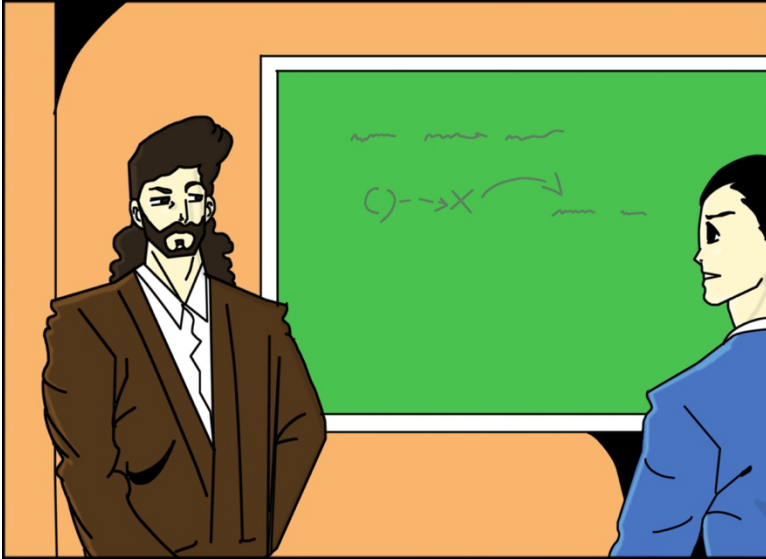


Chapter 7

“I’m A biTCH!”



It was the middle of September and school hadn't been in session long, but Professor Sarantos already felt the itch to fly off on an adventure. He did not know how to avoid being trapped under the waterfall of boredom at school.

It didn't matter what type of adventure, just an adventure, any adventure; anything to get him out of the dreamless drivel of monotony that he endured every day. He enjoyed teaching, and the students were sponges, absorbing anything he shared with them. Though they were hungry and passionate, his blood boiled with emotion as his soul begged to be freed out into the spacious world.

“Professor, did you hear me?”

His mind came back into the modest room and rejoined his body. Slowly his head turned towards the young man with slicked back hair who wore a navy-blue blazer with an insignia representing the college. The young lad gazed at him from the top tier in an oversized room that was never usually filled with students. No one ever fought their way to the front row. They were all indifferent towards him, showing very little enthusiasm.

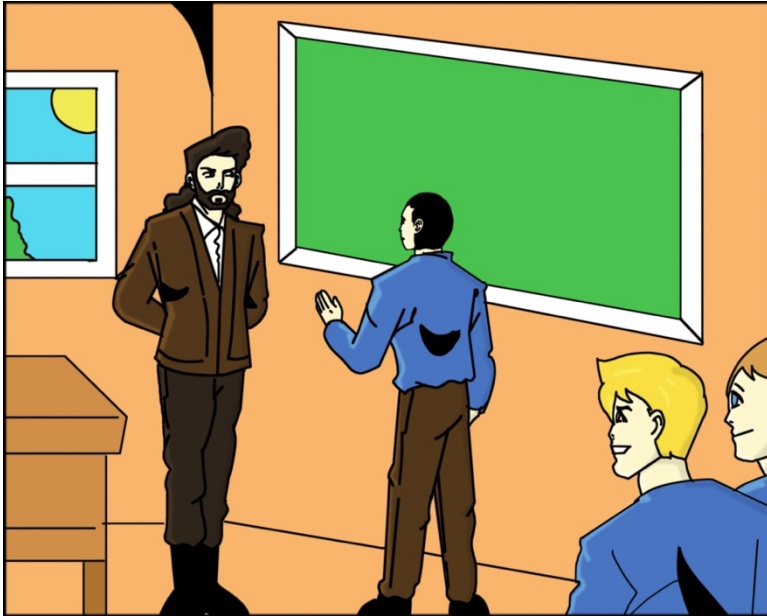
“No, sorry, I didn’t hear the question. Can you repeat it?”

The young man spoke confidently, with a raspy voice. “Do you ever take students with you on an expedition?”

He thought about the question for a moment as he paced the room. When he ended back in front of his desk, he answered decisively. “Well, I suppose I have in the past. I actually still have a couple of students that are with me currently. I typically only choose a student with exceptional grades and, of course, seniors get priority.”

“Ah, Professor, over here. Several freshmen I know would love to join one of your expeditions, including me!” The enthusiasm exploded from a young man brave enough to sit in the front row. His eyes were wide, and he didn’t look like he’d ever shaved.

Sarantos looked around, frowned, then tilted his head up and curled his mouth. “Sorry, I’m not a babysitter.” The Professor could use words like knives when he wanted to, eliciting a beautiful and terrible fear.



The room exploded in laughter and hand clapping. At least, that’s what he believed the thunderous echo was, and it was comforting to hear a few chuckles from the 30 students that bothered to attend this class. Students rarely jumped onto the bandwagon with both feet. Simple was hard for them.

The day dragged after that until he sat in his study. It was challenging to enjoy dinner. He felt worn out. Sarantos looked left to the clock. It was only 8 o’clock.

The kid was supposed to be finding them something fun to investigate, and he hadn't heard from him in two weeks.

Mary entered the room; he loved her fierce smile. Yes, it was a curse. He was born with eyes he could never close.

“Here's your tea, Professor, and I brought you some of the lemon cookies I made this morning. I hope you enjoy them. Can I get you anything else before I leave for the night?”

“No thanks, Mary. They smell and look delicious, but why did you bring me ten of them? Do you think my depressing mood needs a little overindulgence on the sweets? Or are you just trying to fatten me up so I stay stuck in this house forever and never leave you for another adventure?”

She was collecting the dirty plates and shook her head. “Oh, no Professor, the young lad called and is coming over tonight. And I know how much he enjoys eating.”

“Do you mean the kid, Gorilla?”

“Yes, that's him. He called and told me not to disturb you. You were grading papers at the time of his call. He should arrive soon.” She was gracious and had a dignified air around her.

“Thank you.”

No sooner had he thanked her than the doorbell rang. Maybe he had a new adventure for them? Curiosity and intoxication lit up his insides and the anticipation almost made him jump for joy. He often jumped to conclusions because his thoughts were not to be trusted. Somehow, he contained his eagerness.



“I’ll drop these dirty dishes off in the kitchen and let Gorilla inside. You stay seated, Professor and please enjoy your tea.” He nodded and smiled as he exhaled contently. A man could get used to this.

The sound of laughter filled the hallway as soon as the door opened. The kid almost danced into the room, and he was wearing a sinister smirk.

“Hi ya, Doc. Yummy. I thought you’d cheese it with the cookies, knowing I was coming over.”

“No, Mary brought extras for you. I think she likes you.”

“She’s the cat’s pajamas, that’s for sure.”

As if on cue, Mary reappeared, bringing some tea for Gorilla.
“Anything else, Young Master?”

“No, Mary, we’re good.” Like the road to madness, Sarantos never wished harder for an adventure.

The kid didn’t wait to acknowledge her response as he jumped into the cookies with the zest of a teenager in love.

“Doc, the bee’s knees, yep, the bee’s knees!!” The kid could barely contain his enjoyment as he pointed at the cookies and grabbed the tea perched in front of him.

“I might try one, just so Mary doesn’t get upset with me. Or I might not make it past the night because of my chronically low blood sugar.”

Gorilla threw one in a never ending cave where food went to disappear, known as his mouth. As it melted in his mouth, it

left a refreshing jolt of lemon, helplessly lingering on the edges of his tongue.

“Wow, leave me at least one, kid.”

Gorilla nodded, because he had such a mouthful he couldn't have possibly spoken.



The doorbell rang again, and soon after, Charlie rolled into the study. She looked well rested and was drowning in the aroma of refreshment, with a slightly golden glow on her already gorgeous skin.

Her eyes took in the room as she nodded. “It would appear you two are preoccupied. I’m glad I didn’t call you on the blower and just came over instead.” She sat down and waved

her arms in the air. “You two continue babbling, and when you’re done, I have some thought-provoking news, if you’re interested.”

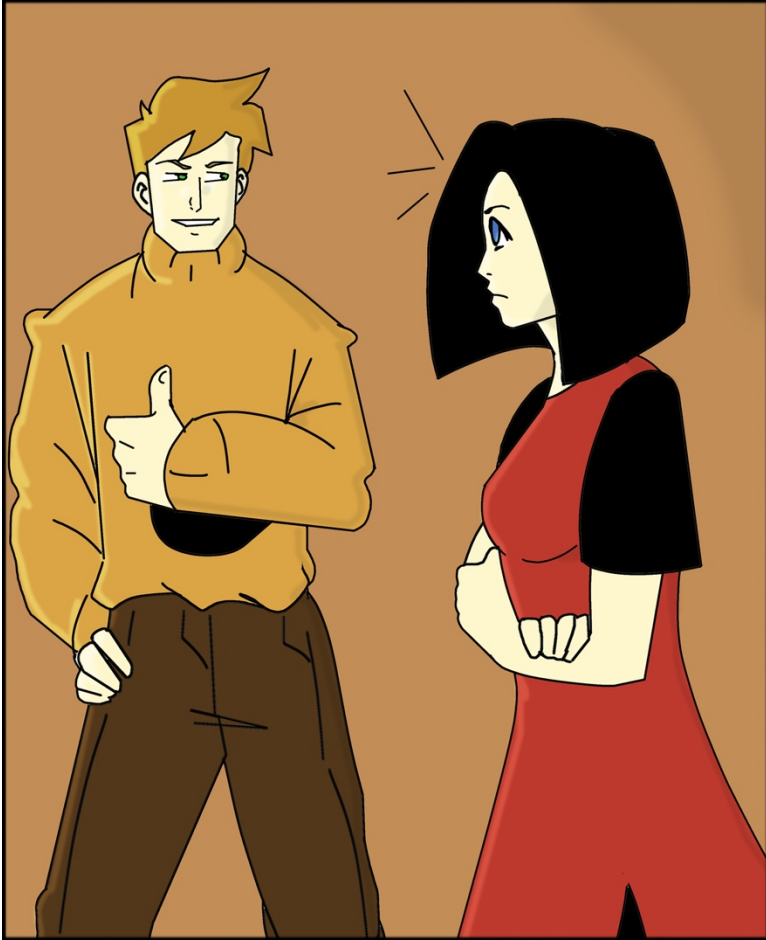
Gorilla quickly swallowed a lemon-flavored bliss, like a summer in a bag, and blurted out words as cookie crumbs flew out of his mouth. “Interesting information is always on my list. So, what’s got your kisser in a twist?”

“I’m glad you asked. I heard that the Peach Rose, made out of rose gold and filled with tiny miniature diamonds, was stolen from Duke Clifford in England. He’s had his own private investigators searching for it for the past five years, with no success. It’s quite hush-hush, but it’s worth a bomb and the reward is rather substantial.”

The kid almost choked on his remaining bits of cookie. “Hey, don’t steal my thunder. I haven’t shared my adventure yet.”

Sarantos grinned and sat back. “This is keen, you both doing the work. Okay, let’s hear it kid. Whatcha got?” The Professor always got uneasy when there was only one loud chorus singing the same song.

Charlie looked at Gorilla and her brows lifted as the sneer on her face confirmed she was up for the challenge. “Spill it, Gorilla. Mine was last tracked to Japan. That’d be a wild trip.”



The kid glared at her but then threw her a kiss. “The Doc will be happy to know my adventure would take us to Alaska.”

“Too cold. You want me to croak?”

“The Doc loves Alaska. I have the adventure of a lifetime waiting.” He grinned. “You don’t have to go.”

“Thanks, I’ll keep that in mind when me and the Professor go to Japan.”

The kid didn’t wait to give up. “I’ll pretend it doesn’t bother me, but we both know I disagree.” He looked towards the Professor and revealed. “The finely carved box of the ancient Mongolian king Genghis Khan that supposedly holds the dagger he used as an adolescent to kill his half-brother over food. This happened after someone poisoned his father and they forced his mother out on her own with nine children.”

Sarantos whistled as he thought about it. “That is something. What the hell is it doing in Alaska? I’ve only heard chatter, nothing verifiable. No one knows if it really exists.”

Charlie lost it. Her brows went up, and her arms folded threateningly. “Okay, I can’t help it. I’m a bitch, and I can’t beat this fascination you guys have for each other. My eyes and heart are seeing red. I can try to act like I’m not jealous right now, but I am, and nothing can scratch this itch unless I punch Gorilla in the face.”

The kid laughed as he sensed he was getting under her skin. This was a rare thing. “That’s right, doll face, you exist to be my bitch! Come closer and I’ll scratch, scratch, scratch that itch for you.”

“That will not happen.” Charlie grinned broadly at him, then smacked him in the right shoulder.

Gorilla knew better. He knew Charlie was getting ready to make him feel bad about himself and pretend she wasn't jealous.

“Come on Charlie, don't do it. You'll regret it. I find both challenges worth the time and money.” The Professor thought about both of them as they rambled on. “What do you two think, babe? Can we cover both in a timely manner?” Gorilla didn't have to finish the thought. The entire room knew what he was saying.



Charlie sighed. “Yes, but we should find the Rose first because it’s more time specific. I can’t help myself. I’m obsessed with a capital O. It’s important to me, Professor.” She turned her back after tapping the kid’s arm again. She barely looked his way after that.

“I know how this goes, Charlie, but I can’t help myself either. I agree to go for the Rose first if the Doc wants to. I could lose control and pout like you, but I look stupid when I do that, so not today.” The kid seemed proud of himself for not stooping to her level. Sometimes you have to keep trying things until you are sitting in the saddle just right.

Sarantos looked at Charlie, then the kid. He’d heard enough. Gorilla’s thoughts were closer to reality. The kid seemed all grown up now.

Mary came into the room with tea for Charlie and some extra cookies.

She glanced at each of them. “Something wrong in here?”

“No, Mary, we are all good. The kids had a small disagreement, is all. It was both thrilling and terrifying to be alone with them. We got along like a house on fire!”

She laughed. “Good. I wouldn’t want to remove the lemon clouds from undeserving young people. Can I get anyone anything else?”

“No, Mary, we are all good. They won’t be staying much longer, anyway.”

Charlie grimaced as the kid looked up and feigned a shocked expression that bordered on total confusion. Yet, the kid knew he was serious.



“I think we can first take that challenge of the Rose. Although, we rarely become sleuths in the proper sense of the word. It is intriguing. And why Japan?”

“The Duke thinks they might have sold it and had the diamonds removed, and the gold melted down. He thinks it’s in Japan.”

“How big is this, Rose?”

“About twelve inches in circumference, and the stem makes it 32 inches tall. They specially made it back in the 11th century for one of his great-grandmothers who loved roses and had one of the largest rose gardens during that time period. It was said she spent all her days and as many hours at night as she could in that garden walking, sitting, and painting the roses.”

The kid winked. “Well, that sounds divine. No, I’m not being sarcastic. I think it’s a remarkable story and we should find it before it’s ruined, and we could then use the money we make there to finance our trip across the Pacific to Alaska.”

“Sounds like a win-win, kid. Charlie, we’ll need all the notes of everyone who’s ever tried to find the Rose. Schedule an appointment with the Duke within the next few weeks and give me a heads up. I’ll have to get a Professor to fill in for me. And again, why Japan? And how did they lose contact? It sounds like someone kept it hidden for a while until the heat was off.”

The kid nodded. “Give me a heads up too, oh love of mine. I have a part-time job writing for a magazine now that I’ve made it in the real world, but this might give me some leverage if I can get a bitch of an article out of it.”

His grin and choice of words made Charlie chuckle.



“You’re a funny boy, yes you are,” she said. “If I want to keep you, do I have to break you again and again?”

As the kids bantered back and forth, Sarantos mind wandered. These were just the adventures he was hoping for, both just as alluring as the last one. He had to admit, the Alaska trip was the one he didn't want to miss.

It was an artifact based on a story, based on an incident that was an assumption. He loved the adventure of objects that might or might not exist.

“It’s getting late, kids, and I need to get up early for my class in the morning.”

“Sure, Doc.”

The kid stood up and started for the door, but Charlie held him up. Everything about them was sometimes awkward and out of sync.

“Wait Gorilla. If the Professor doesn't mind, I'd like to finish my tea.”

The Professor acknowledged, “Sorry, I should've let you finish your drink. That was rude to rush you out.”

“No problem. Almost finished.”

The kid came back and sat down.

“Doc, I’m still getting information on the box and hoping to have more to go on in about a week or two.”

“That’s good. You both turned out to be the bomb. I couldn’t have asked for better students to assist me. I’m looking forward to both adventures!”



“I know the Duke would like us to start as soon as we can. I wonder if we could use more help on this one, because of the sensitive nature of it?”

“That might not be a bad idea. I’ll think on it this evening. I do my best thinking when I lie down at night and then when I fall into these fitful, legendary dreams that help me decipher puzzles out of my spider-webbed brain.”

“I’m the same, Doc.”

“Me too,” said Charlie.

He knew they all had so much on their minds all day long that the silence of the night was the only moment their minds were clear enough to think properly.

“A freshman asked me today if I take students on adventures. I told them I don’t babysit.”

Charlie looked at Gorilla and they both burst open into laughter.

“That sounds about right, Doc. You used to babysit us, so I suppose that got old quick. I remember you thought we could get hurt, and that seemed to stress you out a lot.” Some things never change.

“Yes, kid, it did. You two are of a different mind-set, though. I don’t feel that way with this group of students.”

“Maybe you haven’t given them the chance to shine, Professor,” she said as she flipped her hair playfully.

Sarantos laughed and knew he was now trapped in a burning cage.

