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Calliope, Milo and Lucy were in the kitchen. This was not unusual. The kitchen was warm, it had a large surface for drawing, and there were snacks. Snacks appeared to be in progress at the moment. Lucy was feeding herself oyster crackers from the tray of her Lu-ambulator, and Calliope was feeding Milo one of those extruded ginger spice cookies they both liked.

Milo removed the cookie with a cringe.

Hyacinth snorted and rolled her eyes. "Oh. Yeah, I'm gonna be *super* pissed if you don't eat up all your curry because you had a couple cookies. Gods, Milo. Finish it, nobody else wants it." She stuffed her purse back in the drawer. "It's a new place, anyway, it might suck. I got us a menu in case it doesn't..."

Mordecai squeezed past her to set the paper bags on the counter. He drew out a tissue and coughed before asking, "What's going on?"

"The children are spoiling their dinner," Hyacinth said. She grinned. "Punish them."

Mordecai tipped his head back with a sigh. "Honestly, Hyacinth. Milo has a hard time eating in front of people..." He regarded Calliope. "Er, present company excluded. Not excluded from *people!*"

Calliope snickered. "Nah. Milo doesn't like people, I'm fine not being people. C'mon, babe." She picked up the half-eaten cookie and offered it. "What do we say?"

He shook his head and turned away.

The red man approached cautiously. "Are we in the middle of something?" Milo was trying to learn sign language, but it was hard for him. The very concept had basically shorted him out — he was scared of talking. He had an alter-ego in a dress that did his talking. When he was Milo, it was all pencils and gears.

But he had stolen this cute little readymade family for himself, and he was willing to do quite a lot for them. Perhaps including a meal and a conversation like a normal human being. This could be a step in that direction. Mordecai was ready to prevent Hyacinth from carelessly throwing a banana peel in the way, if so.

"Is this a sex thing?" Hyacinth said.

Milo curled up and hid his face in his hands.

Mordecai wheeled on her. “Gods! Honestly!”

“He’s clotheslined to that chair,” Hyacinth said, pointing.

Mordecai stared.

Calliope groaned. “No! It’s not! I’ve got him tied up in the kitchen so he can’t reach the cookies and I have to feed him because it is *not* a sex thing!” She sighed and turned her head aside. “He only thinks it is because I screwed up. I thought it’d just be fun.”

Mordecai put his hand over Hyacinth’s mouth. “Don’t ask. Do not ask. You know she will tell you, so *don’t ask!*”

Hyacinth bit him. “So what happened?”

“I taught him a word he needs but now he’s all weird about it,” Calliope said. She stood up. “Hey, Em? Do you need iodine on that?”

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Calliope met Milo at the door with a wave and, when this was reciprocated, a careful hug. She pulled back after barely putting her arms around him and said, “Okay?” He nodded, so she hugged again, and this time she gave him some time to hesitantly hug back. “It’s cool,” she said. “I like hugs from you.”

He nodded against her with a sigh.

When she pulled back again she had a smile. “Don’t freak out. I still like hugs. But I gave Lucy to the kids, so we’ve got some time.”

Milo frowned. He brought his hands up halfway and froze.

“No, it’s okay,” Calliope said. She smiled again. “Gimme a chance to figure it out, yeah?”

He nodded, the faintest sketch of a nod. Trying to say real words with gestures made everything feel weird. He signed, very small: *whch*.

“Which kids?”

Even smaller nod, with eyes closed.

“Just Erik and Maggie, they’re in 103.” She tipped her head towards the direction of her room, which she shared with the baby and occasionally Milo. She grinned and covered his hands with hers. “I wouldn’t give Lucy to random kids.”

He turned away. He didn't mean it like that.

"Aw, babe. I'm sorry." But she didn't duck sideways trying to make him look at her like Hyacinth. She gave him space to come back on his own, and that helped a lot.

He was trying to get the hang of this sign language thing so he could tell her stuff like that when he thought of it, but he wasn't there yet.

"I'm so used to you knowing when I'm teasing right away. I know it's weird right now. I just get ideas sometimes and I forget to be careful."

He brightened. Idea? More cuckoo clock stuff or new art? Darn it, he needed paper. He let go of her hands and wandered away.

"It's not complicated, I can just tell you," she said reasonably, when a less-awesome person might've been mad at him for walking off in the middle of a conversation.

He stopped, turned back and nodded at her.

"I know you've got big things to say and it's, like, super frustrating you can't yet," she said. "I thought of a little thing you can learn how to say, and it's super important and you'll like it right away."

Milo covered a smile, closed his hand to sign SMILE, like Calliope fixed it for him, and then signed I LOVE YOU. One-handed, it came out like IUL. Simple, super important, and he liked it right away.

She signed it back with a snicker. "Yeah, but a different one. For sex."

Milo closed his mouth with a hand and did not yet sign SMILE.

He was pretty sure Maggie and Erik could watch the baby. They didn't have Soup with them. They wouldn't go drive a car on the sidewalk or anything. They already did that. They'd be bored of that. It was fine.

He signed: OK!

\_\_\_\_\_

Now Mordecai had his hand over Calliope's mouth.

Hyacinth regarded him. "If she doesn't bite you, I will. I'll pick a spot."

“We don’t talk about Milo in front of Milo like he’s not there,” Mordecai said patiently.

Calliope brushed his hand away. “Yes we do. Sometimes he needs a break. Do you even live here?”

“...while he is tied to a chair with clothesline,” Mordecai finished.

“Then I’ll get a scissors,” Hyacinth said, “because if she doesn’t tell me what word she was trying to teach him, I’m going to lose whatever’s left of my mind.”

Calliope tapped her fingertips together, “More.”

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Since the kids were in Room 103, they went upstairs to 201. The single bed was enough for two if they squeezed.

Or happened to be on top of each other.

“...I just need a way for you to tell me what’s okay while I’m doing it,” Calliope was explaining. “I try to check in with you, but I don’t always remember. And I love you, but you know how you get. I don’t trust you to tell me to stop.”

He tapped her shoulder and shook his head. It wasn’t that he wouldn’t tell her to stop if he needed her to stop, she was just extremely good at sex and he hadn’t ever *wanted* her to stop. If, gods forbid, the house happened to catch on fire and she didn’t notice, he was sure he’d give her a shove. Provided *he* noticed, he wasn’t always paying attention either.

He sighed. But he never said no, so he understood why she didn’t trust him to say no. She didn’t have any data. She’d feel better about that if he had a way to tell her to keep going, and she saw him use it. He understood what they were doing.

He cancelled his head shake, crossing his hands in front of him, then he nodded, signed a thumbs up, and shoed her to continue.

She smiled. “If I do something you like and you can tell me you want more of it, you’ll have more fun too.”

He nodded rapidly. Two thumbs up for that!

“Okay.” She slid her hands around his, pulled him down and kissed his cheek.

He smiled at her.

She snickered. "...So I know I've got you on the spot and you don't like pressure, but can you say it once right now *before* I do anything to distract you?"

He blushed and turned his head aside. She knew this was not an ideal situation for him; new and important things were hard. He was standing in front of a gateway to one of his favourite activities in the whole world and if he wanted in, he had to say a new word.

Also, she already knew how to say it and he always did sign language wrong. She had to keep dumbing it down for him, or else he'd never be able to say anything at all.

"Hey." She tugged his hand. She'd detected something in his expression or posture that said he wasn't just nervous and embarrassed but ashamed. Calliope watched all of him, because she did sign language *right*. She smiled. "Do it with me. Copy me. Like a mirror, okay?" She tapped her fingertips together, slowly, again and again.

He observed her for a few seconds, wincing, then he picked his hands up and did it once, hesitantly: *mre?*

Calliope grinned. "Keep going. More 'more.'"

He copied her, at first haltingly, like someone had poured syrup in his gears. Once he smoothed out, she sped up.

She didn't stop smiling. Finally, she said, "There ya go. You got it. Just a couple times is fine. It's a small one, you don't have to be scared you're gonna bop me in the nose or whatever."

He felt his smile twitching, covered it, and signed SMILE for her. He really was scared he'd hit someone, or knock over a loud thing that broke. She noticed.

She pulled him down by the shoulder and kissed his cheek. She signed and said it, "More?"

He nodded.

She laughed. "Silly. What if you knock me in the head doing that? I can't kiss you while you're nodding. Use your hands."

He had a vague idea that using both hands to sign a thing was going to make it hard to do, like, sixty to seventy-five-percent of the sex stuff he was good at. But it would be rude to poke holes in Calliope's fun idea, even if it was impractical. Like, she never said his flying toaster with three slots for club sandwiches was impractical even *once*. And they had a lot of fun with it anyway. Calliope could think of a workaround, she was super smart.

He signed for her, still a bit small and self-conscious: *more*.

She pulled his head with both hands and held him there while she kissed his mouth. Then her hands went down and started undoing his buttons. She stopped halfway and leaned back to look at him. This time she just signed it, she didn't say it out loud.

He nodded and signed it back: *more*.

She got his shirt all the way undone and took down his suspenders before she stopped again.

*Aw, man*, he thought. *This motor has a bad alternator*. Still, he signed like she wanted. He guessed if he got bored and frustrated with it, he wouldn't be scared anymore, there was that.

He kicked his shoes off while she was undoing his pants. He'd had trouble juggling shoes, pants and sex before. Admittedly, Calliope did appreciate his Buster-Keaton-like comedic timing — accidental or no — but if he tripped and fell *every* time it wouldn't be cute and awkward anymore. He'd save that for another occasion.

She stepped back to admire him in his underthings while he stood with his head turned aside and a hand over his mouth. She liked that he wore ladies' things under his clothes, and he liked her liking it so he let her look. He had upgraded the sexiness of some of his intimate wardrobe, but she surprised him this time. He was in mismatched white panties with a little blue bow in the front and fraying elastic. The black silk stockings had a nice, scalloped lace edging, though. He turned his leg slightly so she'd notice it.

"Pretty," she said, and signed for him.

He huffed a sigh and shook his head. SORRY. He didn't like the ones where he had to draw attention to his face. He didn't have an unattractive face, he didn't think, but he didn't make expressions like a human being. People didn't like how he *used* his face, so he didn't like asking them to look at it.

She shook her head too. "That's not how you mean it, anyway. Gimme a sec." A moment later, she made a simple sign, dragging both hands toward her at chest height. "Wanted. I want you. Pretty. Yeah?"

He nodded.

She smiled. M-I-L-O (you were supposed to fingerspell names if you weren't a real deaf person, except he was bad at that too) PRETTY.

He smiled and signed back [C]RIMINAL (Calliope's name that her friend Helen gave her) PRETTY.

“I know you’re not gonna use it, and you have a little name anyway, you don’t need it, but just between you and me...” She formed her fingers into an M and drew it towards her. [M]PRETTY.  
“Milo.”

Beaming, he signed it once, then scurried over to the mirror. *Ann! Ann! Ann!*

She covered a laugh and then signed it for him. MILO. MILO. *All right, dear. Now let’s leave it alone until you have clothes on.*

He turned and signed for Calliope, YOU’RE VERY KIND. (Which was how she fixed ‘thank you’ for him.)

She snickered. YOU’RE WELCOME.

I LOVE YOU.

I LOVE YOU. YOU’RE PRETTY MILO. MORE?

He swept her up and sat her on the bed.

She scooted half into his lap and smoothed back his hair. “Hey. We were talkin’.”

SORRY? he said doubtfully.

She shook her head with a smile. She undid her shirt. While she was doing that, he undid his hair — she liked his pretty hair. After she kicked her pants off, she plunged both hands into it and kissed him.

He pressed her back on the bed. She let him, for a little while, then she put her hand against his shoulder, nudged him back against the wall beside the bed and (somewhat awkwardly) switched places with him. She sat on his hips and tenderly arranged his hair across the pillow, so it wouldn’t get smushed. PRETTY, she told him.

He sighed. He didn’t have a good way to say, “You make me so incredibly happy. When we’re together, I feel like that glitter novelty lamp you’ve got in your room. You don’t even have to hit the switch. It’s a proximity thing. You’re an electric angel.”

Ooh, yeah. “Electric angel,” that was brilliant. He’d have to remember that and save it for the next magic storm, when the radio was reading minds and he could do her all the stream-of-consciousness poetry he wanted. He wasn’t really sad, but he wished he could do that for her right now. She deserved it.

Ah! Wait! But he could tell her he liked what she was doing!



MORE? he said hopefully.

She snickered and slid back to admire his underwear. The panties were going to come off eventually, but she left them where they were for the moment and pet him through the fabric, feeling him stiffen.

She noted, fondling the lace edging as she slipped a finger past it, that the elastic on this pair was shot. He had a few pairs of nice stockings and underwear, but he hadn't been expecting her. She caught him all mismatched, like before she figured out boxers were way more comfy and practical. If there wasn't anything in the front of the drawer, she'd grope around in the back and just throw on whatever she found. Definitely back-drawer undies and front-drawer stockings.

She traced the edge of the leg and tweezed a fuzzy puff of broken elastic in her finger. If you snipped those off, it just unravelled even worse. Girl undies had that sissy...

Her expression sharpened and she ducked her head to hide an embarrassed snicker. He wasn't funny, *she* was. It was the contrast, like chocolate and pretzels. Boyfriend and panties. It just never occurred to her she would like that until somebody offered it in retail packaging with a cute li'l mascot. Now she was hooked and buying up every flavour they had.

But that wasn't a nice word. There was a fine line between teasing and insulting; she'd rather not trip over it.

They had that silly, impractical, *skinny* elastic, because it was on the outside and had to look nice. There were always a couple pairs in every pack that blew out right away. She might've had a couple like these somewhere in her suitcase, even now. They were probably breeding in there, like odd socks.

There was something really sweet and sexy in how she'd caught her shy boyfriend in girl's underwear that even most *girls* would be embarrassed of, and he wasn't shy about that. He'd been worried what she would think at the very beginning, that was sexy too, but she told him she liked them. At first, it was like he liked to hear her say that but he didn't really believe it, that wore off fast. Then he did believe it and he bought nicer underwear for her to like even more. Now they'd reached the point where he was perfectly comfortable displaying his ratty back-drawer underpants — as long as she also noticed the nice stockings along with them.

She was still trying to wear her *slightly*-nicer boxers for him, without stains. But, she guessed she wouldn't mind if he surprised her in her worst. Yeah. It was really great.

She stroked the fraying elastic possessively. "You don't mind this silly stuff that barely works as long as it looks cute."

He sat up to look at her, squinting to discern what she wanted through steamy glasses. He took them off, and she could see him deciding to throw caution to the wind and just be honest. He shrugged and nodded. Yep. Basically. What else was underwear for, huh?

One hand went down and stroked him while she held the back of his head with the other and kissed his mouth. She broke off with a smile, but she didn't stop stroking. "Brave boyfriend in sissy underwear."

He twitched a smile and didn't cover it. That word she thought would be too mean didn't even register. Maybe he thought she was teasing, or maybe he didn't care what she meant. Well, maybe she didn't care why he didn't get embarrassed by embarrassing stuff either — she just liked it. They were getting to the point where critical thinking went right out the window. She wasn't trying to be funny or contradictory, though. It really was brave to be silly (or whatever, heh) and vulnerable with a person. So many guys didn't get that.

She slipped her hand inside his sissy underwear and ran her bare foot down his nice silk stocking, but then she stopped. He arched against her, and when that didn't get any response he squirmed and issued a high, faint whine — hardly a sound, more of a slow leak from a balloon animal.

"Say it," she whispered in his ear. For a moment she wondered if he really would.

He signed it for her. Embarrassing underwear, yes. No problem. Words made with vocal cords, no. Not yet. Oh, well. It was still talking.

She slid down him again and pulled off the panties, but she left the stockings. When he felt her mouth, he sat forward urgently and touched her shoulder and then, hesitantly, her breast.

She grinned at him. "No, babe, you need your hands. Besides, if we try to eat everything all at once we're gonna get gravy in the ice cream. That kinda thing's only fun in true confession stories. Let me be dessert this time?"

He considered for a moment, then nodded. He signed again, MORE?

"Lots more," Calliope said, while signing.

LOTS MORE, he echoed, probably just trying it out.

"You got it." She dipped her head.

He hissed and covered his face with both hands.

She kept stopping. It was mean, she didn't want to wear him out before he finished, but she thought she knew him well enough. The way he felt, the way he moved, the almost-noises he

made. If he needed a break, he could always play with her for a little while. Or if she blew all his circuits and shut him down, she'd sit by him and pet his hair until he switched back on and could talk to her again. She could wait on her dessert, if needed. Rarely did she reach a point where she needed an orgasm *right now*. She could dog-ear the page and come back to it.

She didn't think Milo was wired that way. It was mean, but she couldn't help teasing the poor guy when he obviously wanted to finish the story. Every time she interrupted him, it got a few paragraphs longer. He seemed to be enjoying it. He never stopped asking for more.

But then when she stopped to check on him — or just to tease him some more — he had blood on his mouth.

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Between Hyacinth's requests for more information and Mordecai's pleas for less, they both put together that there had been some kind of sex-related accident. Maybe they banged their heads together hard enough to see stars or someone fell out of the bed and cut themselves. Milo must have picked up some kind of injury, because Calliope seemed pretty sure it was her fault.

"I wasn't paying attention," she muttered, looking down. "That's all. I was..."

Milo undid the clothesline with a simple motion of one hand. It fell to the floor.

Hyacinth — who had given up looking for a scissors and was about to try a paring knife — looked annoyed.

"...being stupid," Calliope said.

Milo came up behind her and hugged her. He turned her around and shook his head at her. No. She wasn't stupid and it wasn't like that.

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It was like when you were breathing so fast your head felt like a floaty balloon and the rest of you was all pins and needles a mile away. Except, not anxiety. Pleasure. Too fast and everything blurry like a watercolour and out of control and *fun*. Like, if the rollercoaster on Papillon island actually cared about him and was nice... and also a pretty girl. A pretty girl he could kiss and touch but not right now because he needed his hands to sign. They didn't let you ride without that bar thing across your lap to hold you down, right? It was for safety!

It was so safe. The thing that was holding him down was her *asking* him if it was okay to keep going. Being out of control and unable to move or object was a nightmare, one he'd lived through and relived almost nightly. This wasn't that. If he wanted to stop, he didn't even have to *say stop*. She *kept asking*! He could just let go. It was safe to let go.

It felt good and he needed to feel good and he hadn't known what he was doing. Maybe in an absent way. *Admittedly* in an absent way. It was another thing that felt good and his brain was filled with helium at the moment so why not, huh? He caught his lower lip between his teeth and he just... let it stay there and bit down.

When she stopped, he signed for her. She didn't start again, so he got really lyrical about it. He was flying and he didn't want to fall. MORE. MORE. LOTS MORE. PLEASE. MORE. I LOVE YOU. MORE. LOTS MORE. PLEASE.

She touched his face and he tipped his head against her hand. Her voice seemed fuzzy.

When she showed him her hand with blood on it, everything sharpened up fast.

He picked up the blanket and wiped her fingers, looking for a cut.

"Milo, this is you," she said. "Babe, you're hurt. This is you. No more."

He touched the back of his hand to his mouth and examined the stain. It wasn't too bad, but he knew he'd scared her. He turned his head aside, hiding his mouth with one hand and signed, SORRY.

She started to cry.

Okay. So they were all done with "more."

There was a box of tissues on the dresser. She brought it back to the bed to clean him up, but he only needed one. She needed lots more.

She finally managed, "Euterpe got like that when they were dropping bombs on us during the war."

Milo broadly shook his head. *Oh, no, babe. If your little brother got like that when they were dropping bombs on him, he is way weirder than I thought.* He touched her hand to his mouth and kissed lightly, OK, he signed. He twitched an awkward smile.

She took back her hand, shaking her head. "He used to... he used to..." She curled up and fisted both hands so tightly they shook. "I knew he was hurting himself, but he didn't hear me talking and he wouldn't let go."

Milo winced. Maybe it did look like that on the outside. He signed, I UNDERSTAND. He touched his chest, I/ME NO BAD. GOOD. HAPPY. GOOD. GOOD. OK?

She sniffled and rubbed her nose. "You did that because you liked it?"

He nodded.

She sighed. "In the magazines they bite the *other* person. Or scratch up their back or something. Not like that."

SORRY, he signed. He didn't read a lot of true confession magazines, he'd have to pick some of those up at the store.

She shook her head, looking down. "No. *I'm* sorry. I freaked out and messed up sex."

NO. He drew her near again. He kissed the top of her head and breathed in the scent of her hair. Soap, mainly. And her. He signed it one-handed, he could do that and still hold her, IUL.

"I love you too," she said softly. "But teasing you like that and not even letting you finish is *not* acting like I love you."

He sighed. It was too complicated for the signs he knew. He put up both hands, asking her to wait for him, and went after the cards in his dresser. He had to make her understand, it *was* so acting like she loved him. When you loved a person, you didn't hide when you were scared and needed to stop. That would be the *opposite* of loving. Not *hate*, but...

Ann was always trying to explain how love wasn't just liking someone a lot. It was a complicated system, like Calliope's cuckoo clock project; if you didn't have a "trust" gear in there, the whole thing broke down. Running "love" without all the gears was like you didn't care if it broke, like you didn't love your love. Opposite like that. Self-contradiction.

He didn't even glance at Ann in the mirror. He wrote in large, bold letters so she wouldn't need her reading glasses: *Saying "stop" is a part of loving me. I want a whole love with you, Calliope, even if it means I can't let you make my brain into a happy, floaty balloon.*

She snickered when she got to the end. "Aw. Well, now I feel bad you had to stop being a balloon. That sounds fun." She wiped her nose on a crumpled tissue and laughed weakly. "And I like making you feel good. You've got, like, a console with all these shiny, candy-coloured buttons and I like to press 'em and see what they do." She shook her head. "I just hit one that scared me. Are you really okay?"

He nodded.

"It doesn't hurt?"

He shook his head. GOOD. LOTS GOOD.

She signed for him, "'Very good.' Like 'you're very kind,' yeah?"

He nodded. VERY VERY GOOD. He twitched a smile. If she didn't want to, he could always pretend he was kidding, MORE?

She snickered, already nodding. "Yeah, and I know you're not gonna freak me out again, but I need insurance. Can we stuff a rag in your mouth or something?"

He winced and shook his head. He didn't want to think about it too much or else they'd have to give up on sex altogether, but they'd done that to him in the workhouse so he couldn't bite. It was no fun.

"Peanut butter sandwich? I'll make you a sticky peanut butter sandwich, and you hold it in there?"

He twitched another smile and shook his head.

"One of Lu's teething toys?"

He considered that for a moment and shook his head again. Not impossible for the future, but he'd have to buy one for himself. He didn't want to borrow a sex thing from the baby, that was as unsexy as peanut butter.

"Well..." Frowning, as if she were trying to puzzle out what those candy-coloured buttons did without pressing any more, she put two fingers in his mouth and pulled it open. He let her. She turned her hand sideways and put the soft edge of the palm between his teeth. "What about that?"

He bit down just enough to hold her. It was... It was *not* like biting into his own lip until it bled. Not intense. It was delicate. Like balancing a sugar cube on his tongue and telling himself not to crunch it so it would last. There was a little of that paradoxical safety-rollercoaster feeling again.

*This is... No. No way. Are we really going to do this? This is like you're afraid I'll crash my car, so you're lying on the road with your head against the front tire. Calliope, are you seriously willing to do something this dangerous to keep me safe?*

He touched the tip of his tongue to her skin, just briefly, teasing. Blep. *Yeah, this is cute. Now, if you don't want to, just tease me back and say you were kidding.*

She did not remove her hand. She spoke gravely, but with a grin, "I feel like I gotta warn you, there was a god who lost a whole hand this way."

He nudged her with his tongue again, but he didn't let go.

She snickered and patted his head with the other hand. “Nah, I know you won’t hurt me. But if we do it like that, you hafta be on top.”

He fell out of the bed scrambling for the dresser, where he kept a tin of the vanilla-scented petroleum jelly. Actually, there were two of ‘em in there, one slightly smaller. It was good for removing long-wearing lipstick.

He had to paw through a whole rainbow of flavoured contraceptive charms before he found one of the regular kind, which he held up triumphantly, to her applause. He also found an elastic, to make his pretty hair more convenient. He paused only a moment to marvel at how good they were getting at sex. Wow. Another fifty-to-a-million times and they’d really have it down!

Now, doing this with her hand in his teeth meant taking the *other* twenty-five to forty-percent of sex stuff he was good at off the table, but he could work with that! Perhaps this was a *new* sex thing he could be good at!

It was a little like classical music. You know, the part where the conductor picks just one violinist and makes him play all by himself? Presumably as punishment for screwing around, folding paper airplanes out of the sheet music or something. You could do a lot without the orchestra backing you up. If you knew your violin, you could even show off a little.

He didn’t know any violin, but he’d been taking a lot of Calliope lessons! She made the best noises when he had his finger on the right string. High notes first, just stroking her hair was enough to start, and then a little lower, and a little lower. Slowly.

Part of it was wanting to be sure she was okay; he had scared her. And part of it, a *small* part, was wanting to drive her crazy because she drove *him* crazy.

Doing all that with her hand between his teeth, sometimes feeling her fingers curl and twitch, was driving him crazy all over again.

He was careful. He didn’t bite hard. He did bite harder. Ah, but she *let* him.

When he finally nudged against her — asking, making sure — she put her other hand down right away and helped him inside. He decided, absently, you didn’t really *need* talking for sex if you were paying attention. It was extra. Silly and cute, like that underwear she liked.

He was so distracted by working his way through the list of other stuff she liked and trying not to crunch the delicate, forbidden sugar cube, that he brought her concert to a crescendo before he was done playing. She held her breath and twisted, her head went sideways on the pillow, and her whole hand trembled and went limp. Then he knew.

He let go of her hand, panicking. He'd never done it quite that way before! Now what? Did she want him to change it up? Should he just go finish in the closet and come back in a couple minutes? Ahhh! Damn it, you really did need talking!

She stroked his cheek with her hand and shut off his anxiety like a switch. Oh. Electric angel.

She turned her hand against his mouth and he took it again, gently. He closed his eyes.

She said, "More."

Really, all she had to do was say it. Like a magic word.

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In the kitchen, days later, he touched the edge of his palm gently to her mouth, to remind her about the sexy trust part.

She snickered and brushed him away. "Okay, okay. But I screwed up anyway. 'More' isn't that. It's everything. You need *more*," she signed it, "context. I should've done it with cookies *first*, then you wouldn't be embarrassed of it."

He shrugged. She wasn't wrong, but if he knew enough sign to make a counterpoint, he would've added that he liked it way more as a sex word than as a cookie word. This felt kinda like trying to scrub out the magic with an eraser.

You couldn't *really* erase stuff. It always left traces.

That was really great.

"Not that this is any of my business," Mordecai began, "I only mention it because it's taking place in my kitchen..."

"It's my kitchen," Hyacinth said, scribbling a note on the list pad.

"I use it better!" he snapped at her. He turned back to Milo and Calliope with a smile. "Maybe, maybe, *maybe* this would be less embarrassing if you had cookies in your room and worked your way up to the..."

Calliope put up a hand to stop him. "Can't do it, we always end up having sex."

The red man slumped and sighed. He plucked at Milo's sleeve and drew him aside. "If... If there is *anything* you can think of to shore up that jury-rigged wall between 102 and 103, which Calliope's headboard rests against... Listen, I don't like to say this, but Erik and I hear things and I've just reached the point where I can't lie to myself anymore. Okay?"



Milo nodded and signed him a thumbs up.

Mordecai patted him gently on the back, nodding too. "Thank you. Thank you. That's all I ask."

Hyacinth tore the note off the pad and presented it to Calliope like the bill at the end of a meal. "Right. I am assigning you both three petty arguments, as a couple, to make up for how cute you are. This is a misdemeanour, don't make it a felony. Too much sugar is bad for your brain. Yell at him for how you don't like the way he balls up his dirty socks and kicks them under the bed or something, right now."

Milo frowned. Hey. He did his own laundry!

Calliope folded the paper and tucked it into her shirt pocket. "Eh. I'll save 'em for later, when I need 'em." She picked up another cookie. "Hey, Milo? More?"

*The story continues at [soldier-on.com](http://soldier-on.com)!*