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As she heard Prime Minister Welch's words, Shadow 1 slapped herself on her thigh and laughed mockingly. "I'm sorry, Mr. Welch."

She had already taken an antidote before coming. Hence, she did not think twice as she smelled the familiar scent earlier on. As such, she had forgotten to remind him to hold his breath.

"Is this a trick of yours?" Prime Minister Welch curled his lips in disdain and his smile turned increasingly cold.

She looked on at him with an innocent expression as she wrinkled her brows. "No; it's just that I took an antidote before coming here! It's been three minutes since you inhaled copious amounts of that neurotoxin, so if you don't find an antidote within the next seven minutes, you'll drop dead immediately. Not to mention, your death will be quite a gory one!"

Prime Minister Welch held onto the wall as he proclaimed coolly, "If I can't make it out of here alive, then I'll make sure to kill you off the minute before I die."

Shadow 1 kept her cool as she laughed about the situation. "Ha! A normal person would have been in a paralyzed state within three minutes of inhaling this, but your body's quite tolerant to it. It's been more than three minutes and you're still standing here talking to me!"

Prime Minister Welch smiled coldly as he replied, "Don't you worry; I'll definitely stay strong as I can't bear to leave you by yourself."

"I sure hope so," she replied coolly.

On the other side in a darkened underground cellar, the guy sitting comfortably on a black leather sofa gradually opened his eyes. As he lifted his gaze to the clock in front of him, he laughed and said, "If I'm not mistaken, the neurotoxin would have taken effect on the two of them by now. You can go inside in ten minutes to collect their bodies."

Standing next to him, the person clad in black smiled as he said, "Mr. President, you must be pulling my leg. There might not even be a whole corpse to collect."

Corey gave a deep chuckle as he heard those words. "That's true; they might already be blown to smithereens by the bomb."

"Miss J'Adore probably never expected this even up till the moment of her death," the person clad in black continued.

Corey curled his lips in disdain and muttered, "J'Adore, this is all your own doing."

You should have stayed at home and been a homemaker instead of interfering in the affairs of Markovia. You've gradually taken control of Markovia over the past three years and although I'm the president, I'm just a puppet. It was fine in the past but I'm ready to take control of Markovia from now on. I won't allow anyone to come in my way.

As for Shadow 1 and Prime Minister Welch, the former stood by the metal door and observed it carefully before making her way back and sitting down next to him.

He opened and shut his mouth weakly before asking, "Have you figured it out?"

She furrowed her brows as she replied with a deep voice, "This door is operated by an automatic control. It cannot be destroyed by brute force."

As she said this, she turned to look at him.

Currently, his lips were deathly pale and beads of cold sweat trickled down his forehead.

She knew that the neurotoxin had taken effect.

If they couldn't get out of here within five minutes, then he would most probably lose his life here.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Welch's face took on an impatient expression as he asked quite coldly, "What do you mean by automatic control? So, do you have a plan?"

She stared at him with raised brows. "This is an Italian-made mechanical lock and it's made by millions of components put together. It's commonly used in the Markovia military. To be frank, I've been taught how to unlock this by my master but I've never succeeded at it."

Her voice was quite cool and nonchalant; it was calm despite the adversities they were facing.

Prime Minister Welch could feel the energy depleting from his body as he stared at the door weakly. With a smile, he said, "That's fine. At least I have someone to accompany me in death. I won't be too lonely in hell."

Upon hearing his words, she gave a light laugh. "Funnily enough, I don't plan on dying here. Come on; I'll just wing it and hope for the best."

"Wing it?" Prime Minister Welch's voice was surprisingly calm.

"My master told me this before—if someday, my ears and hands can feel the resistance of a single strand of hair, then there won't be a lock in this world that can hold me." Shadow 1 mentioned this with an air of nonchalance.

Prime Minister Welch's face was as pale as a sheet as he pursed his lips and remained silent.

"So, do we wing it?"

"It's up to you," he leaned against the wall and mustered his strength to mutter those four words.

"Okay." She turned around and beamed. At the same time, his enchanting looks were reflected in her eyes.

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She looked up and stared at the lock on the silver door. Then, she leaned close to press her ear against it as her nimble fingers turned the combination lock.

She could hear the clicking sounds of gears and parts that came from within the lock.

As she worked on the lock, she frowned slightly with the clicking sound of the mechanism still resonating close to her ear.

A moment later, she turned her head and glowered up at the man standing behind her, her face devoid of expression as she said, "Shh. Don't breathe."

However, it was not like Peter could do anything about his erratic breathing—the poison was attacking his nervous system and he panted in an effort to draw in air.

The low sound of his breathing was annoyingly familiar.

Her brows drew together as she turned to clap her hand over his nose and mouth.

Upon feeling the soft touch of her palm against the lower half of his face, Peter opened his eyes.

He did not move as he breathed the scent of her palm, which was strange and familiar at the same time.

He stiffened warily at the touch, but the familiar scent soothed him and his eyes began to close once more.

As silence enveloped them, Shadow 1 took a deep breath and she pressed her ear against the door again. She quickened the pace in which she turned the combination lock.

With a sudden raise of her brow, she stopped turning.

The mechanical clicking could be clearly heard through the door now.

Her palm was growing moist with every passing second. The next step was crucial to the success of this mission. Shadow 1 drew in another breath and with her last ounce of strength, she turned the lock.

The heavy steel door gave a loud whine as it sprang open and her eyes rimmed red as tears of relief threatened to overwhelm her.

The hopelessness she had felt was ebbing away and she stared at the open door like it was her saving grace.

Overwhelmed with joy, she reached out to push the heavy door with tears streaming down her face.

However, when she turned her head, she saw that the man lay motionless by the wall.

His face was pale and all the color had been drained from his thin lips.

Eight minutes had passed since he was first exposed to the neurotoxin.

Shadow 1 found herself in a dilemma and she was seized with a sudden surge of desperation. On one hand, he would die if she left him here while on the other, he would only slow her down if she saved him.

An explosion went off behind her as the earth-shattering boom snapped her out of her thoughts.

She rushed out the door on instinct, but the weight that tugged on her arm reminded her of the man she was leaving behind.

Gritting her teeth, she made the decision to turn around and save him. She knelt down next to his unmoving body and began to drag him up to his feet.

The explosions did not stop and the loud booms echoed around her as she felt Ebony Town quake beneath her.

At the final moment, just as Ebony Town was crashing down over them, her gaze darkened and she pushed the man out the door.

She could have left him behind to be crushed under rubble like the merciless assassin she was supposed to be. She thought about all the lives she had taken, the blood on her hands—why did her heart wrench at the sight of man lying motionless on the ground? Why did she go back for him?

A pang of self-loathe and grief gripped her when she realized that she felt sorry for a stranger.

The sound of explosions rattled her bones and she watched in silence as bright, orange flames engulfed the remainder of Ebony Tower.

Meanwhile, in a basement that was painted in black, a man dressed in a black shirt stepped forward. He sounded out of breath as he greeted, "Mr. President."

"How did it go?" The President asked as he rose from his seat, a look of anticipation lighting up his face.

"The news just came—Ebony Town has been detonated and there has been no sighting of Shadow 1 or Peter Welch. They must have perished along with the building."

The man who stood on the dais burst into laughter at the report. "Wonderful!"

The most powerful man in Asia, Mason Lowry, also known as Peter Welch, Prime Minister of Hawke Kingdom, perished alongside J'adore, the world's foremost assassin and the head of the MX!

He could only imagine how the world would burst into an uproar once the groundbreaking news broke out.

Straight to the point was that those two legendary figures had died in his hands!

He guffawed. Now that he had gotten rid of both of them, he could easily take over Markovia and the hamlet that was Hawke Kingdom.

A greedy and ambitious sneer twisted the President's effable face as he ordered, "Quickly arrange for a meeting as soon as possible to make an internal announcement on J'Adore's death."

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"Remember your script—J'adore failed to assassinate Peter and triggered the self-destruct mechanism in Ebony Town, which caused both of them to perish."

"Yes, sir!"

"And..." The President trailed off. Then, he chuckled darkly as he continued. "Don't let news about J'Adore's death be out just yet."

"Yes, Mr. President," the man in the black shirt said before he bowed and left the basement.

The President's eyes turned into crescents as he grinned deviously. He had never felt this much satisfaction before .

It was night time when Shadow 1 opened her eyes and was greeted by the darkness outside. She did not know how much time had passed, but based on her estimation, it was probably the night after she escaped from Ebony Town.

She reached a hand out and began to feel around her in the darkness.

When her fingers brushed against a cold and stiff body, her eyes widened in shock as she called out, "Mr. Peter."

"Mr. Peter..."

"Peter."

"Peter!!!"

He did not respond to a single one of her cries and Shadow 1 was beginning to wonder if he was dead.

In order to confirm her suspicions, she ran her fingers down his arm and found his pulse—it may be weak, but at least it was there. Perhaps his body has gone into shock! For him to survive the neurotoxin is another feat!

A look of disbelief flashed across her features. Anyone else would have succumbed to the neurotoxin, which meant that either Peter was really fortunate or he had nine lives to spare.

She snapped out of her thoughts and shifted slightly as she tried to search for her phone, but she could not move. The lower half of the man's body was weighing down on hers and held her in place.

"Sh*t!" she cursed aloud in frustration.

The only time she was ever in a position like this was with Mason and no one else; the intimacy was making her skin crawl.

Shadow 1 muttered a string of curses under her breath as resentment sank on her.

After shifting under his weight for ten minutes, Shadow 1 let out a breath of relief when her fingers finally curled around the edges of her phone.

She tried to send an outgoing text, but her screen did not respond no matter how many times she pressed the 'send' button.

In a fit of resignation, she switched on the torch on her phone.

Under the weak lighting, she could finally catch a glimpse of Peter's face.

He pursed his lips and his brows were drawn together in pain. He looked as though he was in agony.

"Are you dead?" She reached up and patted his chiseled face. "If you aren't, try to stay awake."

After all, those who went into shock could easily fall unconscious and it would not take long before their bodies gave up on them. If Peter died, it would mean that Shadow 1 would have nothing but a corpse for company. Once the corpse began to decompose, it would only attract flies and maggots. The idea disgusted her so much that she shuddered and goosebumps were seen along her skin.

With a newfound sense of urgency, she summoned strength and patted his face with more force. "Hey, wake up! I don't want to spend the night with a corpse!"

Currently, Lara was waiting for news at the MX's base in Markovia.

Although it was only 9:00PM, she could not help but worry incessantly.

While Janet had told Lara to get help only if there was no contact by six o'clock the following morning, there was still an uneasy feeling that gnawed at her.

Why do I keep feeling as if there's something off about all of this?

At that moment, there was an uproar that sounded from outside the base as someone asked loudly, "Did you hear about what happened at Ebony Town?"

"Ebony Town? Isn't that the President's territory? What could go wrong there?"

"I don't know, but I was passing by when I was on a mission just now. I saw that it was in flames."

"What? Was there a fire? What's going on? It couldn't have just burst into flames!"

"I don't know. I heard explosions too. It's way too bizarre—and the fire was still ongoing when I came back from the mission!"

"Explosions? How did it get serious all of a sudden?"

"Oh, my God! Do you think the President knows about this?"

"Of course he doesn't know about it! If he does, he would have sent someone to extinguish the fire!"

"True. I don't know what happened—Ebony Town seemed fine before it exploded into flames."

The moment Lara heard all that, she abruptly rose from her seat and rushed out of the door.

When the others saw her, they nodded their heads and greeted, "Lara."

Lara's eyes were wide and she froze for a moment before demanding frantically, "What were you talking about just now?"

Upon being questioned so suddenly, they exchanged a bewildered look and answered slowly, "We were talking about the fire that broke out in Ebony Town."

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"And there might have been explosions too."

Lara's mind was racing. A fire broke out in Ebony Town and there were explosions! Janet must have gone all out against Peter!

If Janet had escaped unscathed, she ought to be back by now, but there was not even one phone call from her. Lara swallowed—it was more likely than not that Janet and Peter were both in trouble.

"F*ck!" she swore aloud as she darted back into the base, leaving the others to stare at her in confusion.

When she was inside, she pulled out her phone and called the President, but he did not pick up. She tried calling him repeatedly, but his cell phone remained switched off.

Could Corey have disappeared, too? If I can't get hold of him, there is no way for me to find out what actually happened in Ebony Town.

She gritted her teeth and without wasting another moment on her thoughts, she called Desire.

Desire picked up within seconds and asked, "Lara, what's wrong?"

Lara did not have time to go into details, so she cut to the chase. "Janet's at Ebony Town and she's in trouble."

"What?" Desire was shocked at the news. "Tell me what happened."

"Corey gave Janet orders to head into Ebony Town and assassinate Peter, but I just heard from the subordinates that a fire broke out there. There were also explosions. If I'm not mistaken, I believe Janet and Peter might be in trouble."

"How did this happen?" Desire could not help but be suspicious after what happened the last time. "This isn't like the last incident, is it?"

"No, it can't be," Lara answered firmly. "I can't even get a hold of Corey. Janet must be in trouble. A few of us will move to Ebony Town right now to rescue Janet. In the meantime, you should give Mason a call and ask whether he has forces in Markovia who could help."

Upon hearing that, Desire nodded. "Okay. Be careful. I'll meet up with you guys after I call Mason."

"Okay." With that, Lara hung up on the call, not wanting to waste any more time.

When the other line went dead, Desire immediately made a call to the Lowry Residence.

Markovia was three hours ahead of Sandfort City and at six in the evening, the Lowry Residence bustled with activity.

The maid was busy cleaning around the house when the sound of the phone ringing broke through the monotony of her chores. She put down the rag in her hand and walked over to answer the phone. "Hello, this is the Lowry Residence. How may I help you?"

Upon hearing the maid's voice on the other end, Desire drew in a deep breath and said urgently, "I'm looking for Young Master Lowry."

"May I know who this is?"

Desire answered plaintively, "I'm Janet's friend and I need to speak with Mason."

"I'm afraid Young Master Lowry can't come to the phone right now. He's on a business trip to Markovia. Can I take a message?"

"F*ck!" Desire cursed on the other end after hearing the maid's response. D*mn it! Why is he on a business trip again! Are business trips all he cares about? He doesn't even know that his wife is in danger!

Meanwhile, the maid was taken aback by Desire's rage. "Are you alright, miss? You can leave a message for Young Master Lowry—I'll be sure to give it to him."

However, Desire did not answer her and she instead hung up the call.

The maid stared at the phone in bewilderment. She had been hung up on before she was even done speaking! Now that she thought about it, a lot of Miss Jackson's friends had been calling recently and all of them were looking for Young Master Lowry. And all of them swear like sailors too, the maid added as an amused afterthought.

Seeing that she could not get hold of Mason, Desire could only head out toward Ebony Town with the men that she had at her disposal.

For the first time in her life, she was on a mission to rescue Janet.

It was late at night and she did not know what time it was, but the man lying next to her did not seem like he would be waking up anytime soon.

Shadow 1 could not help but worry.

It would take at least two days before Lara would discover that something was wrong and come looking for her. If Peter died here, then Shadow 1 would be forced to spend the next two days waiting for help with nothing more than his corpse as company.

Shadow 1's frantic thoughts were interrupted when her stomach growled in protest. She was hungry and she needed to scavenge for food in the wilderness.

It was dark around her and her only source of light had been the flashlight feature on her phone before the device ran out of battery.

She sighed and turned to gaze at Peter.