Pre-coital torture. It’s all the rage.”

“Is it?” he asks as he grabs me, yanking me to him and kissing my lips. “Then maybe we need to skip the foreplay.”

“Got it,” I say as I jump up, grab the blanket, toss the trash into a bin and pick him up.

“What the hell are you doing?” he hollers as I take off at a jog with my manprize. Walkers are looking at me strangely which might have to do with the fact that Declan is not a small man that I have tossed over my shoulder. “Let me down.”

“Your pecker better be ready, I’m eager for dessert.”

“Dear god. Please, take me back to the seafood restaurant. Maybe they’ll arrest me.”

“I’d break you out. No matter where you go, I will be following, watching, and coming for you.”

“Sounds extremely suspicious.”

“You love it, and you know it.”

“For some reason,” he grumbles as he fights to escape my hold as I carry him back to the car with a smile on my face.