

*Here I am, sitting at my computer on a weekend, watching funny cat videos on the holonet instead of going out and having a life.* Lezli looked briefly away from the glow of her screen to the black glass pane that was her window, showcasing the dark night sky beyond. A brilliant, momentary flash lit up the roiling clouds for half a heartbeat that made her nearly jump from her seat, though it was the deep thrum of the thunder reverberating through the floor and into her chest that made her feel uneasy.

“Tea. Tea sounds good.” It made for a fine distraction from the storm, getting up from her small desk and flipping on the powered kettle. *Water level looks good. Don't think I need to top it off.* She was halfway through grabbing a snack from the pantry when something caught her eye. A flash over by the computer.

When she looked again with her full attention though, there was nothing out of the ordinary. “Huh. Weird.” The lightning and thunder struck again, and she trembled slightly as she stood amidst her kitchenware. “I hate these friggin’ storms.”

The cheese puff snack she popped into her mouth calmed her nerves only slightly.

Rubbing her arms to bring in some warmth, she wished the climate control in her apartment worked properly. Even on the hottest days it would sometimes chill to the point that she could see her breath. With the storm raging and messing up the entire city's air temperature, just a little heat would be nice. Some time still remained on the kettle, so she walked over to the thermostat — an old, clunky device from a bygone age — and upped the heat temp. *Hopefully this works.* A whispering, almost whistling sound caught her ear; something behind her that was almost as chilling as the cold itself.

*Gotta look gotta look gotta look!* Grabbing the nearest potential weapon from the counter, she spun around to face her assailant. The gap in the window seemed unfazed by her display. Lezli's arms and shoulders drooped in solitary embarrassment.

“Pfft. No wonder it's so damn cold in here,” she mumbled, inwardly relieved that she didn't have to waylay an intruder with... a book of sapphic Selenian poetry. “Only way this would've hurt them is if they were extra sensitive and needed a good hit in the feels.”

She crossed the room and promptly slid the window shut against the frame, making sure to lock it firmly. The loud *beep* of the kettle, nigh forgotten, signalling that the water was ready nearly made the young woman fall to the floor with surprise. *This is just not my night,* she thought, returning to the kitchen. As she approached, she saw the screen of her computer flicker. The few light fixtures she had turned on seemed to follow suit in rapid succession in a cascade toward the kitchen.

“Oh joy. Power surge.” While she was setting out her mug and tea bag, she also pulled out a lighter, some “emergency” candles, and a battery-powered lamp; the kind that could be wound up to recharge its power reservoir. “Good thing I don’t have much in the way of perishables. Just hope the water pressure keeps up.”

Otherwise unworried, she set the teabag into her cup and poured the hot water over it, filling the vessel with mild satisfaction as the aroma filled her senses. *Mmm, that’s nice.* She cringed at another lighting strike as she returned to her terminal. For added comfort, she put on a set of sound-cancelling headphones, hoping that they would at least block out some of the noise from the storm that only seemed to be getting worse.

“Time for some more cat vids,” she monotoned, clicking the clip she’d been watching to resume.

No more than three seconds in, a flash of lightning filled the dim room before the lights all flickered and, loudly, ceased to function. Somehow, the computer was still running, supplying the only light in the room, bathing it in a pale blue glow.

“The f-...? Must’ve been the breakers.” She turned her eyes to the video which had somehow paused, as though buffering, but without any of the usual pinwheel notifications. “Ah dammit. The holonet’s out too?!” She threw herself back in her seat, tea steaming in its mug on the desk. “Just great!”

To her chagrin, the steam from the tea was fogging up the screen, and she reached out to grab the cup, only to pause as she went to wipe away some of the condensation.

“But... the ‘net is on the same power line as the computer. It wouldn’t go out if the computer was still working.”

As she pondered, she felt a gripping chill on her shoulders, and as she went to rearrange her sweater she could see, reflected in the dark parts of the screen, what looked like long, pale fingers sliding down to grip her by the shoulders. Lezli froze. The screen went out and everything went dark. In her ears, through the headset that so effortlessly canceled out ambient noise, she heard what sounded like breathing, steady but ragged and strained. A whispering, almost whistling sound.