

File Name: We're Not Animals

Owner: Dark Violet

File Location: www.patreon.com/SomeonesPC

File Type: Story:Adult:F/F: Midnight Lycanroc x Jolteon

Caption Text: Support us on Patreon for special art, stories, and more!

Details: Don't you want to be a part of the sparkling world above...?

We're Not Animals

A Someone's PC Tale

By Dark Violet

Down here, the air was damp and heavy, choked with the scents of oil and trash.

Natalya hung on the metal railing of the fire escape, leaning over above the ignored canal that snuck between the basements of old buildings, dark waters stagnant around the thick pillars that held up the L-train. But she was looking upwards.

Up there gleamed emerald rail signals, and golden traffic lights, and ruby radio aerials, and diamond offices. Up there hummed a muted susurrantion of culture, of life, of *civility*, hanging like a sausage from a stick, just out of reach.

And down here? This was what it all stood on. This grimy underbelly, where no one came but the animals.

Which was why they were about to leave.

Natalya straightened up, her jacket shifting in the gentle breeze. Her messenger bag slung over one shoulder shifted, clinking as it swayed against her. She pushed the rust-dusted fur from her wrist to find the watch. Its little cracked display showed 02:00:26.

Clickclickclick. Her claws were quivering. Natalya pressed them against her fur to calm herself, their dark grey stone cool against her hide. She pressed her paws into the thick jean shorts, her claws teasing the already-frayed material. She let out a short huff. *Ready to go.*

Nerves quavered around her chest. Knowing she shouldn't, Natalya slipped a quick, indulgent glance at the Jolteon sitting beside her. Peaches formed a smooth, arrow-like shape dark against the glimmers and fade of the undercity's mists. The skyscraper's lights gleamed in her large, rosey eyes. She was staring down into the inky waters of the canal, her needle-like fur raised and twitching in the twirling static of the world around her.

Natalya watched her from the corner of her eye. A lifetime living as a housepet meant that Peaches didn't talk much; usually, Eevees would understand the nuances of growls and flicked ears fairly early on, but she'd made it to being a Jolteon without learning more than a few basic grunts. And yet, she had still lived with humans; knew some of their words, knew when they waked, when they walked, how they *lived*. The oddness of her situation captivated Natalya. So animal - and yet, so human...

But that was a long time ago, and a world away. Now she was here, and staring back out at the world she had once glimpsed. Peaches was her soulmate in this world; ready to rise, just like Natalya was.

A train rumbled over the elevated tracks. Green electricity crackled between the rails, and the sharp tang of the sparks misted the air. The thick concrete supports made trembling ripples in the black water below. Docked up against the side of the building, just below the fire escape, the grime-coated tarp of their raft bobbed in the pungent zephyrs.

Natalya checked the watch again. She needed to wait until 02:03:00. That's what the guide said.

She turned to look at the building they were standing at the foot of. Fourteen floors (she'd counted herself), dull grey, delightfully silent in these early hours. The top was a silhouette against the pale orange smog.

Her bones itched. They always did when they hung around the canal. She sat back against the railing, her claws idly playing against the concrete spikes that protruded from her neck ruff. Their stoney edges had long been worn and shattered; rebar-like bone gently rusted in the damp air.

But she wore them with pride. She'd heard of other Midnight Lycanroc beyond the city limits who had slate for their bones, or granite, or anything else sturdier and sharper - but they could keep their wild ways. Natalya was of the city.

And tonight, she'd prove it.

She'd follow the guide, rise up, and do something no Pokémon had ever done before.

Her watch beeped. 02:03:00 exactly. She threw her arms in the air, the smile hurting her lips with how it stretched across her face. Leaning down, she wrapped her arms around Peaches' chest and kissed her on the muzzle - tilting her head in the way she'd learned. A low rumble escaped her lips. *Excitement!*

Peaches purred back the same, large pink eyes gleaming in the distant city lights. Warm tongues touched. Wet fangs pressed on lips. Natalya's heart leapt...

But she shouldn't indulge. Can't let it last too long, now.

Natalya pulled herself back before she could sink into the embrace, her messenger bag clattering, her feet carrying her to the concrete wall where the fire escape met the office building's foundations. She rested her pads against the gravel surface, feeling for its shape, the size of the grains, the age of the cement. The guide hadn't shown how to do this, but she knew how *she* could do it.

After tonight, she'd no longer be seen as some streetdog. No human could claim she was a mere animal ever again.

Grit started to tumble from between her claws. She slipped her aura into those cracks, cutting into the cement, widening the gaps and probing deeper. The metal fire escape clattered with the tumbling gravel and sand as the hole widened, deepened...

A warm smile spread across her face. She would do it.

Tonight, she was going to rob a bank.

* * *

Natalya clambered through the hole, sand pouring down her claws where they cut into the edges. She ducked lower, keeping one paw protectively on Peaches - the Jolteon clinging to her back, sniffing in the dusty air - so that she wouldn't scrape her head on the concrete.

The room inside was small, barely a few paces across, and sand danced in orange emergency lights. The air was heavy, with that warmth that only came from clunking machinery. In the shadowy recess of rusted iron buttresses glinted a metal ladder, and when she followed it up with her gaze-

Perfect. She'd been right! She'd broken right into the base of the elevator shaft. Now she just had to get to the fifth floor.

She repositioned her messenger bag and grunted at Peaches, who gave a quiet purr in response. She looked back over her shoulder - the Jolteon was glancing between the lights, and the highways of cable that ran down the walls.

Natalya gave another short grunt. *Later*. Then, making sure Peaches wasn't about to fall off, she began to climb the metal ladder.

She strained against her cargo. Peaches was surprisingly easy to hoist - slender paws gripped tightly enough that she barely moved with each rung. But the messenger bag swung freely, the strap biting into her shoulder. Dammit - how had Samantha Romanov done it? She'd made it look so easy in the guide...

All she had to do, though, was take her time. Stay focused, stay on task. She glared at each rung in turn and didn't stop until Peaches chirped in her ear.

She looked around. A grimy panel to one side of the elevator shaft, that might have once been white, had a number '3' engraved into it.

Third floor. Perfect.

There was a small platform set back from the shaft, and Natalya hoisted herself onto it. She let Peaches jump down before she dropped her messenger bag with a clatter. She undid one of the flaps and pulled out a screwdriver - she'd found this one months ago, diving in the canal. It was amazing what you could find there.

She paused then, back against the old concrete, cocking an ear and staring up into the darkness of the shaft. Peaches' claws tapped against the metal grating of the platform, and somewhere in the distance, an idle motor hummed...

Apart from that, the air was warm and still.

In the guide, an elevator had swept past, almost killing Samantha Romanov, before Nathan Spear pulled her back against the wall. Natalya leaned out from their alcove, peering up into the distance above them. There - several floors up, the metal panels of the elevator's floor.

Natalya's hackles rose, and she gave a short, quiet bark. *Watch out.*

Peaches glanced back at her, nodded, and stepped out along the girders.

Against one wall of the shaft were two great metal doors, dull with dust and grease like the rest of the shaft. Staying close to the concrete, Natalya edged her way towards them.

Peaches was at the doors first. She lifted up on her hind legs, pawing at the middle.

Balancing on the metal buttresses, Natalya clung to the side of the shaft and traced her claws along the door's edge, finding the small box she expected. She stuck the screwdriver into the base of it, and jerked the front panel loose, revealing a small handle inside.

It was odd. The elevator not flying past... it left an uncomfortable crawling feeling over her shoulders. Her hackles stayed half-raised as she gripped the handle and began to turn it.

With a groan and a short squeal, the doors parted by a couple of inches. Peaches nosed halfway through, and stayed there, peering through to the other side. Natalya watched her closely, her body still except for the slight twitches from her head moving from side to side...

“Prrrw!” *Safe.*

Natalya heaved the handle around another few turns until there was just enough space to fit through herself, and then followed Peaches out.

The elevator’s warm, heavy atmosphere was replaced with a cool kiss of wide-open air, and with the tang of cleaning chemicals that tingled the nose. They were still inside - but this was a *human* inside. Not some dank culvert - a high, silver ceiling supported by vast marbled pillars, reaching up from great vistas of tiles. Sweeping cliffs were bordered by sheets of glass, looking down across a cascade of colour - and all around, set into the sheer walls, were smaller buildings heralded by multi-coloured, half-intelligible signs.

Natalya had been in here twice before. Both times had been during the day: the first time, she’d barely made it a few paces before being stopped by a heavy-set human with a dour face, and unceremoniously dropped back onto the street; the second time she’d learnt to shadow a human family and their own pet Houndoom, and had managed to spend a good while looking around. Back then, the place had been crowded, noisy, *smelly*, with a hundred different fragrances of food and humans and what-humans-tried-to-smell-like all crisscrossing and overlapping. The smaller buildings had also been bright, gleaming in enticing ways; humans had flocked in and out of them, and she too felt beckoned inside...

And yet, it wasn’t like that now. Now everything was dark, shrouded in the blues of the night, broken only by the occasional green or red light on little boxes on the ceiling, and the occasional pale white panel every few dozen paces.

But the change in scene was expected. The guide had shown Natalya what it would be like - it had even told her about the metal shutters that now covered all the little buildings.

Peaches stood tall in the midst of it all, gazing at the shops, the little Jolteon a black silhouette against the light reflecting off the tiles.

There was a way she held herself - such curiosity, such grace...

Natalya closed her eyes. The creeping feeling at the back of her neck was subsiding; she knew what to do. No time to delay, lest the humans that wander the buildings at night find them...

One paw on Peaches’ neck, Natalya led them to one of the buildings opposite. Unlike the other signs, the human words on this one were stocky and clear:

South Galar National Bank

Natalya had researched the words. ‘South Galar’ roughly translated to the land that they were in. ‘National’ meant it belonged to that land, and ‘Bank’ meant a place with a lot of money.

And that was key. If you needed to get anywhere above the canal, money was how - everywhere you looked, it was being handed from human to human. It was how people rode the L-train, or got the people in the buildings to give you things. It was how you got into some buildings in the first place. She hadn't needed the guide to tell her how important money was. But now she knew *how* to get it...

They paused beneath the metal shutters. Natalya tapped Peaches.

The Jolteon nodded, and with Natalya crouching down, hopped up onto her shoulders. Natalya stood up next to the shutters as Peaches balanced unsteadily, her hindpaws finding the cracked concrete of her spikes. She stood up and placed her forepaws on the wall beside the grating, looking at the long metal housing along the top. The warmth of her hips pressed into the back of her head, even through the thick fur of her mane.

Come on... focus. They had planned this. Natalya had shown her how Nathan Spear had used his little human device to open these...

Electricity crackled and buzzed, and Natalya's fur rose as it trembled through her. Everything flashed in sudden yellow as a bolt leapt from Peaches towards the box atop the metal shutters. A clatter split her ears, a heavy grumble running through her arms - and the shutters began to rise.

It was two long, heart-pounding seconds before Peaches ceased her bolt. The moment she did, the shutters jolted to a stop with a final alarm-like rattle - Peaches was already leaping off her shoulders and running underneath the small gap they'd made. Natalya dropped the messenger bag, kicked it underneath, and then dove under herself.

The shutters were squeezed just in front of some large, ceiling-to-floor windows, with only a slim alcove by the doorway. They huddled together in the small gap, panting heavily, their fronts pressed against one another.

Okay. Okay, they'd made it this far. Natalya grasped Peaches with her stone claws, pressing the Jolteon's head against her chest. Her leather jacket hung around large yellow ears. Natalya smirked at the sight - but knew she couldn't afford to wait any more than Samantha Romanov had. No time to make sure that hadn't been heard. Natalya shifted to the side, just able to open another flap of the messenger bag and stick her paw in. Somewhere... there!

She yanked out a small metal wire, looped around itself like a long hook, or like a human letter 'U'. Now - to remember what the guide showed her...

She stuck it in her mane, left it there for a moment, and then delicately slid it out, before shaking her head like she was ridding herself of water. Strands of her mane tumbled across her face. She smirked at Peaches.

The Jolteon stared back, paws twitching. Her heart was thumping, even through Natalya's chest.

Natalya sat up, feeling for the small hole beneath the handle of the door. She stuck the small metal wire inside, wiggled it around, and...

With a smirk, she pulled down the handle of the door-

It didn't move.

Natalya stared at it. She stuck the wire back in the hole, wiggling it around again. There was definitely something in there - something the wire was touching. She was doing exactly what Samantha Romanov had done in the guide! What had gone wrong!?

She tried the handle again. The door refused to budge.

Natalya glanced worriedly at Peaches, who stared back at her before crouching down to peer under the shutters. The back of her neck was sharp with white hackles.

Fuck. *Fuck*. Hang on - Samantha Romanov had said some words, hadn't she? What were they...

"All... most..." Natalya grunted, her tongue smushing against her fangs to try and produce the human sounds. "All. Most. Dare."

The wire clattered against the inside of the hole. She tried the handle again - and then again and again, yanking it down. Nothing. Nothing!

Peaches' body jerked with a short bark below her breath. *Watch out*.

Natalya's lips curled as a snarl rose up inside her. She jabbed the wire into the hole, and it suddenly gave way - when she pulled it out, it was half-twisted.

She glared at it for a long moment, before slamming her fist down on the tile she was sitting on. It shattered, and a fist-sized lump of concrete leapt from the ground beneath, tingling with her aura. She grabbed it, and slammed it against the hole beneath the door handle. The metal crunched, buckled, and the door flew open.

Natalya clutched Peaches to her chest with one paw and her bag in the other, and yanked them both inside. The door drifted closed, its mangled frame banging against the housing before resting there.

Natalya tossed the lump of concrete aside, completing the guide's words in a low, breathy mutter. "I'm. In."

The carpeted floor scratched at her rear as she slumped on it. She let out a long, shaky breath. Where was she? She realised was staring, without quite seeing. The world blurred around her.

She blinked, forcing herself to see through the veil. Plush human seats surrounded the walls, interspersed with impossibly green monstera plants. Unintelligible signs hung above them, filled with so many words that Natalya would have to spend an hour with her book of words at each one. At the far side of the room sat a long desk through the maze of ropes and metal poles; another 'South Galar National Bank' sign sat above it, these letters thinner and softer, and similarly unlit. The whole scene was cast in sharp shadows by thin white light behind the desk.

But no humans. No threat, not right now. And yet...

She drew up her legs, resting her arms on her knees, and burying her head between them. She was shaking. She clenched her claws around her legs to try and stop it. The room's air no longer felt cool, but icy - it stung her chest.

How could she have got the guide wrong?

There was a wet prodding at her thigh. She lifted her head above her arms - Peaches' eyes still held their pink glow, even in the half-darkness, wide and imploring.

Natalya deflated, reaching out a stoically-still paw to caress her cheek. The Jolteon purred, nuzzling into her paw, but quickly returned to giving Natalya that concerned stare.

Natalya sighed. They had to pause. She needed to figure this out.

* * *

She found a television sitting on one end of the desk. It was chunky, and the screen was small, but there was the usual slot in the bottom of it that the guide could fit in. But when she pressed the big button with the little circle picture, it didn't turn on. Even after she found the cable at the back and traced it back to the holes in the wall, it refused to turn to life.

Natalya turned to Peaches imploringly. The Jolteon eyed the cable and let out a small sigh.

The hum of electricity suffused the room, the quivering bolt of lighting flickering across them both. Natalya turned the screen of the television away from the door, and then reached into her messenger bag.

She always kept the guide in its box. She'd had many things like it - other guides, for all kinds of strange things - but too many had either fallen off the raft or had their thin black insides unspooled in some way. Not this time. The guide she'd been sure to keep safe. If this worked, it would be worth everything else she'd ever found.

She opened the clamshell case with a *pop*, and lifted it out, letting it rest on the points of her claws. On the floor next to her, Peaches stared at it with quiet reverence, the plug of the television between her paws glowing with the constant wavering electric bolt.

Cradling the guide, so as not to pierce its plastic, Natalya eased it into the slot beneath the television.

The screen flashed blue, then flickered. A few human letters appeared in the top left, but disappeared before she could read them.

The screen went black. A blocky white triangle quivered in the top corner.

And then-

ABRA KADABRA PICTURES PRESENTS...

The words faded in from the darkness. A low rolling drumbeat rose from the television. Natalya jabbed at the buttons to turn the sound down to a whisper.

A SKYARROW FILM...

Her heart beat in her ears. The music, reduced to nothing but a half-heard murmuring, still rose with a tinny roar.

THE ART OF THE BANK ROBBERY
DIRECTED BY RICHARD ERRIMORE

The words appeared on the screen as if being wiped on, with towering letters that climbed around each other, like they were fighting for space. She'd spent time translating the line - Bank Robbery she knew intimately by now. 'Art' meant... something like a skill, something that could be taught. 'Directed' meant 'lead' or 'controlled', and 'Richard Errimore' was probably a human name - she couldn't find it in the book of words she used. That line seemed odd to her - there wasn't a 'Richard Errimore' in the movie. Sometimes they spoke to someone on the telephone - had that been him? Or maybe he was the one who told them to make the guide in the first place?

STARRING...

JACK PROCTOR as NATHAN SPEAR

CATHERINE SMITHES as SAMANTHA ROMANOV

GERALD MANSON as DAVE 'JACKKNIFE' THOMPSON

Secret identities. They were important if you got caught, the guide would later show. These people were good at that - they never revealed their true names throughout the robbery.

She pressed the button that made it go faster, and black and white static crackled over the screen. More words flew past, before they gave way to the guide itself.

Natalya found the earlier parts of the guide confusing. It was a lot of the humans talking to each other. She prided herself on understanding a lot of human speech, but she'd spent many evenings riffling through her book of words to find out what they meant - and even when she did, humans had this frustrating habit of using words where they didn't belong. Temperature was a big one - things seemed to be either 'hot' or 'cool' regardless of what was going on. And don't get her started on 'fuck'...

But it didn't stop her trying - human culture was an enigma, a winding mix of sayings and feelings and unstated history. And she'd crack it, even if it took her learning every word to do it.

Occasionally, there were other Pokémon in the guide too. That was something else that she never quite understood - the Pokémon often said things that didn't make sense. They'd growl a warning while showing submission, or the cry of a different Pokémon entirely would come out of their mouth.

Natalya found her paw resting on Peaches, claws idly scritch through the fur of her back. The Jolteon purred, the sound staccato, as she concentrated on maintaining the power to the television.

The guide was now at the instructions for robbing the bank. There was Samantha Romanov and Nathan Spear in the elevator, having cut through the wall. The elevator almost hit them, then they opened the doors. Then they were in the building - theirs was a lot smaller than Natalya and Peaches' - and they were lifting the shutters, and then...

Natalya pressed the button that made it normal speed. The two humans on screen were sitting in the small alcove by the door, muttering to each other. It was cramped for them - Samantha Romanov's teats, bulging against their human material, pressed up against Nathan Spear's face. Nathan Spear was smiling.

Humans seemed to enjoy doing things like that - things very close to mating. And yet, they never mated in the guide, even though they both seemed to be saying with their bodies that they wanted to. None of Natalya's tapes showed that, and, heck, she could forget about

seeing it when she was wandering the streets. In fact, Natalya had *never* seen humans mate. *Ever*. It seemed to be something that humans tried not to do.

She glanced down, and guiltily removed her paw from Peaches' back.

Such... abstinence. Such holding back...

But it was human. So she'd cope with it.

Now Samantha Romanov was kneeling up and taking the wire out of her hair, smiling at Nathan Spear. Natalya leaned in, staring at her as she put it into the hole and wiggled it about...

"*Almost...*" She muttered above the ticking sound of the music. "*Almost... there...*"

And then the door clicked, and it opened.

Natalya's jaw dropped open. She pressed the button that made it go backwards, and watched it again. This time, she leaned in close, until the screen became just lots of tiny red, green, and blue lights...

Just like before. The door clicked, and it opened.

Natalya gasped, leaning back on her paws. But... she had done *exactly* as Samantha Romanov had.

So what... what had she got *wrong*?

A short, familiar whine cut through her thoughts. She looked down at Peaches - the Jolteon looked back up imploringly, half-hunched over the plug for the television.

Natalya jolted up. She jabbed the button that ejected the guide from its slot, then reached out a paw towards Peaches as she grunted. *Stop*.

Peaches slumped down, letting go of the plug as the electricity stopped. Natalya caught her before she fell onto her side. The television went dark with a sharp whine.

Dammit. Of course - some of the human's odd gadgets used a different kind of electricity. Peaches had explained it as going back and forth instead of in a single direction - it didn't quite make sense to her. Either way, it tired her out more than usual.

Natalya retrieved the guide from the television, and placed it, inside its case, back in her bag. Then she pulled Peaches in close, leaning down to let her nestle into her neck. She curled her claws around her waist, keeping her close and nosing tenderly at her side.

Okay. First the guide, now this. Arceus, it had seemed so *simple* before. So easy! What was she going to do now...?

She leaned back, looking around the dark entrance hall of the bank.

What would Samantha Romanov do?

She forced a smirk to her face, showing some teeth for dominance.

Simple - she would keep trying.

* * *

Natalya had to help Peaches over the long desk, her legs still quivering from the exhaustion of the electricity. The door beyond wasn't locked - another deviation from the guide, but not one that Natalya was going to complain about, even if it did nothing to lessen the unsettling grasp of anxiety on her mind.

And that's about as far as their luck held out.

The corridor beyond was starkly lit in a thin, artificially white light, not the dark shadows that Natalya had been expecting. A couple of doors and some wall-mounted cables sat silent at the other end. Still, she knew what to do - she knelt down, placing a paw on the floor.

Beneath the tiles, the concrete of the building stirred, fractured, and dissolved. The tiles shifted as a thin powder of rock lifted into her paw. Samantha Romanov had brought some sand with her, but why bother when she could do this? She grasped the pawful of rock powder, wound back her arm, and flung it outward-

It fell to the ground in a haze and a light hiss. The corridor looked the same, aside from a new swathe of grey sand.

Not again, not *again!* Natalya grabbed her ears in both paws and snarled. There should be red beams of light across the room! The sand should have shown them!

Fuck! Samantha Romanov had shown Nathan Spear the beams. The words she used included 'alert the guards' - another human safety system then. She'd then pranced down the corridor, deftly avoiding them - just as Natalya was planning to - and they weren't HERE!

She took a step forwards, head still in her paws-

"Bark!" Stop!

Natalya froze in place.

Peaches stumbled her way forwards and crouched just after the tiles that Natalya had shifted. Her little black nose twitched as she sniffed the air. Extending one paw, she wavered it above the next tile. "*Wrrh-wrrh*", she grunted.

Natalya stared at her. That was Peaches' word for electricity. She slowly backed away a step and crouched down.

Peaches crouched to sniff at the tile. She tilted her head to one side, listening, the hackles on her neck rising...

Then she planted all four paws in a wide stance, grunted, and quivered. Fur rose all down her body-

Snap-Krmp!

A bolt lanced between the tiles, accompanied by something more muffled. The tang of ozone permeated the air. Peaches let out a soft sigh. She experimentally teased the tile with one paw.

Natalya frowned. Peaches looked up at her, then teased the tile again, staring at it with a straight, arrow-like stance. *Look.*

Natalya knelt down, leaning in close, staying behind Peaches as much as she could. Whenever the Jolteon tested the tile, it sank downwards ever-so-slightly.

Like a button on a television.

Natalya sat back. If she'd stepped on that tile... well, who knows what would have happened?! Damn it... damn it! Now she had to contend with this? New human devices?!

Peaches shuffled forward, her paws sliding on the tiles as she did. She stopped on the next tile but one, sniffed, and then let out a tired, short bark. *Danger.*

Fuck..

Natalya stayed behind the Jolteon as she zapped that tile, and then the next one along. It was slow going, but...

But they *were* doing it, right? Remember the guide, she reminded herself. Maybe it didn't matter *how* they got to the end of the corridor. The important thing is that they did, that they found the vault hidden back there...

She took a step, careful to keep her paws only on the cleared tiles, watching Peaches work on another in front of them. The Jolteon's front half rested heavily on the ground, her front legs almost splayed out. Her rear remained tilted up to her, and in the upturned yellow fur of her rear nestled those familiar dark shapes...

Natalya swallowed.

There was something else the guide had shown. Samantha Romanov hadn't just stepped over the red beams - she'd practically danced through them, even cartwheeling at one point. The guide had followed her every move. But seldom had it rested on her smirking face, and so often had it focused on her long legs, on how her body-tight suit showed off the shape of her teats, her tail-less hips...

Natalya had watched the scene several times. The screen on that part of the guide had even begun to be spattered with the odd grit of static from how much she'd rewind and replayed it. It kept drawing her back, making her claws itch, inspired a pressure in her lower belly that was similar to when she looked at Peaches...

Humans and sexuality. Humans *loved* their female bodies. They were everywhere, on every picture they put up, on every moving screen, on every guide. And yet - and *yet* - it didn't seem to go any further than that. Clothes got smaller and more skin-tight, and yet were never removed. It was enough to make her snarl in rabid curiosity, in *need*.

There must be a reason for this... fascination with female bodies, and yet a complete ignoring of them underneath the clothes. And whatever it was, it was human to do it. That's another reason why she had to wear the shorts, and the jacket, no matter how ragged they got.

So Natalya closed her eyes, and when they reopened, she tried not to look down at Peaches. Her fangs jabbed into her bottom lip.

"Prr...rrrf..." sighed Peaches. *Safe*.

Natalya scooped her up in her arms just before the Jolteon tumbled to the ground. Her eyes were barely open, ears flopped down over her head. Natalya rested her against one shoulder, running a paw down her back, holding her back legs with the other one.

Okay. Okay, so they were through the corridor. That was the last thing before the vault, right?

She stepped up to the far door. The one in the guide had been different - circular, bigger than her armspan, with some kind of intricate circular mechanism in the middle to unlock it. This one, meanwhile, was much smaller - more like a regular door. But it still had polished metal sides, no window, and a small device covered in numbers next to it.

She knew it was the right one, though. To the side, a small plaque read "Vault". A place where humans store only their most valuable things...

Peaches whined. Natalya snapped back to reality. She pulled the Jolteon's head back and looked into imploring pink eyes.

Oh, oh dear. She really *was* exhausted. Fuck. Natalya clutched her closer, casting a glance around. Cables, cables... no cables that she could see, apart from the lights, and they were too high up. Off to the side was another door though - '*Supplies*' was the plate on it. It wasn't locked - but as she pulled it open, Natalya winced at the sharp chemical sting, her muzzle screwing up.

Inside was a small alcove, unlit, lined with shelves crowded with boxes and bottles and other objects, all crowded with human text so dense that she couldn't translate it all. Her claws clicked on the grimy floor. Despite the smell, it felt oddly home-like - it reminded her of their cramped little raft, bobbing on the detritus of the city.

Natalya tugged out a cardboard box with one paw and emptied out its contents onto the ground. She grabbed a few pieces of cloth for something to lie on, and then she knelt to lower Peaches into it.

Natalya looked into her half-open eyes. "*Rrrrr?*" *Are you alright?*

Peaches gave a tired half-trill back, kneading the cloth.

Natalya nodded, cupping her head with one paw - Peaches nuzzled against the soft fur, her body warm, the spiky fur smooth when rubbed with the grain.

Okay. She'd be safe here until Natalya had done this last bit. Standing up, not taking her gaze off the Jolteon flopped on her side in the box, she quietly backed out of the room, and left the door ajar.

And in the meantime...

Natalya stood in front of the vault door with her paws on her hips.

Samantha Romanov had tried the mechanism to open the door. It had taken her a long time, and the door clicked and clunked - yet all that happened was that she seemed to be getting angry.

Alright. Time was ticking onwards. Maybe she could skip that part of the guide then...

Because then Nathan Spear had come in, hadn't he?

She walked to where the door met the wall, on the side where it swung. She ran a paw down the wall; the brick and cement vibrated under her touch, its presence tingling against her aura...

Her shoulders tensed. Oh, *this* would help with the stress.

She crouched, and slammed her paw against the ground, shattering the tile with her claws. A shard of moulded concrete leapt from the ground, a spire of freshly-snapped rebar sticking from the end, and she snatched it out of the air - and with a wide over-arm swing, slammed it into the wall, showering fragments of pale plaster and brick all around her.

Nathan Spear had used a human device - a pointed metal stick on the end of a wooden pole. A 'pickaxe' it was called, and her book of words said it was used for getting precious metals out from behind rock. Seemed like the perfect use for such a device to her. Why Samantha Romanov had disliked it, she had no idea.

Natalya's improvised pickaxe was doing more than a good enough job. She channelled her aura into each swing, bricks underneath shattering in flashes of white. Swing-SMASH. All the tensing in her shoulders, the anxiety that had been creeping around her mind - oh, it all came out here!

She swung again, and again, and again- her pickaxe jolted forward, the last brick falling in several pieces into a new hole through the wall. She took in great breaths, savouring the taste of clay in the air, licking her fangs. Then, dropping the pickaxe to the ground, she pulled away a few bricks still sticking out around the hole, and stuck her head through.

"Ahaaa!" Her heart leapt. Her tail wagged through a hole in her shorts. Yes. Yes! Yes, there it was!

She scrabbled at the edges of the hole, yanking bricks away to widen it. She threw her messenger bag inside, then clambered in after it, half-broken bricks tugging at her mane and jacket.

She entered into a world of delight.

Money! Piles of it, piles upon piles! Neat stacks of it on pale white tables all around the room, lockboxes stacked up against the wall, shelves with bags of gleaming coins. She danced over the concrete floor, scooping up a great handful of little paper slips, letting them tumble from her grasp. Money! Human money! Her key to the world above!

She yanked some of the paper slips out of their bundles. Inscrutable words and strings of numbers were printed all over them. One of them was probably their value - maybe it was the small numbers down here. Or maybe the big one in the corner? Oh, she'd figure it out - she had so much of it now!

She went down on her knees, flipping open the top of the messenger bag. She grabbed handfuls of the bundles of money, throwing it into the bag. Was the paper money worth the most? She hoped so, even though it was the lightest. If she got enough of it, maybe it wouldn't even matter-

"STOP!"

She flung herself around, half-lying on the floor.

The vault door was open. Through a haze of brick dust stood a human, male, about half again as tall as she was. He was dressed in a white shirt and dark red trousers, with a flat red hat on his head. A black box sat on his chest, a coiled wire tumbling down to his belt. He wasn't muscley, but his clean, furless face was wrinkled, his stance wide and stable in a show of determined aggression.

Natalya stared in bewilderment. But... they had done as the guide had said! The guards weren't supposed to find them until later, and chase them in one of those big human cars that whizzed around the city! Why was this one here? Hadn't they done everything correctly?!

The guard shouted again. Words tumbled out in a tangled cacophany.

Natalya blinked. What... had he said? Something about her? Her book of words was in her bag. She turned, reaching into it-

"OI!"

Natalya jumped, snarled, pulling her paw from the bag. What was that?! Didn't he want to be understood? She rounded on him and growled, baring her teeth.

He shouted something again; his voice deeper, his eyes fixed on hers. His hands twitched. He was holding something towards her - small, black, metal. It looked like a gun - she'd seen them several times in the guides, and her book of words told her they were human weapons, probably because of the loud bangs they made. The dark opening at its tip wavered.

Natalya tilted her head. He was speaking too fast. The people in the guide... they spoke differently too, not like the people in these buildings. She thought maybe the guards at least would sound the same.

Why couldn't she *understand* him?!

Okay. Think. Calm down, think now. What would Samantha Romanov do...

She could picture the scene now. Samantha Romanov had opened a door, and come face-to-face with one of the guards. They'd talked - only a couple of lines - what had they said...?

"*Who are you?*" had been that guard's line.

...That was it. "*I'm the replacement janitor*" she had said.

Slowly, Natalya stood up, and raised her eyebrows and let her ears droop, to appear as non-threatening as possible.

"I'mma ree-plays-ment chaantor," she grunted from between her fangs.

The guard frowned. "*Dafak...?*" he muttered, then twitched the gun again. More words, loud and all running together. None of them matched any of the words she was expected.

Natalya's chest rose and fell. No, no, no. She's said the words. He was supposed to be able to understand her.

The guide... no, the guide couldn't be broken. It must just be the wrong time for that line. But, what *was* the right line? Fuck... she must have done something wrong earlier, which was why he was here now. Was this because she didn't use the metal pin correctly?

Wait. This was a human, right? And she was gonna be a human too! Surely she could talk to him?

She remembered a half-dozen phrases from her book of words. There'd been this small category - "*Getting to know you*". It had been about obtaining a level of familiarity with another human. Words to replace smells and touch. Some of those words must work...

She leaned in, pulling her lips into a smile, exposing her teeth as much as she could. "Hell-o. Nikkeh. To. Met. You."

The guard blinked. Then he grabbed the black box on his chest, and muttered a few quick words into it, not taking his eyes off her.

Natalya's heart thumped. No, no, no, that wasn't what he was supposed to say back. She took in another breath, smiling wider. "Wer. Is. Teh. Lib-rarr-ee."

The guard glared at her. He muttered again, an incomprehensible babble.

Natalya's face fell. More words - why couldn't she *understand*?! ...Wait - the... what was it? 'Hand shake'! She extended a clawed paw towards the guard, who took a step back.

“STOP!”

Natalya stepped forward again, extending her other paw too, claws towards the guard. Please! Just, shake the-

BANG

And Natalya was on the concrete floor. Her skull rang with a loud, enveloping, whine that weighed like someone was sitting on her head. She didn't remember falling over. She tried to press her paws against her ears, but her left arm refused to move. Her shoulder was cold.

Was that the gun? It didn't sound like that in any of the guides! She put a paw to her shoulder - and then winced, a snarl leaping from her mouth. When she pulled her claws away, dark blood dripped from them...

She stared up at the guard. The gun was still pointed at her, and he was shouting into the black box now, the words even harder to make out as they warbled just below the ringing in her ears.

She'd... not understood him. And worse than that, *he'd* not understood *her*.

Her vision wavered with tears. The guard had stopped talking into the box, and was pointing the gun at her once more. He said something else, but what words made it past the ringing, were lost in a long, mournful whine. It took Natalya a moment to realise it was coming from her.

She'd not even been *close*...

...she'd not even been *CLOSE!*

She was meant to be HUMAN now. She had money! She had words! She'd done what the guide had said! She buried her face into her good paw, a quivering sob racking its way out of her muzzle.

She was meant to be human now...

Another shouted word from the guard stung her ears. Natalya peered out from beneath her paw. The barrel of the gun stared with a single, dark eye down at her head. She tried to push herself up, claws flexing-

The guard shouted again, louder, sharper, making Natalya jump, her claws scraping at the ground. Fingers tightened on the gun-

A blur of yellow. A yelp of pain A low, muffled crunch of bone. The guard fell to the ground, gun dropping from his hands.

Peaches! She was hanging onto the guard's side, muzzle scrunched up and buried into his shoulder. Surely she hadn't had enough time to recharge - no, she couldn't have. No electricity crackled from her mouth.

But she had fangs. The guard's white shirt, bunched up around Peaches' muzzle, was already turning a deep red.

Natalya clambered to her knees, still clutching her shoulder. She moved her arm - and gasped as pain lanced through it. Peaches let go of the guard, jumping off towards her, large eyes staring up...

Natalya met her gaze. The Jolteon's yellow muzzle dripped with deep, shiny crimson, her body sagged and devoid of electricity, but her rosey eyes were gleaming with an intense concern. Natalya cupped her head again - the world quietened, muffled, blurred around them she met her gaze, blood smearing against blood...

And then she turned to the figure that had tried to kill her, writhing on the ground. And in that moment, she realised something.

She hadn't changed - but he had. He wasn't a human. In that moment she saw only a leaf-eating monkey screaming non-words, and scrabbling with a strange, furless paw at his incomprehensible black weapon.

Natalya's mane flickered with white light as her eyes glowed. She held up a blood-stained paw, and slowly curled her claws together.

The guard began to sink into the floor, sand rippling around his body with a gentle hiss. Natalya's paw shuddered with how tightly she was clenching it. Clouds of dust rose as the body writhed and wriggled, and screamed-

And then Natalya unclenched her paw, retracting her aura, letting the concrete solidify just as it finally flowed around his chest. The guard - what of him was still visible above the pale, featureless, uncaring ground - twitched and jerked, but all that came from his mouth was guttural croaks and shaky breaths. Wavering, bloodshot eyes stared up at her, shining in the light of the vault.

The black box at his hips, half-buried in the floor now, crackled into life. Unintelligible words scraped at her ears.

Peaches and Natalya glanced at each other.

And then Natalya was loping.

She was halfway down the corridor when the piercing ringing of the bell dug into her ears. Natalya snarled, clutching Peaches to her chest with her good arm, the Jolteon burying her face in grey fur. Natalya rolled over the bank's counter using her unhurt shoulder, her messenger bag banging against it. Slips of paper money tumbled in her wake as she ran on.

The bank's was wide open, but the shutters were still barely open. Shifting Peaches against her other arm, Natalya winced and snarled at the pain - then reeled back her good arm and swung, claws glowing as they ripped through the metal with a piercing squeal.

There were figures on the other side - two of them. What looked like a male and female human, each dressed in the same white shirt and maroon pants, and holding guns of their own. Guns raised towards them as Natalya tumbled through the clattering shards of the shutters.

A moment from the guide came back to her. Samantha Romanov and Nathan Spear surrounded by several guards, in some dark building. An automobile had crashed in from near them, scattering the guards-

But Natalya knew now that no one would come to rescue them.

She snarled again. Dust leapt from the floor in a hiss as the wave of aura spread out around her - and then the ground ripped, the shockwaves pounding the air as the tiles splintered, fractured, rocks leaping from the magnitude of the quake. The guards' yelps were drowned out by the cacophony, their flung bodies hidden by the tumbling debris, and Natalya didn't wait to see if they got up - she just shifted Peaches back to her good shoulder, and ran.

A human couldn't have done that.

She loped past the elevators. Nearby them was another corridor, and at the end of it, a smeared window. She barreled towards it, dragging a spike of concrete from the wall as she ran and launching it at the pane. The glass shattered with a *CRASH*, shards sparkling, and Natalya leapt through the jagged hole-

And they were in the air, staring at the world above.

They were higher than the tracks for the L-train. At this height, the walkways and plazas that glowed with warming orange civilization spread around them, like an open case for a tape, endlessly detailed...

But not too distant.

And yet...

Natalya didn't reach out towards the railing of the train tracks, even as they sailed past, less than an arm's length away. She curled herself into a ball, clutching Peaches to her chest, messenger bag flapping in her wake, as the glittering world above disappeared and the black, rippling waters of the canal rushed and rushed up towards them-

And the city's lights disappeared in a shower of black water.

* * *

That had been... how long ago? Hours?

The raft bobbed in the current. Occasionally it would bump against the side of the canal, or into some low, overhanging branches, but the rolling water would pick it up and carry it on and away - away from the orange glow of the city, fading now on the horizon, and out towards the dark hills downstream.

The scent of the city still hung over the dirt-stained tarp - the trash, the grime. Now, too, the sharp iron tang of blood. But beyond all those was the smell of musk, like a weighted blanket across the senses.

A low, muffled growl rose from within. The raft rocked back and forth in a smooth, rolling motion.

Inside, between the half-sodden cardboard boxes of food packets and old tapes, beside half-chewed wires and sodden books, atop mismatched cushions from old couches, Natalya and Peaches lay entwined, panting, gasping. They nuzzled one another, with a ferocity that they'd not done before. It wasn't a human touch, with brushes of the lips and tender mutterings - this was a growl-laden pressing of muzzle against muzzle, of nipping at ears, of half-unsheathed stone claws clutching around a lithe yellow waist.

Natalya's good arm was wrapped around her, her paw pressed between Peaches' legs. The soft black flesh of the Jolteon's spade burned in her palm, and her juices made the back-and-forth smooth and effortless. Occasionally Natalya would slip her paw back, and let the smooth ridge on the underside of her claw rest up between the folds of the spade, pressing against the small pocket that sat near its point - and Peaches would trill so wonderfully, so delightfully, so animalistically in a way that made Natalya's heart leap and limbs tremble, and hold the Jolteon's scruff in her jaws...

Natalya pressed her muzzle against the side of Peaches' face again, breathing in. The scent of blood tingled in her mind, making her gasp and lap eagerly at the spiky fur. Her hips rocked, grinding the puffed point of her own spade against the Jolteon's rear. Her folds had never been much hidden with the number of rips in her shorts, but now she wore nothing; the material had given up easily under a single yank of claws, and now lay in some forgotten corner

of the raft, leaving nothing now to stop her indulgent rubbing, and the drip of her juices onto the already-stained cushions below them.

The spice of their pleasure rose around them, cocooning them in their own den of lusts and indulgence. Electric spikes of delight punctuated every press of their bodies, made them clutch at each other in a desperate scramble for more, a mindless tumble of grasping and grunting and *growwwwwling*...

No more thoughts. No more what-she-should-do or how-she-should be. No more *human*, in a brain where that fit like a sharp brick in an old tree's nook. Let such bricks sink, like the bag, and let herself do whatever she wanted, what she'd wanted all along...

Her lips pulled back over her teeth in a broad, panting smile, delighting with every last fibre of her being in every last electric lick of the Jolteon's tongue against her own, in the reckless freedom of their rubbing and grinding, the tingling and shuddering up her body over and over and over again, building, mounting, like the rumble of a rockslide oh so ready to fall...

The raft bumped against something, and they rocked with it, the motion only pressing them closer, making her claws tingle and hold her lover tighter. In some last vestige of her mind, she knew that every drift of current took them further from the city, further from the messenger bag that had spilt its contents and sank into the murky waters in a trail of paper, abandoned with barely a thought.

Nothing but themselves, their instincts, and each other.

Outside, the air was cool, and the muffled snarls and moans sang a sweet tune for the sleeping trees. A single tape, its case open, teetered on the moss-coated edge of the raft.

They drifted onwards, towards where the canal opened into the nearby river, and a grove of yew trees hung low over the surface. The soft sighs of branches whispered across the tarp; one brushed along the moss, catching the case, tugging at it...

And dropping it, with an unheard, unheeded 'plp', into the dark waters below.

The End