*Piper Black… comes into possession of a Monkey’s Paw*

Piper was far from the sharpest knife in the drawer—Zack and Dakota had both laughed at her when she bought the cursed thing.

She had bought it from Abida’s eclectics as a joke. *Of course* the Monkey’s Paw was on sale in that old Roma’s shop—any old gypsy worth their salt would have brought out something like this around Halloween time. That’s what the tourists expected.

Fifteen dollars in, and Piper had turned out one turkey sandwich richer. Which wasn’t the best trade, but Piper had just as many opportunities as this monkey had fingers.

Once she had confirmed that, yes, the paw had worked and that yes, she could wish for anything that her heart desired, Piper would still adamantly keep her wishes within the scope of grantability. No monkey paw was going to throw a monkey wrench into her wish making—not on her watch, no sir!

Always surprisingly erudite and well-read, Piper had been well-versed in W.W. Jacobs’s short story… albeit mostly through television parodies and references. But the fact of the matter was that, even if it had been total malarkey, Piper wasn’t about to send her family to the poorhouse with tax revenues by wishing to be wealthier than her wildest dreams.

Piper’s *second* wish had been carefully worded. Written and re-written at least a dozen times to make sure that the paw had very little loop holes to jump through. It was a malicious little thing, Piper could feel, just begging to get the chance to fuck up her wishes. But her genre-savviness was just enough so that she managed to get away with having *found* (not stolen, found!) a briefcase of money that had enough in it to pay off the house and pad the family wallet.

Life wasn’t *great*, but it was a damn sight better than it had been pre-paw.

“You are using that thing all wrong.” Her mother, Harper, had scoffed after the delivery of the paw-promised increase in funds, “If I had that thing, we’d be moving into a better house, you girls would have great jobs—”

“Yeah, and it’d probably, like, kill you or something in the process so that we could get it.” Piper wrapped the ugly thing back up in the towel where she kept it, “Don’t mess around with this thing, Ma. It’s very… *peculiar* about how it grants your wishes… didn’t you read—”

“For the last time Piper, *no*, I didn’t read the stupid story.”

But that hadn’t stopped Piper’s mama from seeing dollar signs. The bump in their budget had given her a taste of what life could have been, and while the extra money around the house was nice, Harper could certainly think of more than a few ways that life could still stand to be improved. The temptation of having instant gratification on tap with just the curl of a dirty little finger was too good to pass up!

Early in the morning, awoken by some rustling in the kitchen Piper found the towel sticking out of her bedside drawer, the smell of delicious food wafting through the house…

Her mother barely lifted her head from breakfast, like an overfed pig at the trough. Her stomach was bloated beyond compare, as if she’d been rendered pregnant full-term once more.

“Please…” Harper panted, “Us… anther… wsh…”

She collapsed face first into breakfast, except for the long spider limb to reach past the partition and heft up her head…

*Dani Gosset… finds herself becoming quite monstrous!*

Ever since the dry spell hit, Dani had been miserable.

October in South Carolina was supposed to be a nice cool breeze, for those of you who don’t know. But experiencing summer heats well up until the tenth month of the year wasn’t just concerning, it was *irritating*. All of Dani’s outfits were practically made for fall weather, and at this rate she wasn’t gonna get to show any of them off!

Not only that, she was hot, and she was sweaty. She still hadn’t lost any of *last year’s* winter weight, so that meant she was *fat* too—if only it’d cool down some so that she could truly appreciate being well-insulated for winter climates!

“Ugh, quit your whining Dani, you want something to drink or something?”

Dani paused mid-monologue to snatch the can of soda away from her hate-friend Haley and chugged the whole bottle. Strawberry flavored… something. It didn’t taste too bad. Except for—

“HUACK!” Dani coughed suddenly, leaving her hoarse, “I think… I think that there was something in there!”

“Like a thumb?” Courtney piqued, “You know that happens, right?”

“No, it wasn’t a thumb.” Dani shot back snottily, “It was something… *gooey*. Like jello or something. I felt it on the way down.”

“Are you… okay? Haley asked as her friend struggled to a stand, “Want us to take you to the doctor or anything?”

“Fuck no, I’ll be okay.” Dani tossed the mostly empty can off the way, “As long as I never drink *Very Berry Beach Drink* again… ugh, what a stupid name.”

Dani came in and out of Haley’s life with little rhyme or reason, so she didn’t think twice about when the next time she’d see her not-bestie again. She almost always made a big stink and walked out like she was wronged, regardless of what happened. It was just her way!

Had Haley been there, witnessing the strangeness at play in Spartanburg County, she might have been able to do something. No one thought it odd that Dani had begun to sweat more. She was rather plump, and just as lazy. Her heavy black makeup and black clothes didn’t lend well to staying dry in the heat. As a consequence, she felt thirstier than ever. She was drinking from the tap, emptying out her fridge at home, and guzzling down just about everything that she could in hopes of satiating her unquenchable need for water.

Or, as times got increasingly less desperate, *Very Berry Beach Drink*.

Something about it soothed her in a way that nothing else could. It made her feel less thirsty. Almost full, even. She started buying the stuff by the pack.

Every day after work, she’d sit down, crack open a VBBD, and slurp it down. And then another, and another, until she’d downed the whole 12 pack. 24 pack. *Case*.

“S’starting to feel cool ‘gan.”

Dani’s voice was raspy and labored—her words vibrated in her chins and cheeks as they melded seamlessly against her chest. Bright and pink, with all the structure of peanut butter. Her once pale complexion had reddened into a strawberry hue, and her cheeks had begun to puddle down into her shoulders…

The doorbell rang—Dani was in no shape to get it. She could hardly move on these hot days, it felt like.

Crack – another drink. Crush – it was gone, just as fast.

“S’open.” She called out, sloshing on the loveseat, “Hey, I don’t want anyathat generic crap either!”

“Um… we’re not doordash?” Haley piqued her head inside, “We just—*oh God*.”

“Wut?” Dani struggled to lean backwards, her handprints moist and sticky as her gelatinous body quivered and shook, “At least I’m not the only one who got fat over Summer.”

She chortled, her whole spherical body convulsing with laughter at Haley’s expense. Pink, semi-transluscent goo wobbled without restraint, the thick layer of perspiration having seeped through her t-shirt barely informed the figure of what had once been a woman.

“Dani…?” Courtney ventured warily, “Do you… *feel* okay?”

“Hell yeah.” Dani cracked another can, “In fact, I feel *great*.”

*Violet Barnes… is replaced by a Carnivorous Pod Person!*

Botany was one of the dumbest classes offered at Buttercombe Academy. You couldn’t change her mind.

But the woman running it, Ms. Underwood, was a notoriously easy grader. Violet needed a good grade to keep herself out of Academic Prohibition, and where she needed an easy A that cow was almost always around.

Lately though, she’d been acting different. Odd, sort of. In the sense that it was a different odd than it was when she was behaving normally.

Ms. Underwood used to be annoyingly interpersonal and downright nosy in other peoples’ lives. But ever since the new semester began, she had been spending more and more time in the garden. That big ol’ butt hunched over and tending to her “Little Sisters”, as she called them.

Anyway, it had been out of desperation that Violet had offered to stay after class (and after dark) in hopes of helping get onto Ms. Underwood’s good side. After all, what was she *really* going to be missing? Another pizza binge in from of the tv? No thank you—at least not until she could afford it!

The plants in the garden were strange. Large and heavy. Almost mean-looking. Like they had teeth and, on some of them, eyes. Violet didn’t really remember their plants looking like this. Ms. Underwood’s *private garden* was a lot more… hardcore than she would have guessed.

“Go water that one, Violet Barnes.” Ms. Underwood said in her stilted voice, “It will appreciate the nourishment.”

AND ANOTHER THING—SHE’D STARTED TALKING FUNNY EVER SINCE SHE STARTED WITH THIS GARDEN SHIT.

Violet had seen enough horror movies to know that this was them moment where she would have been screaming at herself to leave. But what could she do? She needed the grade, and after all, it was just a plant. There was nothing to be afraid of out h—

THAT MOTHERFUCKER JUST OPENED ITS MOUTH!

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The unit approached its new domicile.

Having fully adjusted coloration and hue to match subject: Violet Barnes, it was now in prime position to begin the next phase of its plan. Just as Mother had done for her, she would do for herself.

“Hey Vi, you’re out late.” A girl with a skunk strip of pink hair said from the couch, “Ms. Underwood hard on you or what?”

“So hard.”

Cerys and Yumi scratched their heads at that. Shrugging, it was all they could do to pass the chips. Taut, full stomachs rolled out from underneath their blouses while they played on their smuggled Xbox.

“Would you like for me to get you something to eat?” the unit said in Violet’s voice, “You look malnourished.”

“Um… okay.” Cerys snorted, “S’not like we just ate a bag of chips.”

“{i}Each{/i}.” Yumi added, “God, being friends with you two is gonna make me so fat.”

“Likely.” The unit put on a happy face, “If anyone is willing to operate the room service ordering machine, I will gladly pay monetary units for it.”

“Oh shit, seriously?” Cerys paused the game, “Thanks, Vi!”

“Do not mention it.”

The unit could only smile eagerly to itself as the first of many meals already proved most promising. These Earth women were far too thin to nourish unto now. But with a little time and pressure from the pheromones exuding from the top of her stalk, this Unit would soon have ripe pools to drink from.

Soon, she would be the size of Mothervine—and another brood could be born.