

731 Into the Tiger's Den

As the group exited the military prison, Maxwell's eyes gleamed with a trace of triumph. "Magnus, the inspection is complete. Shall I have someone escort you all back?"

"No need," Magnus replied calmly. "It seems there's still one place we haven't checked."

He turned his gaze toward the distant research facility. Maxwell's expression darkened. "Your Highness, that area is off-limits. The lab contains highly contagious viruses and toxins. It's too dangerous for you."

The laboratory entrance was marked with warning signs: Restricted Area, Authorized Personnel Only. His words sounded considerate, but everyone could hear the tension behind them. He didn't want them to go any further.

"It's fine," Magnus said lightly. "I'll send my subordinates in for a brief look."

He gestured to Caitlin, Sebastian, Zeke, and Alicia. The four of them entered the research wing and stepped into the observation corridor.

What they saw inside made Caitlin's heart clench. Dozens of test subjects were locked in glass cells, used for horrific experiments involving poisons and viral compounds. Compared to this, prison would have been mercy.

She knew this might be their last chance to find Kelly.

Caitlin began calling names as she passed each room. "Leonidas... Kelly ..." Her voice echoed against the glass, but the subjects barely stirred.



Anxiety gnawed at her. Was her mother not here?

She moved past an older woman with white hair lying motionless on a cot. The woman's face was turned away, her frail body chained to the bed. Caitlin called again—"Leonidas!"—and this time, the woman stirred.

When Caitlin turned to the next cell and called "Kelly," the white-haired woman suddenly sat up.

No one else reacted, but as Caitlin prepared to leave, something made her glance back. The old woman was standing by the bars, staring straight at her.

Their eyes met through the glass. Caitlin could see the woman's face now—covered in discolored scars and lesions. The sight made her stomach twist.

A broken experiment victim, she thought sorrowfully.

But then the woman spoke.

"Leonidas... Kelly..."

That faint, trembling voice stopped Caitlin in her tracks. Her breath caught, and she turned back, stepping closer to the cell. The woman stood motionless, her ruined face pale under the harsh lights, but her eyes—her eyes were alive.

"Kelly?" Caitlin whispered, almost afraid to believe it.

The woman nodded slowly, her hand trembling as she pointed to herself.

"I... I'm Kelly..."

She had no idea who Caitlin was. She only recognized the names that had once meant everything to her—names she hadn't heard in years.



For Caitlin, the realization hit like a blow. To think that after being taken by Black Hawk, her mother had endured such torment—poison, mutilation, humiliation at Heather's hands.

Her throat tightened painfully. "Mom..." she choked out, tears spilling over. "Mom, it's me. Caitlin."

Kelly froze, her eyes widening. "Caitlin..." she whispered, disbelief breaking into sobs. She reached through the bars, clutching Caitlin's hand with desperate strength as tears streamed down her face.

Caitlin couldn't stop crying either. She had found her at last—but at what cost?

Sebastian's voice broke the moment. "Caitlin, we have to leave. Now."

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Outside the lab, Magnus stood waiting with the officers and Maxwell.

When Caitlin emerged, half-supporting the frail, white-haired woman, Magnus faltered. Could that truly be Kelly? She looked nothing like the woman he'd seen in photographs.

Maxwell's expression flickered with panic. Caitlin had found her—and he couldn't allow them to take her away. If Kelly left with them, he'd lose his last leverage.

Caitlin held her mother's hand tightly, saying nothing, but she met Magnus's eyes. He understood.

Maxwell snapped, "You can't remove any test subjects from this facility!"

Magnus's tone cut like steel. "As Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, I'll take responsibility. There's no law against removing one



subject for treatment.”

Maxwell’s jaw clenched, but he couldn’t object.

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Moments later, their convoy sped through the night, carrying Kelly away from the base. But none of them felt safe.

Maxwell would never let them leave so easily.

Back at the command center, he composed himself and addressed the gathered officers. “Gentlemen, we’ve been deceived. I just spoke with His Majesty. The Prince has impersonated the role of Supreme Commander and unlawfully disrupted base operations. He’s abducted a critical research subject. This is a matter of national security. Pursue them immediately. If they resist—execute on sight.”

“Yes, sir!”

The officers obeyed without question. Within minutes, military trucks roared out of the base in pursuit.

“Your Highness, vehicles approaching fast from the rear,” the driver warned.

Magnus glanced back at the headlights growing larger. “Accelerate!”

If they could cross the outer checkpoint, they’d be beyond Maxwell’s reach.

But tension filled the air inside the truck. They all knew the entire military complex was under Maxwell’s control. If he truly turned the army against them, chaos would follow.



"Your Highness," one of the senior officers shouted from a pursuing vehicle, "that test subject must be returned to the base immediately. Stand down or face consequences! Move in!"

Two soldiers climbed onto the side of Magnus's truck, trying to force their way inside.

Magnus drew his weapon and fired. Both soldiers fell from the truck, lifeless.

"Anyone else want to try?" he barked. "That'll be your end!"

The road fell silent—until headlights blazed ahead.

"Make way! Commander approaching!" someone yelled.

Maxwell's vehicle pulled up, surrounded by armed officers. He stepped out slowly, his smile razor-sharp.

"Magnus," he said, voice cold as ice, "you've forged the authority of a Supreme Commander and endangered national security. Do you realize the disaster you've caused?"

Before Magnus could respond, he turned to his men. "Search the truck. Arrest any impostors. If anyone resists—shoot to kill."

As the soldiers prepared to board, a voice rang out from the back of the vehicle.

"Maxwell!"

Caitlin appeared, standing tall despite the danger. "Let them go. I'll accept your terms."

Maxwell's lips curved into a slow smile. "Good. Bring her here."



That was all he wanted—Caitlin, and the miracle drug she carried. The rest were expendable.

Under the watchful eyes of the soldiers, Caitlin stepped down from the truck and faced him.

Magnus's heart clenched. She had done this to protect them.

But in that moment, everyone knew—she was walking straight into the tiger's den.

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