

The machine sparked and fizzled for a moment, the lifeless body briefly twitching on the laboratory table. Glassy eyes opened wide, a weak groan escaped the mouth. A golden glow emanated from the chest.

Then, as soon as it all started, it stopped. The corpse returned to just that - a lifeless corpse.

Viktra sighed. She had stopped even feeling disappointed with her experiments. Scribbling down notes in her notebook, she sat down at one of the many desks in her laboratory, eyes trained on the body that laid still.

"Perhaps it's the alloy," She muttered to herself. "Something reacting with the blood." She thought for a second more. "Organic matter from the Sleeping Beast won't work. The body will reject it."

She sighed again, rubbing her temples. Pulling the pocketwatch out of her labcoat, she paused for a moment. She had been in the lab nearly twenty hours.

Leaning on the table with her head in her hands, Viktra shut her eyes tightly. Her prolonged day would explain the headache that had been plaguing her. She rubbed her temples again.

She glanced over her shoulder again to the corpse, a faint flickering glow still coming from its chest.

*It's nothing close to the Unbreakable Heart.*

Viktra balled her hands into fists. It never was. It was never anything close. No matter how many hours spent in her lab, how many cadavers she examined, it could never amount to anything. Nothing like the miracle that saved Elise.

Viktra returned to the desk, to the map of Lamordia. Notes were scribbled all over, X's crossing out sections of the map, all in a desperate search for Elise.

Viktra told herself it was for the Heart. She told herself this was all in search of her scientific masterpiece, of her magnum opus. Never mind what she would do when she actually *found* the damn thing. That was all that mattered.

Viktra shut her eyes. That's what she had to tell herself. She couldn't think about Elise. This was for the Heart. Nothing more, nothing less.

~ ~ ~

*"Hey, Doc," Elise leaned against the doorway to Viktra's private laboratory. "Committing more crimes against nature today?"*

*Viktra pursed her lips. "I told you to not call me that. It's unprofessional."*

*"Oh, I'm sorry," Elise said, feigning an apology. "When did you get so posh?" She flung her hair back dramatically, faking an accent. "I'm Doctor Viktra Mordenheim, and I won't let silly things such as morals stand in the way of true science!"*

*Despite herself, Viktra almost laughed. "I do not sound like that."*

*"You very much sound like that," Elise said with a smirk. She walked over to Viktra's dissection table, where a doppelganger was cut open, revealing slimy innards.*

*"Ooh," Elise said, reaching her hand out. Viktra smacked her away.*

*"Don't touch that," Viktra said firmly.*

*"What was that?" Elise said. "Touch it? Like this?"*

*She poked the lean gray arm of the doppelganger. When it twitched, Elise yelped and jumped back.*

*Viktra felt her lips twitch in a smirk. "There's currently a chemical applied to the veins that causes muscles to contract at a touch. I'm still tweaking it."*

*Elise wiped her hand on her trousers. "That is disgusting."*

*"I told you not to touch it." As Viktra returned to her notes, she paused. "Now that I consider it, what are you doing here? I don't believe I scheduled a shipment today."*

*Elise shrugged. "I was in the neighborhood."*

*Viktra turned around, raising an eyebrow. "Taking a lovely stroll through the desolate icy wastelands?"*

*Elise grinned. "I knew you had a sense of humor."*

*Viktra stuttered for a second, before waving away the comment. "That still doesn't answer my question. What are you doing here?"*

*"Am I not allowed to stop by for a chat?" Elise moved to sit on Viktra's desk, nearly giving Viktra a heart attack when she almost knocked over a beaker.*

*"Not when you're disrupting delicate research," Viktra muttered, stabilizing the beaker and moving it to the opposite side of the desk from Elise.*

*"Which brings me to my question," Elise said, leaning forward. "Why don't you just lock me out at this point?" She smirked.*

*Though Viktra could hear the teasing tone in her associate, it still gave her pause. She hummed under her breath.*

*"Science is all about structure," Viktra said. "You can combine the same two chemicals and every time, the same thing will happen. The human body is unimaginably complex, yet predictable."*

*Viktra looked to Elise, meeting her dark brown eyes. "But you're anything but predictable, Elise. And that's fascinating."*

*She stood, beginning to pace around her small laboratory. "Life is merely about the right chemical reactions. But thought? Sentience?" Viktra paused, gazing up towards the ceiling. "It's nigh impossible. It would take decades of research."*

*She shook her head, disrupting her own ramblings. "That's why I must conquer death first. If I cannot create sentience, I will preserve it."*

*Elise was still, not taking her eyes off Viktra. "That's... weirdly noble of you."*

*"I am not noble," Viktra said, returning to her desk. "I am merely a scientist."*

*Before long, Elise was entranced by a shelf full of chemicals, peering intently at them all but being careful not to touch any this time. Viktra watched her as she moved. Every slight movement, every curious facial expression. She was sure, fluid in her movements, her body perfectly proportioned and face perfectly symmetrical.*

*When Viktra imagined the perfect lifeform, she always thought of Elise.*

*Soon, however, Elise realized the time. "Shit," She muttered. "I should get going. The boys are gonna be waiting for me."*

*Viktra nodded. "Safe travels."*

*Elise grinned, but winced, going into a coughing fit for a moment. She recovered, wiping her mouth, though Viktra could still see traces of blood.*

*"It's nothing," Elise said, putting on a charming smile. "Just a little sick. I'll be over it soon."*

*Viktra's brow furrowed. "Elise, all you need to do is say the word, and I could make you a new body."*

*"I'll pass," Elise said, drifting towards the door. "I like this body. I'm just here to facilitate your bizarre experiments, Doc, not be a part of them." With that, she winked, and left.*

*Viktra remained in silence for some time, before she scribbled down notes of what she knew of Elise's ailment and physiology. Why would Elise not want to be saved? Viktra could make her again, reborn, in a body that never aged. She would leave this laboratory blessed.*

*Viktra shook the thought of her head. Using her scientific genius for such frivolous things was ridiculous.*

*~ ~ ~*

Viktra woke with a start to the knock at her door. Hurriedly standing up, she answered it. Her lab assistant - a skittish, scrawny human teenager named Jakob - stood with an armload of papers and letters.

"Ah, Dr. Mordenheim," He said in that high pitched, nasally voice of his. "You have some letters from Ludendorf Universi-"

"Leave them in the study," Viktra snapped, the dream of a memory leaving a bitter taste on her tongue. "I'll see to them soon." With that, she shut the door in his face.

Viktra grit her teeth. Ever since arriving here, her dreams had been painfully vivid, less like dreams and more like relived memories. She could never quite escape them. Even now, her brain still groggy with sleep, flashes came to her like pinpricks on her brain.

*Elise laughed, perched on Viktra's desk. Viktra wasn't sure what she had said - she didn't think it was all that funny, but Elise apparently found it hysterical. Viktra wished she could hear a laugh like that more often.*

"Damn it," Viktra muttered, trying to shake the oncoming storm of memories.

*"Elise?" Viktra wasn't one to get worried, but now her brain was flooded with panic. "Elise!" No matter what, she would not wake. Her lips were parted slightly, and it almost looked like she was asleep. But no matter what Viktra did, those beautiful dark brown eyes would not open.*

She stumbled back towards her desk, pinching the bridge of her nose. She felt a cold bead of sweat run down her back.

*"Stop it!" Viktra kicked and fought against the constable that tried to detain her. The sound of shattering glass rang out in her laboratory, and all hell broke loose. Chemicals smoked*

*and electricity from the machine she was using to bring Elise back filled the room. Panicked shouts from the constables seemed to deafen everything else. And yet, a figure was slowly sitting up from the table, clutching her head. Beautiful dark brown eyes met Viktra's.*

Viktra shook herself from the memory, breathing heavily. When she had regained control of her thoughts, she paused. Why were her cheeks wet?