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## **Shutdown**

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7:34 p.m. My heels resonate on the marble steps as I walk up. The hand rail is cold on my fingertips, and the breeze pushes me closer to the mansion door. Cascading towers made of gold and curtains of silk. Hundreds of the world's upper classmen and women are here.

My ear piece buzzes. One tap to answer the call.

"Are you in, Agent R?" my partner inquires.

"Approaching the golden door now."

I pass my invitation to the doorman dressed in baby blue. His attire matches the sleek ballroom floor. The ceiling has an elaborate painting of whisked clouds and angels within them.

The man passes me back the ticket and smiles warmly, "Go on in, Ms. Alexandra."

"Thank you, sir."

I scan my eyes over the whole place. Most people are down the stairs chatting by the silver-plated food or by the chairs surrounding the dance space. Some are dancing. I proceed to the sides staying above all the people.

My reflection stares back at me as I look down to hold the front of my dress. My persona has to be of the utmost elegance so as not to stand out. My ruby lips especially shine on the baby blue floor. As I walk the curvature of the room, I turn to walk into a parlor of some sort. It's an open feeling room with huge windows and forest green leather chaise lounges. The crisp sound of my heels disappears when I step onto the crimson rug making my presence less noticeable.

A few men are sitting discussing business and their wives partaking as well. I love to see strong women discuss intellectual topics. There are a few groups in each part of the room. Two men in the corner. I make my way to them.

I brush my hair behind my ear revealing my dangly star earrings. They have sharp edges.

"What are we discussing gentlemen?" I ask with a sly smirk.

Both men seem off guard, and they look at each other. They mumble lots of ums and wells when, finally one of them speaks up, "Um, the stock-market. Of course! What else? Is that something you're interested in my lady?"

"Oh, not particularly. However, I heard it's supposed to crash this week, but you didn't hear it from me."

They both gave a chuckle at that.

They're my targets I believe. "What are your names boys?"

The one who spoke before pipes up, "I'm Charles, and this is Edward. And your name is?"

"Alexandra." I extend my hand to shake theirs. Charles turns my hand to kiss it. Once he looks up, I slightly dig my nail into the palm of his hand. Blood pulses out, and the tiny microphone/GPS that was in my nail is inserted into the cut.

"Ow."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. My nails are quite long." I put my hand on his shoulder.

"It's quite all right. I can handle a tiny cut from a beautiful lady." He winces flirtatiously.

"What a charmer. Well, if you'll excuse me gentlemen, I must go to visit my colleagues, but I'm sure I will find you boys again later."

I walk off back into the ballroom. Tapping my earpiece, "Done. Tell me when you're ready."

My partner Noah responds quickly, "Got the signal, Agent R. I'll report to you when they move. They're talking about how that was a close one. How you almost heard them. Now, other people are walking up. I'll let you know when to move."

"Got it."

I make my way to the main part of the ballroom where I await my next plan. Charles is the son of this estate's owner. He and his father are suspected to be working with a European agency to rip apart each branch of the U.S. government. The word on the street is that it's to be slow and manipulative with no trace of their interference. It is not certain how, it's not even certain that these rumors are true, but I'm hoping the plans are here, and I'll get what I'm looking for.

I watch as people are dancing and laughing. The place is beautiful and huge.

"R, they're moving." I make my way up the stairs squeezing through the crowds. Noah continues to guide me, "Ok, go around like you did when you went to the parlor but don't turn in. Keep going straight. Charles said he's going to take Edward to show him the plans in the secret library. He didn't say what plans though."

I do just as he says and walk along with my heels clicking once again. I keep going straight into a room where the only light comes from the open door behind me. It's a huge tunnel running up and down with at least 5 curved stairways wrapping around the edges. Everything is grey. Faint voices are traveling downwards. I slip off my heels and tuck them behind a pipe. I can't be clicking all the way. I take my first step onto the stairway to my right. It gives a large *creak*. I look around trying to figure out other ways to go down. Perfect! There's an emergency ladder on the very side in the darkness. Kind of dangerous if I were to fall, but it's my only option.

I spiderman my way on top of the stair railing and grab onto the sides of the ladder. Then, I swing my feet on. I climb down. I can't see anything, but the faintly lit stairs behind me so each step has to be slow and careful.

My ear buzzes, "R, remember this code, 9921709. That's the code they used to get into the room at the bottom. Don't say anything back because you're too close to them."

Step by step, little by little.

Finally, I make my way down. The door opens back up and they come walking out. I'm still in darkness so all I do is hold my breath and watch.

When they walk out, Charles turns to Edward with a proud smile and explains, "That's it. Once that is complete, the American government will be in such chaos, and the people will be in such distrust of their representatives that we will be able to come in and be the heroes. The country will practically be in flames with each branch turning on each

other. Then, we'll exploit all their resources and leave the people with nothing to sustain themselves here."

Edward nods, "I see. Well, the plan is quite impressive and quite underhanded. I think it will work nicely. There are a few things that need to be worked out, but I believe we can fix them. I'm glad to start business with you. You've certainly had an impressive beginning. You're good to be so young and so new. We'll have a council meeting next Tuesday at 5:00 a.m. here. This place is secure. I like it."

"Yes sir. We've worked hard on the security of this place. Thank you. I really appreciate you giving me the opportunity to contribute." They begin to make their way up the stairs once again.

Edward says, "You have certainly proved yourself to be worthy. However, this is a shame. Now I have to find a new boy to get my morning coffee."

They both chuckle away.

I walk around the edges staying in the shadows. Once I make my way to the door, I enter the code, 9921709. The door opens. I sneak in and close it behind me, but there's another door that requires a key. I detach one of the stars from my earrings, and I insert it into the lock. I move it around until I hear it unlatch. I grab the door, but it still doesn't open. Aw man. There's a second lock that requires a fingerprint. I rip off the piece of tape behind my ear and apply it on top of the door handle. I pick up a fingerprint and place it on the pad.

"Scanning." The machine speaks. The light above turns green, "Accepted."

The door whooshes open. A huge library with golden floor and golden walls is what's inside. Gold dipped roses are in opal vases and the books are all hardcovers. In the middle is a round table with papers sprawled out everywhere. These are the plans. I begin to shift through them.

"Hey! What're you doing down here?" Charles yells.

"Oh, Charles! Thank goodness! I am in emergency status for the bathroom, and one of the waiters told me it was down here. That long staircase was so scary, but I have a terrible stomach ache." I plead with him.

He looks at me suspiciously, "How did you get through the doors though." His face is right up on mine.

He's not a very smart boy and very nervous he's going to mess things up. I can make him believe it was his fault. "Well, the door was unlocked. And that was the only door down here so I figured this must be it. Why are you so mad though? Was I not supposed to come down here? Oh, I am so sorry!"

His eyebrows are cocked and his eyes are shifting nervously. He's trying to see if anything's missing from the table. "It was unlocked? Don't worry about it. What waiter told you that?"

I act like I'm an idiot, "Um he had light brown hair that was a little curly. Hazel eyes. He was a little taller than me, but a little shorter than you."

"All right. Thanks. There's a bathroom that you can use over there. I'll stay down here."

"Thank you!" I scurry to the bathroom.

I turn on the faucet so that he can't hear me.

"Noah, Noah!" I whisper, "Noah, I found it. It's here."

"And it's what we thought?"

"Yes."

He answers back, "Ok. And they're having a meeting on Tuesday, right? We need to be involved in that so we know

who's involved."

"Yes, but I need to get the plans now. Charles saw me, and I think he's going to move the plans. Send back up now."

I walk out and Charles looks at me oddly. "Why don't you have shoes on? And why is one of your earrings missing? Who are- "

I cut him off by throwing my other earring to gash his stomach. Kick to the chin, kick to the gut and he's down.

"Sorry." I say as he's about to pass out.

My backup arrives shortly. Noah and I take all the plans for analyzation and the rest of the agency works on taking in the Charles and his father. I wave a little goodbye to Charles, and he just glares at me. Noah and I high-five and go get Edgar's Chocolate pound cake to celebrate.