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A Villain's Story

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The apartment was filled with books, weird science-y machines of all sizes, a ton of plants, and word-scribbled sticky notes. It wasn't messy, though. It looked more like an organized chaos. There was a light, sweet scent of camomile that filled the apartment, which didn't fit with the appearance in any way. The place was decorated in a minimalist, modern theme that didn't look planned in any way. It was empty and quiet, except for a conversation on the radio.

"Thanks for once again tuning in. It's time for everyone's favorite radio hosts, Derek Everett and Andre Lyon," someone on the radio said.

"Hello, I'm Derek and we're here to discuss the untalented, unintelligent, Max Jeffery," Derek said on the radio.

The radio was sitting on an old, wooden coffee table in the living room. The radio hosts' laughter filled the whole apartment, thanks to the volume being unnecessarily loud.

"Yeah, and not only is he the worst villain ever, his plans never make any sense," the radio host said.

"Exactly, Derek. I mean, last month he tried to freeze the town over with a snow cone machine," the other host said. More laughter followed.

Just like that, the radio was thrown into the wall next to the television by none other than Max Jeffery. His hands were in fists and his light brown hair was disheveled. He stood tall and lanky, and looked to be in his thirties.

"You know, when we were in grade school, talking about our futures, Derek praised my ideas," he said to a friend. He wore big, sort of obnoxious glasses, which framed his face perfectly. He made his way, calmly, to a closet just on the other side of the room. He opened

the door and pulled out another radio. This situation obviously happened often because the closet had at least twenty of the same radio in it.

He returned to the coffee table and sat down the radio, his face almost sour and hands tense. He turned it on to the same station. "Professor," Max said. He moved to his desk, which stood along the wall that connected the dining room to the living room. He leaned over, typed a little, and walked to a printer on the dining table. He waited a few seconds before a paper came out, which had PLAN J written on the top of it.

"You seem to be in a good mood," a short, white-haired man said as he walked in. He was older, looked a lot wiser, and was well put together. He sat at the dining table, watching Max read a paper.

"Ah, Professor, thanks for joining me. Did I wake you?"

"No, no, I was just doing some laundry. Why are you listening to Derek?"

Max had always seen the Professor as a father figure, not only because he didn't have a real father, but also because they were always there for each other. They had met each other a few years prior, when Max was in college. The Professor was his teacher and the only one who wasn't mean to him. A few months back, Max took him in because of financial troubles the Professor was dealing with.

"Because," Max said. He moved to the kitchen and grabbed the trash can. Every movement from him was quick and erratic. He walked to the balcony and dumped the trash over the rail, not caring who it landed on. "I must listen so I know what lies he's telling everyone about me."

The Professor shook his head and rolled his eyes. Max walked back to the kitchen and returned the trash can to its place. He walked through a door leading off of the dining room, which had KEEP OUT written on it.

The room was drastically different from the rest of the place. The walls were clean and white. The floor was a cold, dreary metal, and there was a dozen weird, science machines. And more plants.

Max pulled out a metal cart and rolled it into the living room. The cart had some random papers on the top, which didn't look like they belonged there. There were two metal containers on the bottom of the cart, one slightly bigger and one smaller. He carefully grabbed the bigger one and sat it on top.

The Professor watched, curiously, as he opened it and pulled out a silver cube. It was roughly the size of a watermelon and looked fairly heavy. A slight, constant hum came from the cube and there was a big, green button encased in glass on the top of it.

"What is that, Max," the Professor asked.

"This cube, you see," Max said, gently holding the cube in his hands, "will create a noise so loud, that anyone within a mile will become paralyzed by the sound." Max put the cube in the container that he pulled it out from and put it on the bottom of the cart. "I just don't know what exactly to do."

"What do you mean," the Professor asked.

"I'm not sure where I should set it off," Max said.

The Professor's face lit up. He moved the the kitchen counter and grabbed a calendar off of it. He sat at the dining table, flipping through the calendar until he spotted a circled date. "Here," he said, motioning for Max to come.

A smile grew on Max's face as he realized what the Professor was saying. "Yes, that's perfect," Max said, "The ceremony they're throwing for Derek this weekend. That'll ensure Derek gets the worst of the noise. You're the best evil sidekick a villain could have, Professor."

They gave each other a high-five before the Professor got concerned. "Wait, won't we here the noise," he asked.

Max smiled and, shaking his head, grabbed the smaller box from the metal cart. He opened it and pulled out two pairs of extremely boxy, large, and seemingly uncomfortable headphones. "I have invented these headphones to block out so much sound, we won't notice the noise whatsoever," he said.

The Professor nodded, smiling. He was always impressed at how thorough Max's plans were. "You know, I'm always on board for your plans to destroy Derek, but won't we be hurting the rest of the town, too," the Professor asked, curious and concerned.

"When we were in middle school, we were best friends," Max said, ignoring the question. "And then he turned on me. He's been horrible to me ever since and I must even things out."

"I know he did awful things, Max. You know I'm on your side," said the Professor.

Max nodded and put his arm around the Professor. "Now, how about some lunch," Max asked. The Professor smiled and they walked out, leaving the headphones on top of the metal cart.

###

Derek had a clear view of Max from the building. He stood on the roof of an apartment building across the street from Max's. Derek was the only one up there. A cool breeze blew by as Derek watched Max through his binoculars. He was partially hidden by a beautiful, bright green bush. "What are you planning," Derek said aloud to no one.

Derek had dirty blonde hair and was an overall good-looking man in his early thirties. His eyes were not quite blue and not quite green, but more of a gray. He loved fame and attention, but most of all, he loved making Max feel awful.

As Max showed the Professor his headphones, Derek focused on the image through the binoculars. "There it is," Derek said, a smile appearing on his face. He was sure he had figured out a way to ruin Max's plan and that made him extremely happy.

He threw the binoculars down and ran down the stairs to the street. He waited behind a group of people who were waiting for a bus until he saw Max and the Professor leave the building. "Hello, ma'am," he said as he approached the front desk.

"Derek Everett, what a pleasure. What can I do for you," the employee asked.

"I'm going to need a key to Max's apartment," Derek said.

"What?"

"Max is planning to destroy the town again. I know how to stop him," Derek said. He always knew how to manipulate people to get exactly what he wanted.

"Oh, no, not again," she said grabbing a key from under the desk, "Here you are."

Derek smiled and made his way to Max's apartment. Once inside, he saw the headphones sitting on the cart and quickly snatched them. He quickly walked to the balcony and threw both pairs over where they landed in a pile of rubble. "That takes care of that," he said.

###

"That was great," the Professor said as him and Max returned to their apartment. "Thanks for the lunch."

"Anything for you, buddy," Max said. "If you don't mind, I'm going to put the finishing touches on my cube for tomorrow."

“Okay. Let me know if you need any help.” The Professor returned to his room, leaving Max by himself.

Max grabbed a large backpack and put the unknowingly empty container the headphones were supposed to be in into it. He pulled the cube out of the other container and walked into his lair with it. He spent all night designing, redesigning, testing, and retesting his creation. He had to make sure there were no flaws.

###

The next day, Max got ready to attend the ceremony. He put the cube into the backpack with the other container. “Okay, Professor, I’m heading out now,” he said.

“Good luck to you,” said the Professor.

The city center was overflowing with people. There was a small stage in front of City Hall and everything was covered in banners. A quiet music rang throughout the area.

Max made his way to the front of the crowd with the stage only a few feet in front of him. He watched a woman walked to the microphone on stage and clear her throat. The rest of the crowd turned quiet and focused on the stage.

“Hello everyone, I am Mayor Kettle and I would like to thank you all for coming to support Derek and his acts of kindness in this town,” Mayor Kettle said.

The crowd clapped and cheered and only Max was left quiet. The more people cheered, the tenser Max became.

“As many of you know, Derek has devoted his time to saving this town from people who want to hurt it. He truly is a hero,” she said. “So, please welcome Derek to the stage.”

Max's face was now sour and stiff. He watched Derek walk, head high and shoulders broad, to the microphone. More claps and more cheers arose as Derek waved to the crowd. Max knelt down and rummaged through his backpack.

Derek spotted Max in the first row of people in the crowd. He stopped waving and gave Max a smug, snide look. Derek silenced the crowd as he began his speech. "I am so thankful for all of those who support me," he said.

Max was still kneeling and Derek knew exactly how to make him angry. "Oh, Max, is that you," Derek asked.

Max paused and looked up to see everyone staring at him, thanks to Derek.

"Come to show your support, huh?"

Max didn't answer. He paused for a second before jumping onto the stage with his bag, stealing the microphone away from Derek. "He has you all fooled, you know. He doesn't deserve this award," Max said to the crowd.

Derek never seemed fazed by anything Max said or did. He knew Max well and not only because they used to be friends. He was also a master manipulator and understood that it's best to know the people you hate better than anyone else.

"What do you know, Max," a woman from the crowd said, "The only thing you do is try to destroy the town. You don't know the first thing about doing good."

"Well it's time for someone to take justice into their own hands," Max said into the microphone. He reached into his bag and pulled out the cube, sitting it on the stage. He reached for the smaller container and opened it. He was shocked to find it empty. Panic filled him as Derek grabbed the microphone.

"Yes, Max," Derek said, "continue on."

Max shook his head, placing the cube back into his bag. "Hmm...No never mind. I didn't have anything to do, or say, or whatever," he said.

Derek stepped closer. "No, really, what'd you want to do?"

Max stepped back. Derek moved closer to Max, causing Max to step back again. Unfortunately for him, the stage wasn't that big. His foot hit the air and he fell to the ground with Derek and the whole town watching. By now, people were recording, laughing, and pointing at Max.

"You're a joke, Max. You always were," Derek said, his face full of pride.

###

Back at his apartment, Max sat in the corner of his bedroom. The room was quite different from the rest of his home. There weren't any books and there was only one plant.

He sat in the dark with his knees pulled up to his chest. He stared straight ahead, eyes focused on nothing. Max wasn't crying, but it looked as though a tear could fall at any moment.

The Professor walked in and sat on the bed, close to Max. "I'm sorry, I should've been there for you," he said.

Max broke his unfocused stare to look at the Professor. "Do you think they're right," Max asked.

"Right about what," asked the Professor. Max sat up and released his arms from around his legs. He rested his head against the wall.

"Everyone thinks I'm a joke. I haven't successfully destroyed the town or Derek, despite my best efforts," Max said. He stood up and sat next to the Professor on the bed. By now, his eyes were glassy from the tears welling up, but he still didn't let them fall.

"Well, you see—" the Professor said, before Max cut him off with a big sigh.

"It's not just that. They're right about me. I don't know how to do good. All I know is how to be bad and evil."

The Professor patted Max's shoulder before he got up and left the room.

Max sat, head down, and the Professor returned with a picture of him and Max. They both looked to be slightly younger in the picture and they were smiling, standing in front of the door to Max's apartment. Max stared at the picture and smiled.

"You took me in when I had nowhere else to go, Max. You do good things," he paused, "Sometimes."

Max laughed before he sat the picture down on the bed.

"And look at everything you've built. You are a good villain, too. You just need patience," the Professor said. "Now, get out there and get to work."

###

Max made his way to the street and waited for a cab. He spat on the sidewalk, but it unfortunately landed on a passerby's shoe. The passerby glared at him and Max returned the glare with a smile. A middle-aged woman pulled up and he got in. "The hardware store on 34th, and hurry," Max said, propping his feet on the armrest in the front. The lady looked at him through the rearview mirror with disgust.

They pulled up to the front of the hardware store and Max got out. He walked into the hardware store, eyes focused and posture tall. No one else seemed to even notice him, but Max walked as though everyone was not only watching him, but as though everyone was scared of him.

Max shoved his way to the wood section in the back. "This is it," he said to no one, "this plan is foolproof." His eyes were narrow as he browsed the wood. He repeatedly pulled things off the shelf and put them back, not holding onto anything.

"Need any help," said an employee. Max laughed.

"I don't think you could even help yourself, let alone me," Max said. The employee rolled his eyes and walked away. Max smirked as he watched. He continued to browse when he heard an all too familiar voice.

"Oh, look, it's the town idiot." Max turned to see Derek standing behind him, his face full of pride.

"You have everyone fooled, Derek. You even have yourself fooled." Derek shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not sure I know what you're talking about," Derek said, smug. A teenage girl walked up to Derek.

"Derek Everett," she said, "you're like my hero. I love you on the radio." Derek smiled at her and gave her a hug. She glared at Max before walking away. Max shook his head.

"You're not a good person, Derek, admit it," Max said, walking closer to him. Derek stepped towards Max.

"I stop you and your stupid attempts to destroy this town all the time, everybody loves me, and I am basically famous, therefore, I am a good person," Derek said, "A hero, if you will."

Bystanders started to gather around them, some taking out their phones and recording it, some just focusing on what was in front of them. Derek stood just in front of a shelf of huge wood logs. The shelf was almost empty except for one. It was held up by a metal bracket on each side, but one of the brackets shook. No one noticed.

"Do you not remember when we were in grade school," Max asked.

"You mean how I shoved your head in the toilet," Derek asked. He smirked, but Max flinched. "Or, do you mean the time I broke your leg and then told the teacher you tried to kick me in the head," Derek asked, his face was full of pride, as if every horrible thing he had done to Max was an achievement to him.

Max stiffened up and stood straighter. "No, Derek, I mean when we were best friends. When you were my only friend and I was your only friend," Max said, "But, you turned on me, and that was that."

The bracket which shook, now popped out and the shelf tilted down. The bystanders still focused on Derek and Max. Derek never stopped smirking.

"You're pathetic, Max. You always were," Derek said.

Pop, pop, boom. The sound was so loud that everyone froze for a moment. Max looked up and saw the enormous log rolling forward, headed straight for Derek. In that moment, time stood still. Not everyone saw, but Max knew what would happen if it hit Derek.

Max's eyes shifted from the log to Derek and back again. He could have everything he ever wanted, right then and there. *You don't even know how to do good,* rang in his head.

To Max, it felt like an eternity, but in reality it was only a second later. Max lunged forward, and before Derek knew, he was forced back into the bottom of the shelf. The bystanders watched the log hit the floor, only inches away from Derek and Max.

Derek sat, mouth open and eyes widened from the shock. Max's breathing slowed and he stood up. Derek's eyes followed Max. His eyes looked as though they were filled with panic, regret, truth, and everything else you could ever possibly feel. Max turned towards Derek and moved a few steps forward.

"You're not a good person, Derek," Max said. He turned to walk away but stopped and faced Derek again. "But, neither am I." Max turned again and walked away. Everyone who had saw what happened still stood frozen.

Derek slowly stood up, watching Max as he left. His focus turned to the crowd of people as he realized everyone was staring at him.

"Max was right all along, wasn't he," someone from the crowd asked.

Derek remained silent, not sure how to react or what to say.

"You did have us all fooled," another person said before continuing, "but not anymore."

###

Max was greeted by the Professor after arriving home. "Professor," Max said.

"What's next," the Professor asked.

Max sat down at the table and motioned for the Professor to follow. They both sat in silence for a moment before Max spoke. "They were right," he said, "I don't know how to do good." He stood up, his eyes scanning for some sign that what he was doing was okay, but there was none.

"Well, that—," the Professor began until he was cut off by Max.

"I don't want to let Derek run my life anymore and I definitely don't want to end up like him. I'm going to try and learn to do good, and I need your help."

The Professor smiled, knowing things would never be the same. He stood up and shook Max's hand, both of them ready for the future.

