

“In a pickle, hmmm, hero?”

Electrolass grits her teeth, trying her bonds. “What are these goddamn cuffs made from-?!”

Smirking, her nemesis rounds the corner – Mr Kinetickle. Her rage grows. His laugh dances from his lips, painted the same bright blue as his suit, which he fixes briefly before flourishing with his electric-tipped cane.

“That’s not an issue, just a little pulse technology to cancel out your electric powers. I wouldn’t want your naughty little park waves ruining my plans!”

He titters again, light and airy.

“Please, take note of your predicament.”

Looking around, the bound hero huffs. It’s simple, really – she’s suspended to a horizontal bar by chains attached to her wrist shackles. Her ankles, too, are cuffed together – looking down, she can see she’s hanging over a pit of what looks like blue slime. It twitches and ebbs like a hungry ocean and smells of cotton candy.

“You’ll want to keep a tight grip on that bar. When I press this button, those chains will release, and if you’re not holding on, you’ll fall into my pet project. You know how I got my alias, correct? Tickling and tickle-related sciences.”

He begins to pace the metal catwalk around the vat. “Oh, I love to make tickle robots and knismo gizmos, but the board said my testing methods were *unethical*. Ah well. I can always test on ‘willing’ volunteers from the public, and funding cuts mean nothing if you just steal the equipment. Everything was fine until you arrived. But now you can test them for me instead. It’s the least you can do, to pay me back for ruining my plans.”

Idly, he gestures to the vat.

“Nanomachines. Tickle-hungry nanomachines. If you fall in there, they’ll sense your body heat and go into a feeding frenzy. Nothing but tickling, for hours.” His voice drops to a lilting tease. “Every little inch of your body, Electro-brat. Every nook and cranny. Every ticklish nerve. You’ll really learn to regret that costume choice, you’d be better off fighting crime in a bra and panties.”

Cheeks turning pink, Electrolass looks down at her costume – belly window, boob window, strapless, barely protecting anything at all – and decides not to protest that claim.

“It won’t matter, anyway. They’ll rip off your clothes like wet paper. Your navel, your feet, your armpits, your ribs – nothing will be spared. They’ll tickle you until you go insane. Consider it useful to me in two ways. First, I can make you pay for being such a thorn in my side, by being a mean little tickle in yours. And second, I can study the results, the tickle patterns. They’ll transmit information to my laboratory computer as they work, constantly updating, constantly improving. When I have the perfect tickle machines, I’ll mass-manufacture them. See how those so-called scientists deny me the power I deserve when my tickle-slime army reduces them to giggling, mindless wrecks.”

“You can’t do this!”

“Oh, but I can. I can, and I will. But I’ll give you a fighting chance. If you can hold onto the bar for an hour, I’ll consider your endurance respectable, and let you go. But I won’t make it easy.”

He walks over to the control module, and presses a button. With a clink, the chains fall away but the shackles keep her wrists together, and ankles similarly pinned. Realising that the only thing between her and tickle hell is her own grip, Electrolass whimpers.

“You’re going in the vat, Electro-brat.” His tone is full of spite. “Let’s see how you last.”

With a flourish of his fingers, two mechanical arms descend from the ceiling.

“Tickle, tickle, tickle.”

“W- wait, no! That’s not fair! You bastard-!”

The arms are holding two fluffy, soft feather dusters. Their voluminous bulk makes Electrolass’s blood run cold. Slowly, they creep closer.

“What deliciously smooth, soft armpits... I’m sure they’d adore a nice feathering, don’t you agree!”

“You won’t get away with thihihhHHHHHHHHHHS!”

Her cries of defiance melt into squealing laughter as the dusters begin to spin in her armpits, already making her elbows jolt with the urge to let go of the bar and protect her delicate, ticklish skin. The feathers are almost devious – they play in her hollows like rings of folk-dancers, around and around, tickling her smooth pits without mercy or hesitation, sending electric jolts through her whole body.

“Hmm, your underarms are adorable, but that cute belly has always enticed me. Why show it off if you don’t want it to be tickled, hmm?”

One duster remaining in her armpits, spinning joyfully in the hyper-sensitive hollow, the other slips down, ignoring the trapped hero’s pleas as it begins to clean and dust her stomach. Immediately her laughter raises in pitch, making her belly twitch and jiggle – it’s torture, the tickling, Mr Kinetickle’s coos of *cootchie cootchie coo*, *tickle tickle tickle*, the desperation to protect herself, she can already feel herself slip-

“You know, I’ve noticed something.” Mr Kinetickle pushes a few more buttons. Two more mechanical arms appear, this time holding a stiff but fluffy makeup brush and a bristly hairbrush. “You’re bad at being a hero.”

“You take that bahahahack!”

“Hmm, I don’t think I will.” The makeup brush begins tormenting her neck, sliding up and down, while the hairbrush dances at one of her bare, bound feet, making her thrash like someone trying to escape a sleeping bag. “You like getting caught. I’ve talked to the other villains. We have a group chat. And apparently, you’re quite the hussy for getting captured.”

Trying to protest is futile. Electrolass screams with laughter as the dusters attack her ribs, following her thrashing body’s arc, rendering her incapable of defending herself from the villain’s taunts. Her ticklish spots feel like they’re alight with electricity – each feather, each bristle, they tickle like hell, like millions of tiny fingers belonging to millions of tiny worshippers adoring her body like a temple, tickling it with the reverence of a mass of people permitted to touch their god.

“You love being caught, and apparently, you *suggest* a lot. You like to say ‘you’ll never get me to talk!’, stick out that cute belly of yours. Get stuck in vents with your feet sticking out. When Plume King fought you last week, you made such a huge deal of him touching your sides, as if trying to hint at something. What could it mean? And why would such a highly-wanted hero pursue a measly scientific failure like *Mr Kinetickle*, renowned for tickling his prey?”

He smiles again, turning a dial. The feathering quickens. Electrolass can barely focus on his words as she tries to hold on, summoning every ounce of self control to keep her grip on the bar. Ignore the tickling. Ignore the tickling. Ignore the fact that it tickles so much, oh god, not the ribs, not the armpits, anywhere but the shoulderblades-!

“I think Electrolass has a little tickle kink. I think she loves being tickled by villains. Maybe when you fall in, I’ll invite some of them over to watch you struggle in the vat. I know some fellow baddies who’d *love* to see the spunky Electro-brat tickle tortured until she loses her mind. That’ll be fun.”

Electrolass can’t reply. The dusters return to her pits again, licking her hollows fervently, as if trying to lap up the nervous hot sweat, tickling and tickling the hero’s defenceless body. Meanwhile the fluffy brush dips into her navel, scratching at the tender, vulnerable skin on the inside of her bellybutton, as the hairbrush moves back to her belly, stiff plastic bristles massaging her belly in circles, indifferent to its helpless shaking and trembling.

“No protests. Interesting. Well, even if you don’t fall in, I’ll still be happy in the knowledge...”

Turning the dial to its highest setting, he regards her squirming body with hooded, hungry eyes.

“Electrolass will always be a bratty little tickle slut.”

And she loses her grip.

For a blessed split-second, she’s free of the brushes and dusters. She plunges, like a mind into sleep, into the cool balm of the nanomachine gel. It’s breathable. Breathable but thick. Treacle-like. It makes her head dizzy.

And then they sense her body. Sinking. Hot from laughter.

“There we go.” Mr Kinetickle cracks his knuckles, turning off the mechanical arms. Whirring, they ascend back into the ceiling. “Get comfortable. I’m going to be out for a moment, I need to make a phone call or two.”

Electrolass’s muffled laughing screams fill the room as the nanomachines get into her pits, deep in her bellybutton, between her toes like wet sand, coating each inch of her body like a suit of tickling tongues. It’s torture. It’s *torture*.

“They’ll be a few hours to arrive. Try not to break before then.” He walks down from the catwalk, giving the vat’s glass wall a comforting pat. “They’ll want to see you break, with their own eyes. So try to hold on, alright?”

Smiling, he walks to the door. Electrolass tries fruitlessly to beg him not to go, not to leave her alone with the tickling nanomachines, but all that comes out is a river of mirth, nothing but ticklish laughs swallowed by the slime. Mr Kinetickle looks at her once, snorts, and slams the door shut.

The lights in the lab turn off. Electrolass is enveloped by darkness.

Darkness, silence and constant, all-over, unceasing tickling.