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Sovann kicked Uncle Lumpy in the side of the head. Inflicted on a normal man, that would have driven him off me. Lumpy released his hold on my shoulder and backhanded Sovann. The Cambodian went flying in the direction of the sofa despite getting a leg block up. I had a flash of Timothy going for his home deterrent system, aka the crowbar. Odette began yelling.

The cylinder was coming down. Carrig's left grabbed my chin, fixing my head in place. I opted to use both my arms to stop his right, and the device, from coming down. I bought a little time. Timothy's blow came down on Lumpy's left shoulder, weakening the hold, but not enough. The device slammed into my forehead.

I felt a burning pain as a portion of the flesh beneath the cup was flash-fried away. More pain, then a little pressure and finally nothing. In those seconds before my mind spun out of control, I had the oddest sensation there was something inside my brain. Searing agony - existence lost all meaning and I was gone.

(One week later)

They say pain in the brain is illusionary. Of all your nerve cells, only a tiny fraction are devoted to pain. The rest do the important work of keeping your body functioning. The brain is on top of it all and it has better things to do that register pain - or so I was told. To be somewhat fair, what I felt wasn't exactly pain. It was the sensation that something was crawling around inside my psyche, doing something.

Sharp, tingling jolts shocked my body parts at regular intervals. Painful in their own way, yet not so much I couldn't concentrate. I opened my eyes. The lights in my room had been dimmed, but not enough that I couldn't see the six ladies standing about - doing nothing. I recognized my present lodgings as Havenstone Post-classical Modernism (total lie - I'm not an interior designer).

The six ladies turned, looked at me, then closed in slowly. A staring contest was in the offing when two people entered the room from the door at the foot of the bed. It then occurred to me that little sonic indicators on the machinery surrounding me were chirping loudly. One woman was a physician's assistant I knew from an earlier bout at Havenstone Medical. She had performed CPR on me.

The other woman... she was the senior-most recruit from my father's graveside service. She looked positively grim. My dry throat requested some water then I attempted to rise. A problem instantly revealed itself. I was strapped down on my bed. The ankles, wrists and a neck/head brace kept my movements to a minimum.

There was a side benefit to this imprisonment. That body-wide jolts? My body was wired up to a system that had needles piercing my muscle clusters. Amazons prided themselves on being physically fit and their tolerance for pain. My muscles hadn't atrophied during my... coma and the price was this constant, low-level pain. I still wasn't sure that was the reason I was bound.WW0.n0v0lter0rm.000

The PA maneuvered a plastic bottle with a spout to my lips and gave me a brief squirt. A few seconds later I got another and then a third.

"Okay," I rasped, "What's going on?"

"You have been in an unresponsive state for 7 days, Ishara," the 'senior' told me.

"Why are you here?" I coughed. "I mean, why aren't you on the job?" She blinked.

"Your life was imperiled so we decided that five of us would be around to monitor you and keep you safe," she answered.

"What's with everyone else?" I huffed. The two looked at me. The quiet six were of no help.

"Fine, what are you ladies doing here?" I asked the women originally in the room. No answer.

"Ishara?" the PA worried. That was when it dawned on me that the two and the six weren't interacting on any level.

"How many people are in the room?" I asked my housemate. She paused.

"There are three of us, Ishara. You, me and the attendant," she answered. "How many people do you see?"

"Well shit," I muttered. Then the first of the six spoke to me. Actually, she mouthed to me. It took me a moment to realize she was giving me her name. The next one started.

"Device," I snapped to the 'senior'. As she hesitantly reached for hers, I began rattling off the names. When the sixth one gave me her name, the group dissipated into the ether.

"Who are these women?" 'senior' requested.

"Find out," I sighed then, "It is important." She nodded.

Now that the specters were gone, the mortals began to come in. Right off the bat, I was confirmed in my status as "prisoner". They wouldn't free me when I requested it and they made no attempt to conceal their hostility to my fellow Isharan. The agenda was decided without me; they were going to check me out mentally, then I was off to see Hayden.

Why was I imprisoned? My brain was a maelstrom of activity across a broad spectrum of regions and lobes. What had happened? They didn't know. The suction cup had stabilized the tube which was really a firing mechanism. When the device was able to detect and aim for a specific part of my brain, the longitudinal fissure, it shot a rod three-quarters into my cranium.

A laser had burned through the skin and skull with surgeon-like precision so a barb of unknown construction could go deep into my brain. Then it 'detonated'. That was one of the problems the medicos of Havenstone were facing. The device had been so badly damaged when it unleashed its energy that they could no longer divine its function.

What they did understand was that while my neural network was going super-nova, it wasn't killing me. They leapt on the idea of mind control. That theory sounded pretty lame to me, but I was the one tied down, with one ally in a room full of people bred to mistrust all males. The next approach... was I sane? The PA offered that I was seeing phantasms.

"Wait".

"Go," I directed the senior. "Take care of the business I have given you then tell Buffy and Helena what you've found out. You are wasting your time staying here." She nodded and left. It was more "common sense" rather than any sense of my leadership that made her leave. But that done...

I concentrated on the entirety of the message so that it settled upon my soul. I relaxed, shut my eyes and let the world float by. It took them a minute to notice my noncompliance; any positive contribution on my part had slipped so far down in their expectations.

"Ishara?" one of the SD chicks inquired. I opened one eye, then shut it. There was nothing to be done.

"What is he doing?" that Amazon asked a physician. She, in turn asked me. I took a deep, cleansing breath and continued to ignore them.

"There is nothing wrong with him," the physician noted. "He is being childish." That went beyond disrespectful.

As a quirk of Amazon society, they had left me my knife strapped to my arm. To take it would have been an insult my tiny house could not have borne - essentially declaring me incompetent. I was heading that way, but not yet. That didn't stop them from deriding me until a lull finally developed. For a moment, I thought I was alone. I was intrigued by the words suddenly aimed my way.

"Mr. Nyilas?" an unknown female inquired. I opened an eye. Woman - bad suit - and a badge. What the fuck? I was in Havenstone.

"Special Agent Virginia Maddox with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. I'd like to ask you a few questions," she began.

"Okay," I cleared my throat, "as long as we are clear I am one misstep away from invoking my Miranda Rights." She worked that one over for a second.

"Do you know why your uncle attacked you?"

"Honestly, I'm curious as to why I'm still alive," I tried to shrug.

"Carrig and I never got along, if you consider when I first met him we fought and the second time he stabbed me in the forehead," I explained.

"How long did you and your uncle fight - the second time?" she asked.

"Ummm... six second," I guessed. "How is Lumpy doing, anyway?"

"Lumpy?"

"Uncle Carrig."

"He's dead."W0r0.N0v0lter0M.00M

"Seriously - fuck. What killed him?"

"We are working that out. He was beaten, stabbed - by three different blades, shot 67 times by five different firearms, only two which we have recovered," Virginia stated. "We also think he was hit by two cars, one dump truck and a subway."

"Well... yeah... Uncle Carrig was looking a bit rough when I answered the door," I confessed.

Lumpy had to have been on a freaking quest to go through all that to get to me. Subway? He was hit by a subway and walked away. Most people barely leave a recognizable corpse.

"How are Odette, Timothy, Casper and Sovann?" I recalled. She looked at her phone.

"They are mostly fine. Casper Winslow was taken to the hospital in shock and was released to her parents," she said.

"The other three were taken to the Emergency Room, treated for minor injuries and released," Virginia informed me. "The other four women were a more delicate manner."

"Four women? Could you be more specific?"

"Your bodyguards."

"Could you be more specific?W00W0lter0M.c0m

"For a person with supposedly limited financial means, a lower income lifestyle and a humble background, you appear to have a small army hovering around you, high society friends, and lawyers who are on a first name basis with Supreme Court Justices," Virginia noted.

"Lady, half-way through Day Two on this job, I almost gave it all up and biked my ass down to Terra del Fuego to live the sane life of a paranoid recluse," I sighed.

"Why didn't you?"

"Cause I'm an idiot. I was hoping a crackerjack investigator like you would have figured this out by now," I grinned.

"How do you know I'm any good at my job?" she sent a sultry lip twist my way. Yes - pinned to a bed I could still attract the ladies. Having hundreds of little needles in me made the prospects for a quick sexual romp unlikely.

"Javiera chose you for this assignment," I told her. "You have to be a woman because this is Havenstone and you have to be clever because this is a lunatic asylum."