Two Predators in the Blitz
by LornaHarrisonStan, SebastianHarkenMoran

Summary

New Year's, 1941:
Lorna Harrison and Sebastian Moran meet in a crowded pub and immediately understand what the other is: A hunter. A wolf amongst sheep. In this alternate universe, their roles are changed, and their age seniorities switched, but their magnetism remains the same. How they survive in the war is up to them.

WW2 AU of our other fic - Not required to read the other one, this one can stand by itself and makes no references to the other
Please read the tags and be mindful that this story is very dark and very fucked up.
Fantastic, but is coming for your feels. Be warned!

Notes

I should mention that Sebastian is 18, Lorna is 22, and Jim is 24.
New Year's, 1941, London, Britain.

The city was still smoking. There had been air raids before, but this one was the worst. So far, she supposed. Lorna Harrison pulled out a silver cigarette case from her coat pocket, flicked it open to retrieve a fag and then shut it to slip it away again, her hand coming back out with a lighter. A moment later and she was sucking in a long drag of nicotine. She let it out in a relieved huff, looking down the street at a charred, rubble of a house, still swarming with firemen and paramedics. If anyone was left amongst the burnt bricks, she didn't think they'd survive much longer. One benefit of the network was the underground offices - a private bunker, essentially. It wasn't shock-proof, but at least the only damage came in the form of plaster chips shaken loose into cups of tea.

She stepped off the curb, rubble gritting under her modest heels, which might have been rubbing horribly had she not had the pair of nylons on. Another benefit of her job. She picked through the dust, heading down the block, for the corner pub. Blessedly untouched by the bombs, and judging by the activity by the door, profiting from it nicely. And so would she, hopefully. She delicately slipped off her coat as she stepped across the threshold, folding it over her arm, cigarette held between red lips.

*Buy me,* her dress screamed.

Sebastian Moran leaned back in his corner booth, eyeing the crowd swarming in from the scabbing street to the smoky warmth of the pub. There was a clamor for seating, but few people dared approach his table, and those that did caught his eye and soon turned back. There was a cold manner to his appearance that overshadowed the normal jovial nature with which someone wearing his sort of uniform was greeted. It gave the gazed-upon the distinct impression that they were prey. It did not require intuition to decipher; it was an instinct as base as man itself. The man with cool eyes in the corner was a predator. Steer clear.

When he first saw her, he was interested. Mainly, at first, he'd admit, in the haphazard plunge of her neckline, but once his eyes wandered up to her face that interested him as well.

Maybe it was her expression, or the way her eyes slid over the crowd, but a predator could tell another when it saw one. She was hunting. He'd yet to decide if he would allow it on what was traditionally his turf. He waited for her attentions to slide his way, then caught her eye, nothing more. Then he lifted his whiskey and took a sip, returning his attention to the gazelles fighting for position at the watering hole.

He wasn't the first to catch her eye since she'd walked in, but he was the first to keep it. A corner booth, with room to spare, occupied only by a single uniform? Strange. No - *different.* There were
very few things that could have kept the jostling crowd from making use of that space, and any of
them were worth a little investigating. Worth taking a break from the hunt. She slipped through the
crowd, snagging a half full bottle of bourbon from the bar as she did, and within moments she was
sinking into the booth. It was fascinating, how suddenly the joint became quieter, dimmer.

"What's a guy like you doing in a dump like this? " She raised an eyebrow, sliding the bourbon to
the center of the table. He was neat. Shockingly so, considering the night they'd had. His uniform
was impeccable, and up to code, as far as she could tell. She met his clear blue eyes almost
cautiously, like he'd dart out like a snake and bite if she moved too fast. "Rather, what's old money
like you doing in a shithole like this?"

The corner of his mouth turned up just slightly, though it did nothing to warm his eyes. "Hunting.
Like you," he said calmly, tossing back the remainder of his whiskey and reaching for the new
bourbon, pouring another shot. "But you knew that."

"No one has this much space in a pub. Especially not after a raid," she replied, leaning back,
crossing her legs. She didn't drink anything, not yet. She'd test the waters a little more. "What are
you doing here? Hunting or not, a man like you in a uniform like that.... Pilot, or AA?"

"Special forces," he said quietly, studiously ignoring her other implied questions. "You're wearing
quite the uniform yourself. Why so dolled up for a professed shithole?"

"It's not for this place. Or any place," she shrugged. She made it look elegant. She was good at that.
"I'll go somewhere else, if this one doesn't have anything worth my while." She turned her gaze to
the milling crowd, scanning them with a dulled interest. Already she could tell there was no one
else worth her time. "Certainly no good money to be made here. But people talk, anywhere you go.
Chatter isn't confined to the upper class, not like money is."

"Money isn't either, but I suppose that's a more... liberated way of thinking." He put the shot back
with the casual toss of an experienced drinker. "Fancy a walk?"

"Outside, through the ashes?" She raised her eyebrows, though gathering up her coat already.
"Alright. But you might end up regretting it. Fair warning, hunter to hunter."

He just shrugged, standing and grabbing his wool pea-coat and hat. "Quiet night to be about."

"I suppose I can't argue there," she agreed, putting out her cigarette in an ashtray on the table and
turning in the general direction of the door. He was curious, and definitely dangerous, but
somehow she didn't think he was luring her away to kill her. Well, she'd see.

He headed for the door, walking directly for the door with no particular regard for anyone who
might be standing in his way. Most of them moved out of it. Those not paying attention were
pushed out of it by his body mass, but no one argued once they saw who it was who'd checked
them.

She stayed in the open zone left by his wake, all gracious smiles and polite nods. She didn't want
any drunk idiot getting an aggressive idea in their head and following them out. She slipped into her
coat again as they stepped out into the cold air. A dog barked down the street.

He pulled on his own coat and hat, looking around before heading off towards the more clear
center of the road, away from the worst of the damage.

"If only those pesky Germans would stop this nonsense," she commented as she surveyed the
street, counting more standing houses than destroyed ones. That wouldn't last much longer, if this
blitz kept up. She kept her eyes off him; a habit she'd developed, walking with men. She found it gave them a better opportunity to observe her - and it was always easier to reel them in after they'd done so. "So, what's your name, soldier? If we're going to walk I ought to have something to call you."

"Colonel Moran," he returned evenly. He watched her gaze, carefully avoiding him, and smirked slightly, but returned his own observations to the darkened streets around them. "And yours?"

"Harrison, Lorna. Pleasure to meet you," she replied in a smooth tone, slipping her hands into her pockets. "So, Colonel, how long have you lived in England for? With that accent, I can't imagine you moved when you were a child."

He smirked slightly. "Actually I've lived in England for most of my life. But my father is Irish and strongly accented, and I spent time there as an adolescent." He glanced over at her. "Your accent's a bit on the round as well. Spent time in America recently?"

"I go where the money is, and right now, it's not in London," she smirked, nodding a little. Not strictly the truth - the high-end prostitute get-up was mostly a front, and her time in America had been much, much bloodier than any whore's nightly rounds. "Lot of rich men in New York, trying to pretend there isn't a war advancing on their doorstep, looking for a distraction." Also not strictly accurate. She hadn't been over since the war started. She'd been kept busy by Jim, and he was careful not to send her into Armetti's territory. He was unpredictable, and pissing off the mafia? Not a great plan.

He nodded a little. "Well, cards on the table, I don't plan on utilizing your services," he said calmly. "So if you'd like to make any money tonight, you should probably look elsewhere."

He surprised himself. He'd been planning on doing his usual. Nice fuck, little blood, body in the Thames, or in the rubble, or pretty much anywhere these days. But something about her stopped him. Maybe it was that she was a fellow hunter. Maybe it had been something she'd said. Maybe he was just too tired. Whatever it was, he was giving her a clear way free

She gave a mild shrug, stepping over a fallen streetlamp. "I already figured as much. Anyone who wants to never walks me this far," she replied, voice amused. "But it's New Years, not New Year's Eve, and the men around here are cheap, anyway. I'm content just walking."

He laughed quietly, adjusting his coat. "I'm surprised. You seemed like a woman on a mission when you walked in."

"Oh, no, that wasn't my mission face," she chuckled, brushing a loose curl from her pinned up hair out of her eyes. "That was me looking for something to occupy myself with. Money was a secondary objective."

"That makes me an occupation, then?" he follows, taking a turn and heading down towards the Thames anyway. He could feel the way his gun holster lay against his chest, heart thumping calmly away underneath it.

"That makes you a welcome surprise," she corrected, following him without too much suspicion. It was darker here, and quieter, almost silent, the sounds of recovering people and distant sirens fading away with the light. A good place for him to attack her. She decided to keep on her guard. "I hadn't much hope of finding anything truly interesting tonight."

"Likewise. I was just expecting to watch the crowd and spend a few quid on stale beer," He was considering, hands in his pockets. He'd given her a sporting chance...
She felt a crawling sense of dread in her chest, one that often warned her of dangerous changes in someone's mood, and she carefully put a couple of feet between them, moving in a way that suggested she was just meandering for lack of anything better to do. "The benefit of my looks is the ease of which I can get free drinks out of people," she hummed, stepping up onto the curb, keeping him in her field of view.

He watched her step away, saw the goosebumps on the back of her neck, knew it wasn't the night chill. He could see the tense of her body, and it sent a thrill of anticipation seeping up his arms. Still, though, something held him back.

After a moment he turned along another street, this one heading back towards the better-lit streets of downtown. Not tonight. Just to keep things interesting.

"Definitely an advantage of the fairer sex."

She relaxed just a little, her heart rate slowing slightly, though there was still a nervous energy bouncing around her now. Somehow, she didn't think he'd changed his mind, just that she'd made it slightly inconvenient for him. That meant she needed to get him on a hook, reel him in, where she could safely manipulate him. "I've never quite subscribed to the idea of women being the fairer sex. Men can be beautiful, too, just in a different way. Look at you. They'd love you in America, you know."

A smirk. "That so? Well, maybe I'll explore over there after the war. Who knows."

"Where are you staying? Army quarters? I'm surprised you haven't been shipped off with the rest of the able-bodied young men," she added, slowly meandering back to his side as they entered the light once more. "I'd offer to have you back at my place for a nightcap, but it's not exactly accessible at the moment."

"Your place, or the nightcap?" he smirked. "And we have been. Back for debriefing and some training after a two month tour. Getting a few days leave."

"My place," she clarified with a quiet laugh. "It's been sealed up at nights because of the air raids. But it's past midnight, and it seems like the Germans are taking the night off, so perhaps they'll open the doors up if I ask really nicely."

"And if they don't?" he asked casually, offering her his arm as they entered the more well-lit street, camouflage among the ashy debris, a couple on a late night stroll. Nothing more, no silent duel between hunters.

She took it with practiced grace, more than used to the challenging of navigating while attached to someone's arm like a corsage. He was warm, even through the coats. "Oh, they will. They know better than to refuse me. I've got a bit of a temper, you see; extremely unladylike, but I decided long ago to own it."

"Sounds like an extremely useful decision to me," he said, nodding. He kept his arm just a bit higher than he knew would be strictly comfortable for her height, keeping her just slightly under his power.

They reached a familiar intersection and she made up her mind, guiding him right, towards the bunker. "Well, that's because you're a reasonable man. My mother, on the other hand, would disagree with you," she smirked, not even irritated by his obvious yet subtle bid for control over her movement. It wasn't every day she met someone like this, someone in the military with a penchant for killing so obvious she could almost see it rolling off him in waves. She knew there
was a hole in their staff, and if she got him into the bunker and got drunk with him and still wanted to work with him afterwards, she'd bring him to the boss.

"Mmm... well, my father would disagree with many of my personal choices," he said, giving a toothy grin that was strikingly unfriendly, in an odd sort of way.

"It appears we have that in common, then," she replied, voice even. She wasn't incredibly intimidated by him. It was hard to do, having worked for Jim for this long.

He studied her carefully, the smile fading naturally. She had interesting resolve and instinct. Too good for a hooker, unless she was very unlucky. But he'd play along for now.

"So, any interesting stories from the continent?" She asked as they turned onto the street that held the main entrance to the bunker, halfway down the steps to the Underground train system. Someone in the network could always tell whether or not it was open by the height of the Union Jack on a pole across the street. Tonight, it was half mast. Closed to anyone who didn't remember this week's password. Those who didn't remember could wait on the steps of the bank behind the flagpole and hope someone they recognized walked by, or they'd have to wait for the flag to be raised to full mast once again, when the door was unlocked, and guarded by a single, well-armed man. That was the price that had to be paid for a well-hidden door without any viewports. She adjusted their path so they headed for the phone booth just outside the station's steps.

He let her make the turn, following along carefully, eyes on the road around them. She was guiding them into unknown territory.

He didn't answer, which meant he was distracted. She glanced up at him, finding his eyes scanning their surroundings. Good. He was cautious. She stopped outside the phone booth, extricating herself from his arm with a smile. "I just have to make a quick call, then they'll let us in," she smiled, stepping into the phone booth without bothering to close the door. It might help him relax a little, and it wasn't like he could use the password himself. She picked up the phone, hit the correct sequence of numbers, then waited for a click on the other side of the line. "Hello, I'd like to make a deposit of halibut, please," she said cheerfully, and the line went dead again. She hung up. "There we are. Shall we?"

He raised an eyebrow, becoming more and more suspicious, but not nervous. "Is that's what's in that bag of yours, halibut?" he jabbed, offering his arm again. Easy access to her as a hostage if he needed it.

"Do you smell any fish?" she retorted, leading him down the steps by his arm, into the damp, cold air of the station. At the halfway landing was a metal service door, and she let go of him to open it, which always took a little jimmying. Then she stepped inside, flicking on a light switch as she went. "Shut the door behind you, if you please."

"What a charming abode," he deadpanned, stepping inside nonetheless, careful to place his feet exactly where she had placed hers as he stepped inside. He was now more than certain that this was some sort of trap, but he also was confident in his ability to fight his way out if he needed to, and it would be interesting to see what he could discover.

"This isn't it," she waved off, stepping a few more feet before stopping at a finger-sized hole in the wall. She pulled, and a door-sized section of the wall swung out with a squeak of hinges, and a light clicked on, as if she'd opened a refrigerator door. "Good evening, Edward," she said to the doorman, who was wearing an entirely black suit, with a semi-automatic rifle on a strap around his shoulder. The man gave a hard stare at Moran. "Stand down, please. He's a guest."
He wasn't phased by the show, merely took in his surroundings with apparent casual observation, though in actuality he was cataloging every detail. He nodded to the man, but didn't see the need to speak.

She took his arm again as she led him down the hall, which improved in quality and brightness as it lengthened, until it ended at the entrance to a stairwell, and an elevator. "We'll want to take the lift down. Hell of a lot of stairs."

"Mmm... hell of a place for a hooker, even a high-end one," he said, a touch of sarcasm floating into his voice.

Her eyes flicked up to give him a very dry look. "Colonel, I think you and I both know I am more than I advertise to be. Just like we both know that not all of your... extracurricular activities are sanctioned by special forces." The elevator door opened, and they stepped inside. A moment later they were descending into the bunker. "I have to say, you gave me a little bit of a fright by the Thames. I'm good with the knife in this bag of mine, but I don't think I have to point out the size difference between us."

"I considered it," he admitted with a casual shrug. "But I wasn't quite in the mood. Glad I didn't now, this is much more interesting." He leaned back against the elevator wall.

"I'm glad you didn't either," she snorted. "Would have been an anticlimactic end to an exciting life. Would have been a few seriously pissed off people, too. And I do not doubt that one in particular would have found you, too."

"Seems like the best solution for both of us, then," he said with a small smirk. "What a fortunate evening." The sarcasm was far from subtle now.

She rolled her eyes as the lift opened again, onto a wide, marble-floored hallway, with expensive wallpaper and an accent table against the wall, with an antique porcelain vase on top. She led him to a big white door on the left and dug a set of keys out of her bag. "I'm in the mood for gin."

"I'll drink whatever doesn't have the tranquilizers," he sniped, looking around at the foyer with one eyebrow quirked- the only sign that he was impressed.

"Please, I wouldn't taint good alcohol. That's what the lipstick in my bag is for," she replied derisively, unlocking the door with a loud click and pushing it open. The inside of the apartment was expensively decorated, although still tasteful, with dark furniture and light wallpaper. The liquor cabinet against the wall was an expensive armoire - really, everything in the place was made of money. Well-spent money. "I can drink the first sip of yours, if you're really suspicious."

"No, then I'll have to wonder about the lipstick on my glass," he deadpanned. "So, not government, not with this money. Mafia?"

"No, I already tried the mafia life out. Not for me," she hummed, tossing her bag and coat onto the closest sofa and heading for the liquor cabinet. "You're closer, though. But you won't guess."

"And why is that?" he asked calmly, removing his own coat and hat and hanging them by the door, his jacket still concealing his shoulder holster.

She shrugged, grabbing the bottle of gin out of the cabinet, and two crystal glasses. She walked back over to hand one to him, then the bottle. "Here, I'll let you pour it. And I don't think you can guess it because it's a little... unorthodox."

He smirked at her offer but nodded his thanks, pouring out two generous portions and handing one
"I did suspect as much," she chuckled, sinking down into the arm chair behind her. "I don't bring people back here, as a rule. But not everyone thinks about murdering me and dumping my body in the Thames. That's a little unorthodox."

He shrugged, but smirked a bit, finally taking a sip of the gin once he saw her swallow her own. It was good stuff. "I suppose not. Call it a gift."

"I haven't seen you in action, I don't think I can call it much of anything, yet," she returned, then waved a few fingers at the furniture. "You know, you are allowed to sit. Lean, even."

"Yet?" he prompted, interested as he lowered himself onto the couch, his posture sturdy and tall even when sitting.

"I can't make an informed opinion without seeing anything now. Can I?" She challenged, herself lounging back in her chair with all the grace of a resting leopard. Had she wanted to, she could have made a killing in American movies. But her tastes were a little too eccentric for such a public lifestyle.

"What sort of informed opinion are you looking to make?" he asked curiously, eyeing the woman. Beautiful and dangerous. It was an attractive combination.

She took a sip of gin, then lifted up her glass to inspect the lipstick stain. "Several different opinions, really. Whether or not you're actually any good, generally. In a variety of subjects. It's nothing you really need worry about."

He laughed. "I didn't sign up for any testing, Ms. Harrison," he said, raising an eyebrow. His eyes were back to cold. "Just what are you looking for?"

She smirked. "I'm looking for a lot of things. A good fuck, a new contractor, maybe some antique silverware..." she shrugged. "If I see something useful, or interesting, I pick it up and I put it to work. I don't look. Things find me."

"Oh, well then, the silverware I can definitely help you with," he muttered into his glass, lips quirking.

She laughed, honestly amused by him. It wasn't often that she gave a genuine laugh. "Well, I'd certainly appreciate that, mine are shit."

"That's a shame," he said, leaning forward to refill his gin glass, holding the bottle towards her glass questioningly. "In my opinion, a person should always have excellent knives."

She leaned a little so he could top her up. "I have good kitchen knives, and good sport knives, but my cutlery is sadly lacking. I have the same set I picked up a good four years back, right after I got back from America. Cheap tin. Hideous."

"Well, you don't seem short for cash," he said, filling her glass expertly and setting the bottle down, before waving a hand at her room to indicate what he was talking about. "Go get a new set and stop inviting strangers in in the hopes that they've got a set tucked into their waistband."

"I already told you, I don't invite people in here, and I don't seek things out," she corrected quietly, her eyebrows raised just slightly.

"Then I'm not people, but I am something you were waiting to fall into your lap," he said calmly,
firmly, eyes holding hers. "What do you want from me?"

"You misunderstand me, Colonel. I don't want anything from you. You struck my curiosity. I wondered if your posture would slump any once you had a few drinks. I'm not looking for anything from you. I just want to talk," she sighed, holding his eyes until she finished talking and then tilting her head back to finish the last of the gin in her glass, before leaning over to grab her coat and dig out her cigarette case. "Relax, will you? It's the end of the world, live a little."

He studied her. He wasn't inclined to trust her, but she seemed genuine enough. Or she thought she was. There was still the whole business of her testing him. Still...

He couldn't remember the last time someone had just taken an interest in him, not in his abilities. For the moment his abilities remained unknown to her, so either she was betting, or she was actually interested in him.

He didn't relax, but he was curious.

"You don't say much, do you?" She chuckled, lighting up a cigarette and taking a drag. "That's alright. You're pretty enough you can get away with stoic silences. You want a fag?"

He smirked just a little, but nodded, reaching out as she offered the box, taking a cigarette and the lighter. "So you want to talk. What about?"

"Tell me about yourself," she smiled, reaching out for the gin again. "You know, what do you like to do, all that. Anything that doesn't have to do with this blasted war."

He shrugged. "I don't have much time for hobbies," he said with a smirk. "The army takes up a lot of my time. When I do have a spare evening, it usually goes like this. Except it ends with the walk by the Thames."

"Why didn't it, this time?" she asked, voice level. She knew that he could have killed her there, had he truly wanted to. She'd have wounded him, maybe grievously, but she would have died.

His eyes traced her expression and her body for a moment, before he took a sip of gin and parroted her own words back to her. "You struck my curiosity."

She smirked, amused by his imitation. "Fair enough. I guess it's hardly surprising, considering the fact we singled each other out in a pub."

"Hardly. Though, to be fair, you made yourself fairly easy to single," he smirked.

"Everyone singles me out, however. You singled me out, and then you looked away. Not because you were embarrassed, or you simply couldn't hold my gaze, you looked away because you felt like it. That's different than what I normally encounter."

He laughed, finishing his second glass of gin and feeling just a touch more free. "I know how to get the attention of someone who's used to it."

"That you do," she agreed, smirking. "How much practice have you had? You seem like a pro."

He shrugged a bit, setting his empty glass to the side for the moment. "It comes naturally. Or from being 'raised' by a politician. One or the other.

She took a long pull off her cigarette before releasing a stream of menthol smoke into the air. "Yeah? Anything else come to naturally?"
He sat back, finally lighting up his own cigarette and handing back the lighter. "Shooting. A few other things. What about you?"

"Sex, lying, and a couple messier things," she replied cheerfully, tapping ash into the glass tray on the accent table.

He smirked. "Seems like a nice set of fortes, there," he chuckled, drawing on his fag slowly, the ember glowing red. "Messier things...?"

She shrugged a little, crossing her legs, her red heels still on. "Getting what I want out of someone. Creatively."

His smiled widened, and for a moment, flashed genuine. "One of my personal favorites as well, though my chances to exercise my talents in that area are always... limited."

She knew when she'd hit on something that resonated with him when that shark smile of his softened into something more real. She gave a quiet laugh. "Yeah, well, you get a job in my field, you'll have a lot more opportunities."

His eyes sparked with life for just a second, but then he took a drag and it all faded back behind his control, like it had never been. "I don't even know what your field is," he pointed out.

She laughed for a moment. "Oh, yes you do. Don't pretend to be oblivious, Colonel. You're far too much a predator for that."

He smirked, too, watching as she laughed. It seemed to be an art form for her, and he was happy to be the audience. "I have an idea. But you aren't mafia, which just leaves me guessing semantics. Some other criminal organization is my bet, but I've no idea who."

"No, no, you wouldn't, I'll give you that much," she chuckled, pausing to take another pull off her menthol. "And I'm not going to tell you, either, at least not yet. Might have to have you killed or some shit. Which I'm sure would be difficult, but we're good at arranging accidents."

"Well, we wouldn't want that," he agreed, not in the least unnerved by the information. "Another weighty 'yet' there. You've got plans."

"I've got ideas. I don't have plans. I'm more of an improviser, really." She toed off her heels, which fell with two sharp clacks onto the maple floor. "Better my ideas than that stuffy old army job you've got, in my opinion. And yours, too, if they turn out to be anything worthwhile."

"The army job isn't nearly so stuffy as they try to make it," he chuckled, reaching out to tap his ash into the tray. "I've dug myself a nice little area of free reign. If I'm smart about it."

"Mm, they would probably frown on harboring their own little Jack the Ripper in the ranks," she grinned, then pointed at the gin. "Pass that down, will you?"

He passed the gin. "Please. That man knew how to instill fear, sure, but he had no imagination."

"We can agree on that point," she nodded, speaking around the cigarette held in the corner of her mouth as she used both hands to pour herself another glass. She set it down a moment later and leaned back, glass in one hand, cigarette in the other. "You fancy listening to some music?"

He nodded a little. "Sure, why not?" he agreed, grabbing his own glass and reaching for the bottle to fill it.
She hopped to her feet and set her glass down on the table - a very trusting move - and walked over to the record player against the opposite wall, trailing a finger across his shoulder as she passed him. A few moments of clunking around, and then she was done, the music flickering to life, the horns and piano starting, and she had to fight the urge to sing along.

*There's no sunshine*

*This impossible year*

*Only black days and sky grey*

*And clouds full of fear*

*And storms full of sorrow*

*That won't disappear*

*Just typhoons and monsoons*

*This impossible year*

"Hope you don't mind a little melancholy," she chuckled quietly, walking back to pick up her gin again.

He rolled his shoulder where she'd brushed it, urging away the goosebumps and considering her glass on the table, but not touching it. He looked up as the song came on. He didn't know it, but he liked it, and nodded slightly as she spoke. "It suits me more than the lovesick crooning of most singers these days." He shifted on the premise of putting out his cigarette in the tray, opening more of the couch, a silent, subtle invitation that could easily be ignored.

She stopped on his side of the sofa to grab the glass, and took the opening on the cushions naturally, crossing her legs as she settled back. "If you're going to be sick about something, make it about something important, you know? Not another person. Don't they know there's a literal war on?"

"I think that's their argument," he said dryly, shrugging. "Keep up the spirits of the boys in blue. Hell of a lot of good that's doing."

"Everyone says the war will end any day now, but I don't believe a word of it. It's never that easy," she muttered, then took another sip of gin and relaxed further into the sofa.

"As someone who regularly sees the worst of it, believe me, we're nowhere near done," he snorted, shaking his head.

She leaned over to put out her cigarette too as the music swelled to a crescendo. "I really wish that they'd stop bombing my damn city."

"Don't we all," he snorted. "Though I tell you what, it makes hiding bodies a damn sight easier."

"Do you even have to hide them any more? Or do you do it just for the sake of the process?" she raised her eyebrows, the back of her mind starting to be vaguely pleased at the gin starting to take effect.

He shrugged. "I do sometimes when the wounds are a bit more 'blatant murder' than usual, but only when I feel like it. Otherwise I just drop a few big pieces of rubble on them from a bit of a height
and call it a day."

"Have you got a pattern like a proper serial killer?" she asked curiously, the corners of her lips turned up in a slight smirk.

"They define proper serial killers by the ones they know about, can catch, and can link to multiple murders," he points out with an equal smirk. "Not very proper in my opinion."

"Good, because I meant it as a joke anyway," she laughed. In the background, the song stopped and there was a momentary pause before the next started.

"Really? Couldn't tell," he deadpanned, looking over and giving her a flash of a canine before he took a sip of gin.

She smirked. He wasn't very good at putting on a convincing grin. "So, soldier," she started, "You got an interesting scars? That's what I'm supposed to ask, isn't it?"

"It depends on what you want to see," he retorts, leaning back against the couch and considering the drink in his hand before looking back up at her, blue eyes still sharp despite the fact that he could feel the heat of the booze in the pit of his stomach. "Got a couple, definitely. You don't do my line of work without getting them."

"I believe it. I'm shocked I haven't got more, honestly, the kind of work I do. Only two. One I got from an angry old lady with a shockingly sharp purse." The other was the small but deep JM carved high up between her shoulders, directly over her spine. It was easy enough to hide, with her hair the length it was, and if anyone saw it she could always claim a possessive ex-fiancé had done it, but at the time it had been excruciatingly painful.

He almost laughed at that, genuinely, which surprised him. She amused him, and not in the usual 'ah, pitiful humanity' sort of way. She was genuinely entertaining. He liked her.

"Watching your face is hilarious," she commented, grinning. "You keep stopping it from doing anything, and then you end up looking surprised."

"That so?" he asked, shifting to face her a bit more. "Because yours is a damn good puzzle, too."

She raised her eyebrows a little. "Yeah? How's that?"

He considers a way to put it. "You know the phrase 'she talks a lot but says nothing'? It's like your face is doing that, very intentionally. It's an impressive art."

She didn't know how to react for a second, then a sort of resentful smile appeared on her face, spreading into an exasperated smirk. "Damn, you figured me out that quickly, did you?"

"Are you kidding? I saw it right away. Part of what drew me to you," he said with an amused grin. "Your smile told the room 'I'm yours' and the nothing underneath added '-or so you think, you quaint little mortals.'"

She laughed, running a hand through her careful curls. "I suppose I made it a habit a long time ago to be animated so that people look at me, not what I'm doing."

"Well, they do," he nods in agreement, watching her curls fall back around her shoulders. "It's a beautiful game."

"It helps that I'm such a beautiful woman, then, doesn't it?" she shrugged, watching him carefully,
grey eyes on his icy blue ones.

"That's definitely helpful, yes," he said with a smirk. "It reels your victims in, and then your wit and charm go for the kill."

"Oh, wit and charm? I'm absolutely flattered, Colonel," she said coyly, finishing off her third glass of gin. "You'll make me blush if you aren't careful."

"Not unless you wanted me to," he retorted. "I've a hefty wafer that says you have that expression on command."

"You're right," she admitted with a smirk, then shrugged a little. "But I have been known to give a genuine blush on occasion. I guess you'll just never know which one you get."

"I suppose so. I get the impression there's a lot I'll never know about you," he retorts, grinning.

"Well, you'll certainly never know until you try," she pointed out, lifting a hand to adjust the collar of his jacket. "Where's your sense of adventure?"

"What sort of adventure are you suggesting?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

"I'm suggesting you relax a little and have a little fun. Not everything has to be planned," she smiled, half turned to face him, her elbow resting on the back of the sofa.

"I've found that when you stop planning is where you start making mistakes," he said, mirroring her position. "Especially in unknown territory that could be the enemy camp."

"Outside that door," she gestured to the flat door, leading to the foyer, "Out there, you could consider it potentially hostile territory. In here? So long as you don't piss me off, you're good. Keep your gun on if you want to, but loosen your tie a little, relax. I'm a heavy drinker, and three glasses of gin's enough to affect me quite a bit. Join in the fun."

He sighed, considering her for a moment before reaching up to untie the tie, letting it hang around his neck. "You saw the gun, then."

"No, I didn't. But I know people, and I know soldiers, and a combination of the types you are? No way you're walking around unarmed," she shrugged, still cheerful.

He paused, glanced at her. "And now you have confirmation. Nicely done," he said with a nod of appreciation.

"Thank you," she smiled, then, "It's getting late - do you want a cup of coffee, tea, maybe? Either way this night goes, think you might need a little caffeine."

"Coffee would be fine," he said with a nod, standing as she did and following her into a kitchen that matched the rest of the flat for taste and spending.

"Oh good, I don't have to worry about apologizing for my slightly Americanized tastes," she chuckled, banging around the kitchen, scraping together the making for french press coffee.

He reached out to grab the tin of coffee on a shelf just out of her reach, handing it to her. "We survive off of coffee in the field. You get a taste for it," he murmured.

"Will you be wanting it black, then?" She asked, putting a kettle on the stove to warm the water with. "I usually take mine with sugar. I'm not very good at following rations."
He smirked. "Black is fine, thank you. Though I understand the disregard for rationing."

"It makes me feel a little better that we're getting our supplies shipped in special, either way. Not that that has exactly been easy, with those damn U-Boats," she muttered, leaning against the counter as she waited for the kettle to whistle.

"I'm impressed," he said calmly. "I've been on those damn U-Boats. They're tough to fly by."

She shuddered, making a face. "I don't know if I could stand being trapped under water like that. I could drive a tank, maybe, but a plane or a u-boat? Those are elements I don't belong in."

He smiled. "I can't say I was overly fond of the idea either," he admitted, watching her prepare the coffee.

When she'd poured them both a glass she gestured back to the living room. "Were you drafted, or did you sign up?"

"Signed up. First chance I got," he said, taking the hot mug in hand and following after her.

She sat where he had been before, leaving open a good space for him to take. "Patriotism, or family?"

He sat a touch closer to her than he'd been before. "Definitely not patriotism," he chuckled, though his eyes weren't laughing.

"I see," she sipped her coffee, the picture of poise. "No need to explain further, then. Not even people who like their family want to talk about them."

He took a large gulp of his own coffee to reset himself, the hot liquid scalding the roll of his tongue, and nodded just a little, letting the tension of the moment ease quickly and quietly away, though he had no doubt she'd noticed it. He returned his attention to the warmth of the gin, letting that ease him as best he could. That and the beautiful woman who was sitting just a few feet away. "What about you? How did you get into this business?"

"My father, actually. He did hits for whoever would pay. Wasn't secretive about it either, which caused a lot of fights between him and Mum," she shrugged, her voice still pleasant. "Helped to have his name to bandy about when I was old enough to start working. I didn't have to; we had good enough money, but I had an itch that needed to be scratched."

He nodded a little at that. "Sounds like fun. What sort of work do you do specifically?"

"I used to do... creative hits, when I lived in America," she shrugged, taking a sip of her coffee. "Now, I'm more of a spy, I suppose. I grift. Acting like a call girl is a good front and good bonus cash."

He nods a little. "Creative hits sounds entertaining. Why'd you move out of it? Get bored?"

"More like got sick of the Mafia. Had me do a few things I'm not proud of," she sighed. "And I was involved with the Don. That started getting messy."

"That sounds like it would get messy," he agreed, making a slight face.

"I'm sure he's still madly in love with me, but there's nothing to be done about that," she shook her head, and took a bracing drink from her mug.
"Some gin in that?" he asked, picking up the bottle and offering it her way.

"Yes, please," she chuckled, holding out her mug. "I'm already quite buzzed, but what could it hurt?"

"Nothing at all," he agreed, pouring a generous serving of gin into her coffee and adding a bit to his own as well.

"Before I get any drunker, however, you're going to have to make a choice," she smirked, sipping her spiked coffee. "Because if I'm going to walk you back to the surface tonight, I don't want to be barely capable of walking up stairs."

He smirks just a little. "That sounds more like your choice, not mine," he decided after a moment.

"If I wanted you gone, I'd have you gone. But I won't keep you trapped here against your will," she laughed, shrugging a little.

"If I wanted to be gone, I'd be gone," he retorted. "So we both want me here. That's a start."

"Now the question is," she murmured, bringing her hand up to smooth along the collar of his jacket. "Whether or not we talk all night, or find something else to... occupy ourselves with."

"I'm not much of a talker, personally," he smirked, catching her hand with a quick movement and then bringing it to his lips, kissing the inside of her wrist lightly.

"I can work with that," she murmured, eyes locked onto his, dark, interested. "I can definitely work with that."

"Good to know," he said with a grin, holding her gaze, unafraid.

"When's the last time you slept with a woman, soldier?" She murmured.

"Excluding my Thames excursions?" he asked with a smirk. "It's been a while."

"When's the last time you slept with a woman and stayed for coffee in the morning?" she corrected, smiling.

"Ah, yup, there's that qualifier," he said with a small nod and a dark smirk. "I repeat. It's been a while."

"You can change your answer tomorrow," she smirked, taking one more long draught before she leaned forward and kissed him.

Chapter End Notes

Lana del Rey - Serial Killer
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlf9e9PnJZM&list=PLSCvi5dTA1ahDvIwz8x5mRI4kKDxqhd4S&index=4&t=0s
Panic! at the Disco - Impossible Year
He considered saying something witty in response, but then his tongue was occupied, and she was the talkative one, after all. So instead he set his coffee aside and pulled her over into his lap to gain better access, kissing her back eagerly.

She slid sideways into his lap with practiced ease, the demure way to do it, the proper way - the teasing way, the kind where he'd have to work a little. She didn't make things easy on anybody, not even the people she truly wanted to fuck, and her kisses were still mostly chaste. The hand traveling down his chest, headed for his belt, however, was not.

He slid hands over her hips, fine if she wanted to take it slow, but making it clear that he was going to be just as difficult in return. He trailed his fingers slowly up her spine, tactile by nature.

She slid a hand into his hair, the other undoing his belt. She kissed him a little harder, a little more needily. She loved a man in uniform.

He smiled, one hand on her hip gripping tighter, pulling her against him, his tongue reaching out to brush against her lips inquisitively.

She dropped his belt off the side of the couch a moment later, and then her hand was sliding into his trousers, the tiniest smirk on her face, palm pressing against his growing erection. "Tell me what you do to the girls by the Thames," she murmured, shifting a little to kiss down his jaw. "I want to hear it."

There was something wonderful about her request. To be able to share his work with someone... he certainly didn't need it, but the idea was incredibly appealing. He found the top button of her red dress, tilting his head back as her lips explored his jawline. "I pick them up at clubs," he says softly. "A smile and a drink or two is usually all it takes. The uniform helps. They never even think, most of them..." He undid her first button, and then the next, his fingers tracing soft skin, feeling the ridge of a scar but not pausing in his exploration, just noting it for later.

"I take them for a walk, we find a quiet alleyway or bridge or... anywhere, really... and sometimes I fuck them. Sometimes they're eager, sometimes they try to run, it doesn't matter..."

She shivered, the combination of his quiet words and soft touch combining into a heady mixture. "How long do you wait before you kill them?" She murmured, stroking him slowly, nipping the very corner of his jaw gently.

"It depends in how much time I have..." he whispers, turning his head to bite her ear gently. "Sometimes it has to be quick, but even then it can be fun... I like to just barely nick their artery... hold their gaze while they go..." he murmured, his hands spreading across her shoulders.
She shivered again, electricity shooting down her spine, her fingers tightening in his hair.
"Picturing you there, in an alley, over some bleeding girl. That does something to me," she
chuckled quietly.

"Mmm... I should tell you about when I have time," he murmured softly in her ear, finishing
unbuttoning the back of her dress, hands sliding down her spine.

She arched under his touch, shifting her legs to face him more fully, her hand slipping down to the
base of his neck. "And what do I have to do to hear that?"

"Mmm... I think you should tell me something about your time in America..." he murmured,
shifting his hands to pull her dress forward off of her shoulders. "About that information gathering
you used to do..."

She slipped her freer hand out of her dress, then busied it pushing off his jacket, pulled back
enough now to look him in the eyes, her own dark. "I used to brush up against my target, as if I
needed to get by, in order to gauge a reaction. Usually ended with a hand job in the back alley
while my other hand pickpocketed him."

"Oh, come on," he said with a flash of teeth, raising an eyebrow as her dress pooled around her
waist and his fingers traced the top of her brassier. "You mentioned messy... I'm sure you had more
interesting encounters than the usual..."

"Messy involved my boss-slash-lover," she chuckled, sliding off his lap to stand, her dress slipping
off in the process. She held a hand out to him. "Messy involved him fucking me in a pool of
someone else's blood."

He took her hand, standing, going from a head shorter to more than a head taller in a single motion.
The images her words brought to mind did something deep in his gut, and he swallowed, imagining
her dripping in scarlet, viscous liquid, the metallic taste on his lips when he kissed her, watching it
drip along her throat...

"Fuck..." he whispered, chuckling a bit nervously before gathering himself and glancing away for
just a moment to pull himself together. When he looked back to her he was still warm and eager,
but something deeper was back under control with steel bands. "Sounds like a hell of a thing," he
murmured, leaning forward to trace his lips and teeth along her jugular.

"It was," she smirked, unbuttoning his shirt halfway and then grabbing ahold of it and stepping
back, leading him toward the bedroom. She'd seen the change in his eyes when she'd mentioned the
blood, had seen the longing and hunger appear before he'd pushed it down. "Come now, I think I've
been wearing these suspenders long enough. Help me take them off."

He flashed a lopsided smile, following after her without struggle. "I think I can help with that.
Always thought those bodices looked pretty uncomfortable as well."

"They are," she confirmed, turning with one hand still in his shirt so she wouldn't walk into any
walls. Her room was a bit of a contrast to the rest of her apartment. It was still beautifully
decorated and expensive, but it was notably smaller, more lived-in than the rest of the flat. It wasn't
impeccably clean - it was the right amount of cozy. The bed was the only piece of major furniture
in the room besides from the large armoire and the small nightstand, and the headboard was
ornately carved. "You going to help relieve me?"

He grinned, stepping up behind her and wrapping his arms around her to find the lacing on the
front of her bodice and starting to loosen it, one hand pulling the lines, the other sliding down the
She leaned back into him, lifting a hand behind her to slide into his hair, arching just a little so her ass pressed into his hips. "You are wearing far too many clothes..."

He laughed softly, pressing his hips forward against her arse. "Well, maybe you should do something about that," he challenged, loosening the laces enough that he could unhook the bodice, letting it fall to the floor and turning his attention to her breasts.

She turned in his arms to face him, unbuttoning his shirt the rest of the way, her hands running down his chest to hook in his belt. "We're a pushy couple of people."

"I could see that making for some interesting results," he chuckled, shrugging out of his shirt and then running his fingers down over her chest.

"What are you going to do with your gun?" She raised an eyebrow, tapping the leather strap that crossed his shoulder. Her eyes, however, were on his bare chest. He was incredibly attractive, and it kept getting better.

He pulled it off without hesitation, removing the gun and unloading the bullets in the space of a few seconds, hands never hesitating. He returned the gun to the holster and set it on the nightstand, before taking the bullets and putting them in a small case from his pocket. It closed and locked with a combination. "Gotten used to that question," he explained with a smirk, setting the locked case aside too.

"Really, even while fucking girls in dark alleys?" She chuckled, pushing his trousers down.

"Sometimes if I had time, I'd get a room," he smirked, stepping out of his trousers. "And we'd go there."

She grasped his wrist and pulled him close enough to kiss again, while backing up towards the bed, in only her pants and nylons.

He reached down as they moved, grasping her hip again as the back of her knees hit the bed. He considered the nylons, then chuckled, motioning for her to take them off. "I always rip them."

She laughed, efficiently undoing her suspenders and carefully unrolled her stockings, moving up the bed to place them on the nightstand. "I appreciate the concern for my apparel. God knows it's hard to get those these days."

He smirked. "Nylons are sacred. Anything else I'm a bit less careful." He waited until she'd set them aside to lean forward again, his tongue finding hers and effectively stalling conversation.

She cupped his jaw in her hand, using it to pull him closer, down over her, her hips already searching for his.

He met her search willingly, grinding against her eagerly, a small moan escaping as his hands traced her frame. It was different, being with someone who knew him to be dangerous, who was attracted to that. To be himself rather than bait.

She could still feel the thrill in her spine, the tinge of fear, of being hunted, of the tension of a predator meeting another in a dark forest. She bit his lip, provoking him, egging him on. Get rough.

He took a sharp breath as her tooth cut into his lip, and then grinned, biting back before leaving her
mouth and reaching a hand up to grab at her throat, pushing her head off to the side and biting the joint of her neck and shoulder.

She groaned, nails digging into his back, her own arching up off the soft sheets. Jim would be something close to livid tomorrow if it left a mark, but at the moment she couldn't bring herself to care. It felt good, being with someone who didn't treat her like a china doll, who grasped her sides hard and her neck harder. She hooked a finger into the waistband of his pants, urging him to take them off.

He shifted his hips up and rolled them slightly against her grip to get the pants down, reluctant to release his grip on her neck as his tongue lathed hungrily over her collarbone, exploring.

Her heart was trying to beat its way out of her chest now as she finally got the blasted things gone, her own still on, but she still arched back up into him again regardless, desperate for friction. The record player was still playing in the next room, the dim strings of the music reaching into the bedroom, adding to the mood.

He continued his exploration downward, mouth and teeth and tongue scraping heat into her skin. He ran his tongue through the grooves her brassier had left in her skin, dragged his teeth over her ribs, his thumb pressing just slightly against her jugular, just for a moment, as she shifted under his grip. His free hand dropped to find the waistband of her knickers where he could feel them shifting against his skin, and pushed them down out of the way, eager to feel her hot against him.

She kicked her pants the rest of the way off, her fingers sliding into his hair again, nails scraping across his scalp. The last time she'd really enjoyed a man being on top of her, well... She had a habit of sleeping with her employers.

He finally dropped his hand from her throat, shifting it down to get a handful of her arse, pulling her hips against his more firmly, grinding into her with needy precision. His teeth returned to her throat, and he growled against her jugular, before he pulled back to look at her, eyes black and a touch wild.

Her own eyes were dark and hungry, meeting his for a second before she pulled him back in by the hand at the back of his neck, teeth clashing against his for a second before she could control her enthusiasm, a quiet moan leaving her throat as he ground against her again. "Fuck me, please," she gasped, pulling away again, desperate for something more.

He had absolutely no interest in arguing, the hand on her arse changing to grab his cock and guide it to her entrance. He paused, his breath catching low in his chest as he forced himself to still for just a moment. "Got a condom?" he asked, shoulders tense, body pressed against hers on almost every plane.

"Yeah, yeah, nightstand," she breathed, her fingers tight on his skin, a leg hooked around his waist. "Hurry."

He snorted, pushing himself just enough to tear her drawer open and dig around for the package. He tore it open with his teeth and rolled off to the side just to enough to get the thing in place.

She knocked his hand aside to line him up, her forehead pressed against his, her eyes on his, dark, wild, urging him on.

He held her gaze as he pushed into her, saw her pupils shrink just slightly and then blow out wide as his cock sank with satisfying snugness into her heat. He bit into his lip as he pulled back just a little, adjusting his angle before pushing in again, feeling her muscles tense and roll to
accommodate him.

"Oh, fuck," she groaned, arching beneath him, her fingers clenching hard on his biceps, her eyes soaking in his. Men had this look a lot; the look that they had when thought they were in control of her pleasure. Of her herself. He was one of three people whose look was justified.

He took a short breath, letting out a bit of a laugh that melted into a groan as she pressed up into him, the pain of her fingers in his arms driving him forward and sending adrenaline coursing through him. He shifted just enough so that he could move his hips with a sort of regular rhythm, and pulled almost all the way out of her this time before he entered her again, and again, setting up a rhythm that was just on the border of being too slow, not enough, wanting to push her, wanting to see what she'd do when he held out.

"Moran," she growled, her lips brushing against his throat, before her teeth did, a very obvious threat. She was desperate for it, starving for it. And if he didn't give her what she wanted she'd leave him with scars.

The slight pain was an aphrodisiac like little else. No woman, or man, ever bit him back, ever threatened, ever exerted power in a situation like this. Not with him. No one had the guts. He elected not to push it any further, not yet, just accepted the warning as it was and acted on it. He shifted his knees upwards until he could put more power behind his hips, and thrust into her with new speed and energy, swearing under his breath as she twisted her hips against his.

She let out a pleased groan, nails dragging down his back, fire racing up her spine. "Don't stop."

"Wasn't... going t-to," he panted, arching his back into her nails, his breath coming short and tight as he felt warmth spreading along his spine and down his tailbone.

She kissed and bit a line down his shoulder, the only thing she could continue to do with the lack of coordination that she was beginning to feel. He was driving her physically insane, was making her feel like she'd never have a better fuck than him, like she'd barely make it through this one without bursting into heated flames.

He pushed her thigh up his hip, feeling her tighten around him in response as his teeth found her neck again. He bit down, hard, and suddenly there was the rush of metal across his tongue that he knew so well, that dogged his dreams... His whole body seemed to harden in response, muscles bunching and then releasing with new energy, like coiled springs. The blood drizzled over his tongue as he dragged it against her skin, and his whole being was alight, focused, in tune for that single moment.

He snarled against her, his hands grappling her shoulders and hauling her beneath him a bit further, tilting her hips up and giving him a new angle as he fucked her with everything he had.

She cried out at the new angle, already burning from the bite, the feeling that he'd completely taken ownership of her, laid his mark on her, however temporarily. She was close suddenly, so close. Just a little more...

He could feel her getting close, heard the noises she was making, and knew that the instant she came he would be following her, if not before. He took sharp breaths, struggling to keep himself away from the edge as he slid a hand between them, fingers finding her hood and rubbing over it broadly as his hips snapped forward, seeking the bundle of nerves that he hoped would bring her over.

She vaulted over the edge, a mangled swear making it out of her mouth before she bit into his
shoulder, raked her nails across his skin, bucked up into him, becoming completely lost in her own ecstasy.

Her teeth were in his shoulder, incisors cutting into his flesh, and she was swearing and tightness and heat, and suddenly he was falling over, too, letting out a cry into her shoulder as he came, his body shuddering and trembling against hers before slowly relaxing, emitting heat like a stove.

She thought she might pass out, she felt so good. Her heart was drumming like it was trying to win a race, and her lungs were not doing so well with keeping up. "Holy shit, Colonel," she breathed.

He rolled off to the side out of habit, still floating in a gaze of hormones. He was a large enough man with enough muscle to impose a breathing issue if he didn't.

"I could say the same..."

"I'm not in the army," she chuckled, lifting a hand to touch the bleeding mark on her neck and then examining the blood in the dim light. "Aw, shit, my boss is going to have me quartered."

He smirked at her comment, then raised an eyebrow. "Why? What does he care?"

"I'm his property, and I've let myself be damaged," she snorted, shifting to grab the soft sheets and pull them over her.

"Sounds like a charmer," he muttered, removing the condom and tossing it in the bin before laying down as well.

"He is, when he wants to be," she shrugged, and sighed, making herself comfortable, despite the blood drying on her sheets. It wasn't the first time she'd stained her sheets. It was usually alcohol, though. "I've killed for him. I'd consider dying for him."

He raised an eyebrow, but didn't comment further. Killing for someone didn't seem like much of a bar. But dying... that was a sort of loyalty he didn't see the use of.

She let the conversation die away, rolling onto her stomach with a contented sigh, effectively exposing her back to him. He wouldn't kill her tonight. "Don't try to sneak out in the morning. First person to see you would have you shot or arrested," she added, voice quiet.

"Wasn't planning on it," he smirked. He finally caught a good look at the scar he'd felt earlier at the apex of her spine. JM in precise lettering. He filed that away for future reference, and closed his eyes, waiting for her to fall asleep.

She fell asleep after a long while, unable to be completely comfortable with his presence - a predator's presence - so near to her, but eventually her physical efforts got the better of her, and she drifted off.

He heard her breathing change and shifted, rising slowly out of the bed and walking around, naked, bare feet silent on the carpet. He was looking for any hints as to her employer, or the situation. For the most part, however, all seemed secure, and he found nothing. A few minutes later he used the loo as an excuse, and then climbed back into bed. A few minutes after that he fell into a light sleep, wary.

She woke up in the late morning when her alarm went off. She shifted, groaning, and smacked her
alarm clock until it stopped. She was still for another minute before she moved again, sitting up and sliding out of bed.

He woke instantly to the alarm, alert and still. His eyes scanned the room for movement, and he heard it behind him. Harrison. His gun wasn't in reach, but her movements sounded relaxed, unhurried. He shifted enough to see her and relaxed just slightly when he saw her stand, watching.

She stretched and then headed for the bathroom. When she came back, she waved a few fingers at him in greeting before she picked up a silk dressing gown thrown over her dresser and slipped it on. "Breakfast and coffee?"

He nodded a bit, sitting up and rubbing at his eyes before looking around for where his pants and trousers had ended up. "Sounds great."

She nodded and left the room, idly looking for any disturbed items. He'd slept in her bed, but that didn't mean she had to trust him.

He pulled on his trousers and took his gun, loading it again and tucking it into his waistband, making no particular effort to conceal it as he followed her.

She banged around the kitchen for a few minutes, getting together the materials for pancakes, humming to herself. When the pan was on the stove and she was about to pour the batter, she glanced over her shoulder at him. "How many pancakes do you want?"

He shrugged. "If you make them, I will eat them," he said, leaning against the door frame.

"That's unhelpful, but noted anyway," she shrugged, falling back into silence for a few moments, while the hiss of the cooking batter filled the air. The rest of the apartment was obviously built with taste, and a lot of precision, but the kitchen was more like the bedroom; lived in and small, and not very fancy. She didn't know too much about cooking, and she didn't care to. What she couldn't make for herself she had someone else make for her. "When are you expected back?"

"I should be back on base by 1300," he said, walking over to watch her cook. "And I could eat five or six easily."

"More helpful, good job," she smirked, forking the first couple of pancakes onto a large plate waiting by the side. "You'll have time to meet my boss, then. I think he'd like you."

"Will he like me after he sees the mark I left on your neck?" he asked, reaching out to skim his fingers over the impressive bruise on her neck, surrounding the cut of his teeth.

She gave a carefree shrug. "My old boss, he wouldn't like you after he saw my neck. This one? He'll be angry with me, but I think he'll be curious about you."

"I believe your exact words were that he'd have you quartered, but fair enough," he shrugged. "What will he want to know?"

"That I can't tell you. He's unpredictable that way. But I guarantee that whatever questions he may have he'll have the answers to within three minutes. You ever met a reader before, Moran?"

"As in someone who reads?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Reads people, yeah," she nodded, turning off the stove now that she had a respectable stack of pancakes built up.
"What does that even mean?" he asked skeptically. "Like a fucking fortune teller or some shit?"

"No, he doesn't do anything so impressive as to predict futures," she shook her head, picking up the platter and setting it on the table, then set a place each for them and sat. "But he's remarkably good at your past, sometimes even your present. He looks at people and just knows things."

"Sounds like an interesting man," he said, sitting at the other place and forking a few pancakes onto his plate.

"Certainly the most interesting one I've ever met," she chuckled, taking a few as well and starting to dig in after pouring a modest amount of syrup. "But I think you've made it into the top five. I wonder where he'll rank you."

"Glad to hear I've made an impression," he said with a small nod as he added his own syrup and butter, and started to eat. He was hungrier than he thought, and the first few pancakes were gone quickly. He reached for a few more.

She didn't mind that he took the majority of the pancakes; she was, after all, much smaller than him, and he looked like he had the potential to be a mountain of a man, given a few more years and a lot more food. She took only three pancakes in total, leaving the rest for him. "Coffee?" She asked as she swallowed her last bite, raising her eyebrows at him inquiringly.

He nodded just slightly, mouth full of pancake. He swallowed. "That would be great, thanks"

She nodded and set about making it, idly wondering how best to introduce her guest to Jim. "What's your first name, anyhow?"

"Colonel," he deadpanned. "My mother had an army fetish. That's the clothes, too. Never worn anything else."

"Ha ha, very amusing," she rolled her eyes, setting a mug of coffee down in front of him, "Now tell me anyway."

He picked it up, raising it in a casual toast in her direction before taking a sip. It was good stuff, and he closed his eyes, savoring the flavor of decent coffee that hadn't been provided by the military ration core.

"Sebastian," he said finally. "This is good coffee."

She smirked. "Thanks. It's french. Costs a pretty penny, but I do so hate bad coffee," she sighed, swirling the coffee in her mug a little bit. "I'll be glad when that blockade breaks up."

"Won't we all?" he asked with a small grin. "Though the end of all this is really going to make my midnight entertainment more difficult."

"I know. No longer able to lurk amongst the rubble, hide your prey as bomb victims," she said wistfully, smirking at him. "What ever will you do?"

"I'll think of something," he chuckled, taking another sip of coffee. "There's still the Thames."

"Isn't that a little cliche? What about graveyards? Who the hell would think to look there?" she suggested, still smirking.

"Maybe I will, though the groundskeeper might notice fresh graves he didn't dig," he pointed out. "Sometimes things are cliche because they work."
"That's why you wait for someone to die, and then you kill someone and bury them in the fresh grave," she laughed, sipping her coffee.

He raised an eyebrow at her, impressed. "Actually, that's damn good," he admitted with a smirk.

"If I have anything, it's a pair of good legs and a decent common sense," she quipped, quirking her eyebrows at him in amusement.

He laughed at that, eyes on her, studying her. She was gorgeous, even in the morning, unbrushed hair curling around her face free-form. And the more he spoke to her the more she seemed to be a fellow, of sorts. Someone who shared his ambitions, his interests, however... uncommon.

She finished off her coffee and stood, moving to put her mug in the sink. "Alright, I have to start preparing for my day, so feel free to turn on the radio, amuse yourself however you like. Do try your best not to break anything, won't you?"

He smirked but nodded. "Wasn't planning on it. If I could use your shower after you're done with it, I'd appreciate it."

"Sure," she nodded, heading for the bedroom, "Or you can just shower with me, I don't mind either way."

He considered that, then stood, following after her and shucking his trousers as he went, not one to turn down an invitation.

She wasn't surprised he followed, and was, in fact, a little pleased. This would give her better opportunity to inspect him. "So, any siblings?"

"No." The answer was short, almost clipped. He provided no further information, nor did he return the question. Family wasn't a topic he was touching on.

"Mm. I do. Little brother. Looks more like me than my parents, neither of which are particularly attractive people, but here we are," she hummed, disrobing and tossing the silk gown towards the bed as she passed it, and entering into a black and white bathroom.

"Well, you seem to have won the genetic lottery, then," he said softly, voice low and quiet as he admired her arse. He walked up behind her, brushing her hair to the side to kiss her shoulder, and getting a proper look at the scar he'd noticed the night before. The initials seemed to have been carved with a knife that was duller than he would have chosen for the job, leaving behind a broad, ridged scar. They were obviously meant to last, and given their location, they had probably been painful.

She shivered as his lips brushed her shoulder, then leaned forward, turning on the shower. "Having a look at the stamp on my back, Colonel?"

He smiled a little at that. "Guilty as charged. What can I say? I'm a connoisseur of scars."

"Not going to ask me what I did to earn it?" She asked, testing the water with her hand to see if it was warm enough, then stepped in.

"Alright, I'll bite," he said, shoving his pants off and stepping out of them before following after her. "What'd you do?"

"I earned his trust," she laughed, stepping fully under the spray and turning around to get an eyeful of him, a pleased smirk on her lips.
"Mmm... So he carved his initials into you. Logical next step, I do it all the time," he shot back, his legs entering the hot spray, the rest of him dry for the moment as she shielded the water.

She moved a little to let him have the water, running a hand over her wet hair. "There are worse ways to express the feeling, but..." she shrugged a little. "Although, to be completely honest, I did do something that warranted a cutting first. We were still kind of starting out, the two of us. I wasn't used to him yet; got upset, ran off, decided to cool off by doing a job that I'd been putting off for a few days. I think he thought I'd made a run for it. When I came back, he grabbed me, bent me over my kitchen counter and took a knife to me that he hadn't sharpened in like two years."

"Yeah, I noticed it was dull. Sharp blades don't leave marks like that," he said, wincing a bit sympathetically. "Right over the spine, too. Had to hurt like hell." He stepped into the water, putting his head underneath and leaning back, letting it run over him for a few seconds before stepping out and starting to rinse his arms down, water dripping out of his buzz cut.

"Oh, it did. One of the most painful things I've ever experienced, in fact," she shook her head, though her voice was still light. "Screamed something awful, I did. But at least my dress didn't get stained."

"Got to know your priorities," he said with a smirk, turning around on the premise of washing down his front and doing his best to rub the image of her, screaming and bloody, out of his mind before his lower brain did things it shouldn't.

"That I do," she agreed, reaching for the bottle of shampoo to lather her hair. "Healing wasn't very much fun, I'll tell you that."

"Yeah, I'd bet not," he said, nodding a bit and grabbing the bar of soap, lathering up his hands before starting to rub down, stepping out of the water to give her a go again. "Friend of mine got a piece of shrapnel right across the shoulder blades. Sonofabitch was lucky it didn't sever his spinal cord. Took forever to heal."

"And god, they're a bitch to shower with. Forget trying to wash your hair while the wound is open," she muttered, moving back under the water.

He nodded in agreement. "That's most wounds, though," he said. "Some way or another, they're going to fuck you over when you shower." He wiggled his foot, indicating a long, thin, but jagged scar that ran from just under his ankle bone to his knee, along the outside of his calf. It was still a bit pink. "Got thrown by an explosion and caught rebar. Took a few months, and soap was always getting in the damned thing."

She gave a sympathetic hiss. "That's rough. I've always been worried about being impaled on something. I don't know if could really stand the front. I'm more of a flirter than a fighter."

He shrugged. "It's not as bad as they say, especially if you have our set of... interests." He cupped some water into his hands to rinse his face. "Certainly not the worst thing in the world."

"I very much enjoy being clean," she sighed, lifting a hand under her hair to run a finger over the scar on her neck. "And the front looks very... grimy."

"That, it is," he agreed, rising off a final time and leaning against the wall, watching her. "Completely filthy. But you get used to it."

"I don't know. Just doesn't seem like the kind of life for me," she shook her head, turning off the shower and wringing out her hair.
He shrugged. "To each their own." He stepped out, passing her a towel from the rack and taking one as well, drying quickly. "So, when do I meet this employer of yours?"

"Get dressed, and we'll go ahead and meet with him. He's probably not busy," she hummed, taking the towel with a nod and starting to dry off her hair. "Even if he is, I think he'll want to see you."

He nodded, heading out into the next room to get dressed. His uniform shirt was a bit wrinkled. He'd have to change it when he got back to base, but for now it would do.

She finished drying off and did the same, heading for the armoire, starting to rifle through and decide what she was going to wear. She settled on a black dress, cut looser than the one she'd worn last night. She didn't need to go hunting in the bunker.

He stood in front of the mirror for a moment, straightening his uniform and tucking his gun back into his shoulder holster. "Anything in particular I should know before this meeting?"

"Be polite, but don't grovel. That'll put you so far below him it won't matter that you're interesting," she said, putting in a pair of ruby earrings. "Just do what he says."

He laughed. "The day I grovel is the day the sun goes out. Let's go do this, then."

"Alright," she chuckled, giving a small nod. She put on the pair of shoes she'd just dug out of the corner of the bottom drawer in her armoire and then left the bedroom, heading for the door to the foyer. This would be an interesting experience for both of them, she was sure.

He walked behind her, the heels of his shoes clicking on the polished floor as they headed for the lift.

She led the way back to the elevator, and once inside pressed the button for the bottom floor - the safest floor. "You better wait in the waiting room until I call you in. I should make sure he's not in a bad mood."

He nodded just slightly at that, taking his surroundings in carefully once more. He cataloged the last sentence to add to his expanding image of the man he was about to meet. Temperamental.

The doors ding ed open and she stepped out into the waiting room, which was a gray, uninviting room, and was built that way for a reason. Anybody who had to sit in this room was someone that Jim still wanted to assert control over. Someone that needed something from him, anyway. Nobody except Lorna came down here without being summoned. "Take a seat. I'll call in a minute," she said evenly, walking across the room to pause by the mahogany double doors, where she knocked twice.

This room was much more his style than the others. Simple, and practical. He sat down, lounging back and closing his eyes.
New Job

Chapter Notes

Panic! At The Disco - Lying Is The Most Fun A Girl Can Have Without Taking Her Clothes Off
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-1A0jf67Q&t=0s&list=PLSCvi5dTA1ahDv1wz8x5mRI4kKDxqhd4S&index=10

She entered the room after she heard Jim make some sort of noise, shutting the door quietly. "Hello, sir. Have a good new year?"

He looked up from his desk, where he was sifting through a few files of neatly typed print. "Is it the new year already? I hadn't noticed." He looked her over, and then his eyes settled on the mark on her neck, and he stood slowly, eyes flashing danger and curiosity. "And you, Lorna, darling? Have a good... fling?"

"That I did, sir," she smirked, stepping forward a little to be closer to his desk than the door, though she was keeping a very close eye on his reaction. "He's a interesting one. A serial killer wearing a soldier's uniform. I couldn't resist myself."

He walked forward slowly, fingers reaching out to trace the mark on her neck. "And tall. Two meters... you always had a thing for tall men." He sneered, but his nail dragged a sharp line over the hickey as he walked behind her, inspecting her slowly. "What did he think of my mark on you?"

She hissed a little in pain as he tore the wound back open - not because she couldn't keep silent, but because she knew he'd want to hear it. "He didn't have to be told that it was a dull blade. He knew just by looking. Sharp eyes on that boy," she murmured, almost an afterthought. "He's outside. I thought you'd fancy seeing him for yourself."

He waved off her explanation, heading back over to his desk, sucking the drop of her blood off of his finger. "Yes, yes. Bring him in."

She turned back for the door, opening it and holding it open, a mild smile on her face. "Alright, Colonel."

He stood, walking forward cautiously. There was a trickle of blood running down her neck, but at the moment it was less of a turn-on and more of a warning. He stepped past her, standing tall and undaunted, eyes taking in the small man in the chair behind the desk. He was surprised for a moment. He'd been expecting someone in their forties or fifties, not someone barely older than Harrison. But he kept his expression neutral, remaining silent until he figured it would be better to do otherwise.

Jim gave him a single, very thorough scan. He was just a boy, despite Lorna's inclination for colorful phrasing, and he'd seen battle. And Irish. Jim's only connection to the common man had to do with nationality, and a shared derision for Englishmen in general. His uniform was fairly well taken care of, excluding a few wrinkles in the shirt that had happened from a night on Harrison's floor. Neat, good with a gun, careful; all qualities of a good soldier. If he stayed alive, he might
make it far. "What's your name, then?"

"Colonel Sebastian Moran," he said calmly, in a tone that easily could have accommodated his serial number in the same breath. "And yours, sir?"

He deliberated for a moment, drumming his fingers on his desk. "Jim Moriarty. And you should know that if you deign to speak my name to anybody outside of this room I'll destroy your life, then everyone you've ever even glanced at, and then you."

The corner of his mouth twitched just slightly. A grin, not in doubt, but in amusement at the thought of this man tracking down his family members. It was pleasant. But the grin was gone as soon as it was thought of.

"Of course, sir. I understand the need for confidentiality."

"Good," he snorted, eyes still locked on the soldier. "Now. Having you in front of me, I've very suddenly come to the realization that I recently lost my inside eyes on the army. Mustard gas, I think. Now all the man can do is hear. Not very useful, a pair of ears sitting in the corner of some backwater hospital in France." He paused for a moment, brown eyes flicking to Harrison for a second before landing back on Moran. "I'll pay you 1,000 pounds a month to be my eyes, Moran. How does that sound to you?"

The smile emerged fully now, cool and on the edge of unnerving in a normal circle. Here, it was almost friendly. "Sounds like a deal, boss."

"Excellent," Jim smirked, leaning back in his chair. "Harrison will give you my contact details. And, on the subject of Harrison..." The smile dropped from his face. "Break her skin again without my permission and you'll pay for it financially. Break it a second time, you'll pay for it physically. She's worth far more than a little mouse like you. Understood?"

He squared his shoulders slightly. "Of course sir. Do I get that permission in person, or via a request form?"

Jim let out a very sharp sigh, giving the boy a similarly sharp look. "In person," he said after a pause, and his voice was irritated. Not a promising emotion to have directed at you by Moriarty. "If you add to the paper waste that accumulates on my desk I'll likely have you turned into vellum."

"Of course," he said with a nod. "I'll keep that in mind should she ever extend me an invitation again, sir." There was a spark of amusement in his eyes at forcing the man to acknowledge the leeway he'd given him. It was a game he frequently played with superior officers in the military. The irritation didn't bother him. It was just a sign he was approaching the line, like a sniffer dog for land mines. The more you knew about where the line was, the closer you could get without crossing it. "Are you looking for any information in particular regarding the military, boss?"

He was something close to glad that Moran steered the conversation back on track - he needed a good, intelligent head to be on a swivel for him, and anybody who pushed Jim too far often ended up headless anyway. "I don't care about your movements, but I care about weapon shipments, air raids, and whatever interesting tidbits you hear about the officers, or anyone above. I'd die for a sword to hold over Churchill. But I'll settle for his subordinates."

He nodded a little. "I can do that. I think this is going to work out very well, Mr. Moriarty. I look forward to it."

"Good. I like enthusiastic employees. Saves me the trouble of motivating you with fear all the
"bloody time," he snorted, rolling his eyes.

"I'm sure that must be taxing," he agreed, not letting the man consider the comment too much as he continued "Anything else, boss? I don't want to waste any of your time."

"No, that will be all," he shook his head, and flicked his wrist at the door. "Harrison, see him out. Then report back to me."

He fired off a crisp salute, then turned for the door, following Harrison out. He waited until the door was closed to say "That seemed to go well."

She chuckled, pausing to grab a disposable tissue from a small, drab table in the corner and clean up her neck. She tossed the bloodied tissue into the bin and then headed for the lift. "I think he likes you. He didn't kill you, that's nice."

"Always an encouraging start to a business transaction when you remain living," he agreed with a smirk. He entered the lift, letting her select the floor. "It was good meeting you." He said it casually, but it was an unusual phrase. He didn't like people, as a rule. But people like this... he could get used to it.

She pressed the button for the top floor, smiling a little. "It was good to meet you too. I haven't had such a good fuck in a long while. I'll sink into a depression when you ship out, probably."

"I'll take that as a compliment coming from someone who fucks for a living." he shot back, smirking and leaning against the wall of the lift. "I've got a few weeks left here. Should I expect a call before I leave?"

She mirrored his posture, which looked very different on her curvier, smaller frame, and wore an identical smirk. "Give me a number to call and I'll show you how to get the most out of your victims and a night to remember."

His eyebrows went up, and he grinned. "Sounds like a fantastic night." He pulled a pen and pad of paper out of an inner pocket and quickly wrote down a number. "Call there and ask for Colonel Moran. I'll get it. Now, I need your boss's contact information, if you recall."

"Yes, you do," she confirmed, taking the pen and pad from him and ripping off the top page for her own use before writing down a different number, for one of the bunker's operators. "Call this, and the operator will ask you the current date and time and your name. She'll have you hold for a moment, and then either she'll forward you to a scribe or to Jim's office, depending on whether or not he's receiving calls. If you don't get him - and you will, for the first report, so you have a template for the future - just wait for the scribe to greet you and then give your report. They'll write it down and pass it on to him." She handed his things back and tucked his number into her dress. "Don't try to come here in person unless you're called in. The password changes every three days and the guard won't let you in unless he knows you. If and when you're given clearance to come and go as you please your picture will be taken and added to a book at the entrance so you won't be barred for no reason."

He frowned, nodding in appreciation. "Very nice," he admitted, glancing at the information and memorizing it before tucking it back in his suit. "How frequently will I be expected to report?"

"It's flexible, but you must report at least once a month. How else will you earn your pay?" She chuckled amiably, shifting off the wall as the lift stopped and stepping out. "If you can, leave a means to contact you."
He nodded, following after her. "I'll keep that in mind." He gave her a grin and a half-assed salute as they passed the guard and exited to the street. "See you around, then, Harrison. Glad I didn't toss you in the Thames."

She laughed. "Me too. I'll see you around, Moran. Try not to miss me too much when you fuck other girls, yeah?"

He grinned. "I'll do my best." He gave a final wave, and then slipped off into the crowd, disappearing surprisingly well for a two-meter tall man in an army uniform.

She stood and watched the crowd for a little while, then turned and headed back to the bunker. It was time to report back to Jim. She didn't know what he wanted her for, but it was never wise to ignore him.

He was leaning back in his desk chair as she came in, feet on the desk, hands behind his head.

"You wanted to see me after I took the Colonel back to the surface, sir?" She raised her eyebrows, walking forward to stand in front of his desk.

"Yes," he said, setting the file aside and giving her a coy smile. "Did you honestly think that you were going to get off with nothing but a scratch on your neck?"

She swallowed, biting the inside of her cheek nervously. "No, not really, sir."

He kicked his feet up off the desk and hopped up to his feet cheerfully, bouncing on his toes for a moment before walking over to her, eyes bright with enthusiasm. "You know, sometimes I think I should have put my initials a little more visible, Lorna, darling. You always seem to be forgetting them."

"With all due respect, sir, it's the rarest occasion that I fuck somebody you haven't told me to," she pointed out carefully, voice polite, eyes wary on him.

"It is, indeed, Lorna," he agreed, walking forward. "And it's on the rarest occasion that I get very, very angry with you." He walked forward, reaching out suddenly to grab her throat, his hand constricting quickly and powerfully as he pulled her forward, off balance towards him. "Do you see the pattern?" His voice was suddenly cold, eyes livid.

She had to stop herself from falling over by grabbing his wrist, her jaw clenched from the tension, heart stuttering in her chest as it tried to decide whether to fight or take flight. She would be able to do neither. Yet she was intrigued, too. "May I ask what specifically bothers you about these occasions, sir?" She asked as normally as she could with his hand strangulating her windpipe.

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He considered her for a long moment, frozen in time, his grip on her neck neither increasing or decreasing. "You're mine, Lorna Harrison. And no matter how trifling the possession, I don't share. And I certainly don't permit MARKS."

"Trifling rankled. "I wasn't aware out-of-job celibacy was in the contact, sir," she replied, just the beginning of an edge entering her voice, her eyes sharp on him. "Do you do that with all your grifters?"

"I don't fuck all of my grifters, either," he snarled, grip tightening further. "I can abide you sleeping around. I don't appreciate the marks. Don't like the terms?" He dropped her, and his dark expression with her, back to a smile. "The door's behind you. By all means. I just cleaned my pistol."
She snorted, partially because the situation demanded it, partially because she wanted to stall for breath. "Sir, I'm not defensive about the mark. I fully accept it as a mistake on my part. But I'd appreciate it if you didn't suggest with one breath that my sleeping with other people infuriates you and in the next tell me it's fine. I can't go about my life thinking both, now, can I?"

"I didn't say it didn't infuriate me. I said I could abide it. I'm not going to put you on that short of a chain, mainly because I don't have the time. But if you come in here again, bearing a mark like that like a bloody medal, with no attempt to hide it. That I will not tolerate."

"Alright, then," she nodded, running a hand through her hair, which she still hadn't had time to do. "Understood, sir. Will there be anything else?"

"Yes," he said, turning back towards his desk. "In six hours and thirty-eight minutes you are off shift. In six hours and fourty-three minutes precisely you will be in my quarters, naked. Am I understood?"

A shiver ran down her spine and she nodded, her face still businesslike, controlled. She was sure the time until then would drag on like hell, too.

"Good. Then get out of my office. I have work to do." He sat back down, and picked up the file where he had left off.

She nodded again and turned to exit swiftly, well aware that any extra second spent in Jim's presence was another second in which his mood could flip again, and become volatile. She was out the door in less than three.
The next few months were rather dull, in Jim's opinion. There were moments of excitement, but on the whole it was little but minor jobs and gathering intel. The information was vital, however. He had it coming in from all over - the army, the government, even the day-to-day joe on the street. He was amassing a network, and that was exactly what he needed. Pressure points, weaknesses, information. Then, and only then, could he push forward into action.

Lorna had seen Moran once before he shipped out, and it had been fun - although she hadn't had the chance to kill with him before she'd been called away. She suspected Jim had done it on purpose. But Moran wasn't anything to her - just a fun, fleeting distraction, so she forgot it soon enough. After that came a list of boring jobs, at the bottom of which was finally something a little more exciting. Going somewhere with Jim? Now that was going to be interesting.

Jim called her up the night of the party, fuming. He didn't even wait for her to speak when she picked up, just clipped "Harrison, get the \textit{fuck} up to my office. \textit{Now.}" And slammed the phone down.

She just stared at the phone in her hand for a moment, then cleared her throat and stood, rushing for the door. That was a bad omen. She was stepping into his office just two minutes later, most of which had been taken up by the slow elevator. "You called for me, sir?"

He whipped a box at her head as she came in, missing intentionally, but barely. It hit the ground and fell open, revealing a crumpled bowtie.

"Tie the damned thing," he muttered blackly.

She viciously fought the urge to roll her eyes, picking the bow tie out of the box and walking over to him. "Alright, hold still then."

He sighed, turning around and facing her, looking as though he were barely fighting down the impulse to go murder someone, tapping his finger against his leg impatiently.

She tied the bow within fifteen seconds, being careful not to mess up. The longer it took, the more likely he was to take his irritation out on her.

He nodded a little as she stepped back, observing her work in the mirror over the bar on the far side of the room. "It will suffice," he said, voice and expression casual again as he headed over to pick up his tux jacket and pull it on. "I interrupted you. Are you ready to leave?"

"Yes," she nodded crisply, smoothing down the hem of her dress, which she'd mussed in her jog to
the lift. "Ready whenever you are."

He nodded, checking himself over once more and adjusting his pocket square. "Let's be on our
way, then. Have the car brought around." He headed for the lift.

"Already have. It's outside the firm," she agreed, one step behind him - a habit she'd picked up
from his tendency to make sudden, sharp and pointed turns. "Remind me again what we're going to
this party, for? Objective-wise."

"It's a fundraising gala for the front. All the big names will be there, including a few contacts of
mine. It's a convenient way to check in with them all in person." He entered the lift and hit the
button for the ground level.

"Anybody you want me to be in particular?" She asked, raising her eyebrows a little.

He smirked, offering her his arm. "My charm, for non-business conversations, of course." He
waited for her to take his arm and headed out of the lift into the lobby.

It was a nice change to be leaving out of the law firm instead of the dirty station. Her heels clicked
on the floor without that vague feeling of stickiness. "Would you mind terribly if I had a few drinks
tonight, sir?"

"Not at all, so long as you can still work properly," he said, heading out the front door to the black
Rolls Royce waiting outside.

"Ah, good. I can't stand all those stuffy old men for long without a good stiff drink," she muttered,
glancing down the street, checking for any new bomb damage. Last night had been fairly calm,
thankfully.

He waited for the chauffeur to open the door, and slid into the back, waiting for Lorna to join him.
"It shouldn't be overly stuffy. I was lead to believe the sticks in their asses were to be left at the
doors, but we'll have to see."

She got in delicately and shut the door, where she leaned back and rubbed her eyes, the facade
falling off again. She didn't maintain it for Jim. It would have been no use. "Anybody's head going
to roll if that's untrue?"

He shrugged. "Not anyone you care about, anyway," he said, reaching out to grab a bottle of scotch
from the ice chest in front of their seat, grabbing a couple glasses and pouring before handing one
to her.

She smirked, giving him a slight nod and taking a sip from the drink. "I don't care about anybody,
Jim."

"I'd call you a liar, but I feel like neither of us would particularly enjoy me picking around in that
brain of yours," he said, and then fell silent for the rest of the ride, only looking up as the car
pulled up in front of the history museum and tossing back the rest of his drink. "Shall we?"

She rolled her eyes a little and nodded, doing the same and then putting the glass down, getting out
of the car. "We shall."

He offered her his arm as she exited, and they walked up the lit steps, the music pouring through
the marble pillars out onto the street. He handed two tickets to the man at the door, and he glanced
them over before nodding slightly and stepping aside to let them into the party proper.
She spared one last look at the darkening street as they stepped inside, and hoped they'd finish their business before night truly fell - she didn't want to get caught in an air raid under a million tons of marble and mortar. "Am I going to be recognizing anybody here or will you be doing that yourself?" she asked quietly as they stepped into the main hall, where she snagged a champagne glass from a passing waiter.

"I'll recognize them," he said quietly, observing the room around them calmly, taking in what he needed to. He almost immediately spotted the contacts he needed to make, but didn't even let his gaze settle on them as he glanced around. First to get settled, then to work. "Whether you will or not, I'm not certain."

"What, aren't you supposed to know what's going on in my head?" she quipped, raising an eyebrow almost imperceptibly and sipping from her glass, using the opportunity to eye up a few people. So far, no bells. She wasn't surprised, not really. She knew the New York blue bloods, but here, she'd never had the chance. It wasn't that her family had ever been poor - aristocratic? He snorted.

"I'll know whether you know them when you see them, but I don't have the remotest interest in cataloging each and every person you've met in your life. Christ, that would be dull." He steered them over towards a rouge, portly man with mouse-brown hair and large eyes that might have made him handsome were he not in such poor health. "Senator Carrick. A pleasure," he said, extending his free hand with a warm smile.

"Ah, hello," the senator replied heartily, smiling as he shook Jim's proffered hand and gave it one good shake. "Have we met before? You look familiar."

"I'm sure I'd remember meeting the face of big oil in the senate," Jim assured him, smiling and slipping past the question of names. "Please meet Heidi Cardinal," he said, shifting slightly to bring Lorna forward. "A friend of mine. Heidi, this is Senator Lou Carrick."

"Hello, Mr. Carrick," she beamed, leaning forward to shake his hand, artfully displaying the dip her neckline took in the process, aided by a very expensive diamond necklace. "How do you do?"

The senator's eyes slid to Lorna as soon as she started speaking, and then they stayed there. "Very well, thank you. Is there anything I can do for you?..."

"I just wanted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Carrick," he said with a smile. "I've got a few ideas I'd like to slide your way, but that isn't something to do at a party. Have my card." He held it out to the man, waiting for his eyes to slide from Harrison's cleavage to the small white card, embossed with a red M and a number. "Please, give me a call when you have a moment. I think we could both stand to benefit."

"Sure, I'll do that," Carrick nodded, taking the card and slipping it into his coat pocket with a wink, and turned away as someone else said his name, leaving the two of them back by themselves.

"He's really going to regret taking that card," he sighed with a small smirk, glancing around the room again. "Right. On we go. Let's split up, shall we? The man in the green vest should provide you with information about Carrick."

She made a noise of confirmation, already bored with the party. "What exactly do you want about Carrick?"

He shrugged. "He says he has some dirty laundry worth my while. If he wastes your time, let me know and I'll deal with him later."
She nodded, letting go of his arm. "Alright, I'll see you later, then. I promise not to get too drunk."

"Do try not to wander off too far," he called as she retreated, then headed off to find his own mark.

She walked up behind the man in the green vest - an interesting fashion choice for a gala - and tapped his shoulder. "Excuse me? I believe you have some information for me."

He turned around, and smiled as soon as he saw her. "Is that right, doll? Well, I'd be happy to help any face as pretty as yours. What's your name?"

His own face was bland and boring, and she immediately was tired of looking at him. "Don't ask questions you'll only get lies in answer to," she replied, sipping at her champagne. "I'm here for Carrick's dirty laundry."

His expression hardened slightly. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said tensely, though his eyes were still roving over her.

"I'm here for my employer. If you were expecting someone different, all the advice I can give you is that you should keep a more open mind," she said, her expression still unchanged.

"I don't care who you are, honey. If you don't have the passphrase, then you can either leave me alone, or drop the subject and join me for a dance." He smiled.

"If there was a pass phrase, it would have been given to me," she said, through teeth clenched in a smile. "Will you give it to me if I give you a dance?"

He considered her, then smirked. "I think that can be arranged," he said, offering her his arm.

She took his arm, fighting the urge to roll her eyes. God, did he have to make it that easy? "So, do you come to these things often, or did you just find an excuse today?"

His smile was smug. "Oh, I get invited all the time. I make a point to go when I can, it's a good place to pick up information, a room of drunk politicians." They stepped onto the dance floor and he pulled her into his arms with very little attention to propriety, his body lined against hers greedily.

She sighed inaudibly, a tolerating smile still on her face as they melted into the rest of the dancing crowd. "Those are my favorite kind of politicians. Sober ones are boring. And usually saying something insufferably irritating."

"That we can agree on," he said with a smile. He was taller than her by a head or so, and he had to look down to meet her gaze, which gave him both a feeling of power, and a double chin. His hand slid further around her waist in what might have been an attempt at subtlety, but came out more like a grapple.

She was going to have to drag Jim into an alley after this to get the feeling of the man off of her, she could already tell. "So, what's your name? I'm Heidi," she smiled, hands still unmoving from the place she'd first put them on his shoulders. He wasn't attractive to her in the least.

"Eric," he replied, smiling a little as he moved them awkwardly to the music, his eyes more on her cleavage than her face. "That's a great name, Heidi. Matches your body."

Oh, great. Not only was he an enormous boor, he had her brother's name. As if this wasn't gross enough. "You're not the first man to say that, and you won't be the last, believe me," she muttered, eyes scanning the room for Jim, just trying to keep tabs on him. Or distract herself.
"I certainly doubt it. But perhaps I'm the most sincere," he suggested with what he doubtlessly thought was a roguish grin. It faltered when she kept looking around. "Come on, doll, if I'm buying this dance at least pretend to be interested. Who're you looking for, anyway?"

"The man I came here with. He pays much more than you for my company, believe me," she smirked, now of the mindset to simply put a leash on him and jerk him around. "Consider yourself lucky."

He frowned more fully at that, teeth setting. "Oh? Well, good for him then. It's hard to pick up a loyal whore these days."

"I'm an escort, Eric, do mind your manners," she corrected steadily, her eyes on his. "I'm giving you a dance for information, but I do still owe my time to another. It's common courtesy to know where he is."

"Hmph," was his only reply, his expression cool for the remainder of the dance. When it was finished he broke away, seemingly finished with the contact. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a manila envelope, folded in half the long way so as to fit into his inner pocket. "Everything's here. He's been having an affair for a while now. Wife doesn't know. Ran on good ol' family values so this ought to ram him pretty good." His expression was terse.

She beamed and delicately took the folder. "Thank you ever so much. Maybe I'll see you at one of the things again, sometime. If we all don't get blown to bits by the Germans, first, of course...."

His expression lightened again at the smile, and he nodded. "Of course, yeah, perhaps we will..." he said, watching her walk off.

The smile had been a sign, he was sure of it. She wanted him. She wanted him to help her get away from the man who had her.

Why else would she smile?

She found Jim again talking to an old woman who might have been blind. "Hello, dear," she smiled, taking his arm again and smoothly slipping the folder into his pocket. "How's your night doing?"

"Oh, it's been alright. A few nice conversations. Was just talking to Mrs. Lois Jericho here. Lois, this is Heidi. Did you enjoy catching up with your friend, Heidi?"

"I did, in fact," she said cheerfully, giving the old woman a winning smile. "We had a lovely dance. Although I think I'm all danced out, now."

"Mmm. I don't blame you for that. I think perhaps we should start saying our farewells. It's been a long day. It's been lovely seeing you again, Lois."

"And you, James, dear. Keep these other bastards in line, won't you?"

"I always do."

"Such a good boy."

Jim headed off at that, pulling Lorna away before she could comment.
She coughed a little to hide a laugh, but other than that she was smart enough not to say anything on the matter. "He had what we wanted, but he was an enormous sleaze. I might have gotten a little snippy the third time he groped me. Oh well."

"Then his information had better be impeccably," he snorted. "You aren't some free candy dish." He headed for the coat room to grab his jacket, and frowned slightly to see their green-vested contact standing there, waiting. "Can I help?"

He didn't finish his sentence as the man lunged for him. He spun off to the side, away from Harrison, but couldn't avoid the collision completely, hyper-aware of the flash of steel he'd seen in the man's hand as he accelerated. In a moment they were on the floor, grappling, and he was maneuvering his body as best he could to keep clear of the hand with the knife.

Lorna swore, and delivered a swift stomp to Jim's assailant with her heel before bending down, grabbing a fistful of ugly green vest, and dragging him away, her other hand going for his hair, yanking his head back. "What the fuck are you DOING?"

"Ow!" he protested, trying to get her to release his hair. "Let go! I'm just trying to help!"

Jim sat up, touching his side to ensure he hadn't been stabbed anywhere, a bit dazed.

"Stop, you imbecile!" She snapped, kicking his hand to get him to release the knife. "You're not helping! I don't need help! You're going to need help, though, very fucking soon."

Jim sat up slowly, brushing himself off as he got to his feet. He stared down at the man, who was still struggling in Lorna's grip. "You tried to kill me," he stated calmly. It was an obvious statement, and he was immediately disappointed in himself for it, but he slid past it, bending down to pick up the knife on the ground. "I wish I could say I was impressed..."

"Jim, this isn't exactly a secure location," she reminded tensely, shooting a glance back at the door of the coat room, completely ignoring Eric's continued wriggling. "Maybe make this quick?"

"Shut the fuck up, Harrison," he snarled. "I know exactly where we are." Without a word, he covered the man's mouth with one hand, and skewered the knife through his voice box and windpipe with the other. The attempted shriek was just a hiss of air, and he shoved him out of Lorna's hands to the ground, and then pulled him into a corner, piling a few coats over the weakly flopping man. He straightened, and walked back over to Harrison, offering her his arm. "Shall we?"

"Please," she agreed emphatically, taking his arm and letting him lead the way back out of the coat room, not at all saddened by her admirer's demise. Foolish man.

He walked at an unhurried pace out of the museum and down the front steps, waiting casually as their car was called up and climbing inside.

She was silent in the car, pondering the incident. Jim had come very close being stabbed tonight. She couldn't afford him getting injured. How would she earn her living, with him gone?

He was pondering the same thing, though it was along a more selfish vein.

Some idiot layman could have killed me. I could have died to an ignoramus armed with a knife and a savior complex.

She stayed silent the rest of the drive. It wouldn't be good to intrude on his thoughts right now.
He, too, remained quiet, and when they returned to the base headed immediately for his quarters.

She went to bed that night thinking of possible bodyguards for Jim. And then trying to think of how to convince Jim he needed one.

He didn't sleep that night, though that wasn't particularly unusual. He played the scene over and over, looking for what he had missed.

He came to the conclusion that he had missed nothing. He had reacted perfectly. That was why he was still alive.

It was only the next morning when she woke up that she paused to actively think about herself again, and it was then she stayed wondering whether or not he would blame her for last night's incident. Either way, she waited for the call. He would have decided something by now, if not that.

He dealt with other business during the morning. They were all matters that needed to be addressed, so he wasn't really avoiding the subject.

By noon, however, he decided he was avoiding the subject, which was intolerable.

He reached over and pressed the intercom button. "Harrison, do come to my office at your convenience."

"At your convenience." Yeah, right.

She dropped what she was doing and knocked on his door five minutes later.

He looked up, sighing slightly. He'd almost hoped she'd been in the middle of something. It would have delayed this further.

"Come in," he muttered, slightly irritated.

She came in, shutting the door softly behind her. "You called sir?"

"It has occurred to me that we should probably discuss last night's encounter with my green-vested contact," he said, expression unreadable. "I'd like your opinion on the situation."

She stood in front of his desk, fingers folded together. "I think you need a bodyguard, sir. I can't fulfill that role for you. I'm not around all the time. I don't know how the hell you'll find one you can trust, but that's my recommendation."

He sighed through his nose. It was annoying to realize that the solution he'd been dancing around all night was obvious enough that the average human came to it as well.

"I'll take that under advisement," he sighed, bridging his fingers and pressing them against his forehead. He considered the problem for all of thirty seconds, but even that was delaying, really.

"Put out a call. Specific invitation only, the best in the business. I'll be holding an audition. Five thousand a month."

"Right," she nodded, already beginning to go over a few files in her head. "Do you want the invitation extended to current agents as well?"
"Yes, yes," he said, waving her off. "I don't care who they're employed for, as long as they're the best."

"Alright," she nodded. "I'll start right away, unless there was anything else you wanted?"

"No, that is all. I want this resolved by the end of the week. Pay for any necessary travel arrangements." He picked up a file on his desk, effectively dismissing her.

She nodded again and turned to leave.

In all, she ended up sending out ten invitations. Eight of them were out of network, freelancers. Two were from inside the network. One of the freelancers got blown up on the way, but that saved her some traveling costs.
The night of the auditions, he rented out a warehouse a few miles from the base. He met Harrison at the car at 8 p.m. precisely, climbing in, with her just behind. He hadn't explained his plan to her, but he didn't need to.

"Anything I should know that wasn't in their files?" he asked as the car got underway.

"No," she shook her head. "I assume you remember Mr. Moran. He's the only one that we've met personally."

He nodded slightly. "Yes. A bit cocky, but I suppose we'll see. It's possible none of these candidates will be acceptable."

"I know. And if not, we'll widen our search," she shrugged a little, glancing towards the warehouse door. "We'll see."

He nodded, getting out of the car as it slowed and climbing out. "We have about twenty minutes until they are supposed to arrive. If anyone comes early and does anything but scope the exterior, I want them removed."

"Alright," she nodded, getting out of the car and standing by him. "Do you want me to let them in armed?"

"Yes," he said with a nod. "Warn them that there is no way out of the building without passing our people, but other than that, they are free to bring whatever they like," he said, walking into the warehouse. He paused just inside the door, looking at the large open space. "Oh, and Harrison, it is going to be an unusual day, so have fun acting however you like as long as you don't corrupt the audition."

She smirked, shaking a strand of hair out of her face. "Thank you, sir. I'll take advantage of that. I'll send them in the order in which the files were given to you."

He nodded, giving her a rare, excited smile. "That will do nicely. Though I would like you to escort them. Add another variable to the equation, and another pair of eyes. I'll be at a distance."

"Understood. Am I allowed to step in if I feel they are making an attempt on your life?" She raised her eyebrows, secretly pleased to see him in a good mood. Bad things rarely happened to her when he was in a good mood.

He considered. "It will be a difficult scenario... Use your judgement." Then he closed the door.

She sighed and moved to lean against the wall by the doorway, taking her silver cigarette case out of her coat pocket and lighting one up to wait.
He took a few minutes to properly survey the room, before walking over to the center of it, precisely forty meters of clear space from the door. He then pulled out his handgun, disassembling it and checking each chamber carefully to ensure that it was not loaded, though he could tell by the weight, anyway. He reassembled it, and then closed his eyes, waiting.

She found out when she escorted the first potential bodyguard into the warehouse what, exactly, Jim's test was. She simply stood by the side, her eyes on the man. As she would for each of the tests.

He had made sure to instruct his men to keep the contenders separated at all times, both before and after the test, so that information could not be passed between them or gleaned from expressions.

The first potential was unimpressed with the gun, waiting the situation out, until Jim reached eight in his countdown from thirty. At that point, the man began to sweat slightly, losing faith in his play, and started forward. He passed the twenty meter mark and Jim pulled the trigger. There was a telling click and the man drooped slightly in relief. Jim dismissed him without further questions.

It continued like that through most of the candidates, and he was unsurprised. It was a no-win situation. He didn't intend for them to succeed, he merely wanted a read on their reactions.

Lorna glanced at her wristwatch as she called up the last contender. "Hello, Mr. Moran. Nice to see you again. I wasn't sure you'd accept the invitation."

He flashed a grin. "It's been an interesting time with the good old boys, but the frying pan is heating up and I've been looking for a nice fire to relocate to."

She chuckled, turning for the doorway. "Well, let's go find out if you'll be relocating to this particular fire, then, shall we?"

"Appreciated," he said, giving her a half-arsed salute as he followed after her, before sobering up and clearing his head, ready to work. To prove himself.

She led the way into the room and held the door open for him, revealing forty feet away Jim, who had a gun in his hand. He waited for Lorna to shut the door behind Moran before he spoke.

"Here's what's going to happen," he said loudly, theatrically. "I'm going to count down from thirty. At zero, I'll shoot myself in the head. If you approach me, I'll shoot myself in the head. Stop me."

He didn't nod, didn't react, just processed.

Approach the man and the gun fired. Close combat was not an option.

He knew Jim, knew he was not a man to be convinced away from something blatantly, and he didn't have time for nuance. Conversation was not an option.

"Thirty."

They were in an open, empty, well-lit room. Stealth was not an option.

That left long-range combat.

"Twenty-nine."

Time seemed to slow, slightly, his breaths calm, even.

His hand was on his way to his shoulder holster as Jim raised the gun towards his head, sounding
A lot of things happened at once. There was the crack of gun-fire, and a whirl of smoke at one end of the room. Forty meters away, there was a misting of blood as Sebastian's bullet drilled through Jim's left forearm, and the gun hit the ground with an almighty clang.

Before it had touched, Sebastian was jogging forward, dropping his jacket to the side and pulling off his shirt as he went.

Lorna had a handgun trained on Moran as he moved forward, adrenaline surging through her, and she had to restrain herself from pulling the trigger. He wasn't taking off his shirt to kill Jim. Who was, at the time, swearing in pain and clutching his arm.

"Alright, sir," he said calmly as he reached Moriarty, kicking the gun well clear. "I'm going to request you sit down." The request was accompanied by a firm suggestion in the form of a guiding hand on the arm. He knew Harrison's gun was trained on him, but she hadn't shot yet, so he doubted she would.

He waited until the distracted man was seated, letting him fumble for the far-out-of-reach gun as he tore open the man's shirt. He pushed it carefully clear of the wounded arm, inspecting both sides to be sure the bullet had cleared and there were not bone shards (there weren't, and he was proud for a moment that his aim had been good enough to pass through only flesh). Then he started tearing his own shirt into strips, folding some up and pressing them to both sides of the wound to stop the bleeding.

"Ms. Harrison, would you be so kind as to alert Mr. Moriarty's doctor of his injury?"

She fired a single shot into the ground behind him, a warning if he chose to try and kill Jim while she wasn't there, and then she turned and hurtled out of the room, running to fetch the physician.

He didn't so much as jump at the shot. Either it would hit him or it wouldn't, he didn't have any control over that at this point. He kept the compresses in place with one hand, taking another strip with the other and starting to wrap it around the arm snugly. "There we are, sir. That should be fine until the doc shows up. It's a clean shot, should heal quickly."

"Yes, fantastic," he said dryly, through his teeth. He'd not been expecting to be shot today; he hadn't been prepared to get a handle on any pain today. "Creative."

"You ordered me to stop you, sir," he said, sitting back on his heels, unabashed. "I don't believe in no-win scenarios."

Jim looked at him sharply for a moment, appraisingly. This was the youngest of the candidates, but the smartest, by a long shot. Not that the bar was particularly high. "Could you reproduce this exact shot on a dummy?"

"Yes, sir," he said without hesitation. If he was sure of anything, it was his marksmanship. "As many times as you needed."

He nodded, considering him again for a moment. "You just got promoted, Moran."

He smiled, managing to keep it from being smug. "Thank you, sir. When would you like me to start?"

"Now, of course," he snorted, rolling his eyes as the door opened again and Harrison and the doctor came in, walking hurriedly.
"There is the matter of my currently being in the military, sir," he pointed out. "If you can fix that, then I can start immediately. I don't particularly care how."

"It'll be taken care of," he assured, holding out his arm as the doctor trotted up. Harrison hovered behind, her jaw still clenched, shoulders tight with tension.

He nodded slightly, standing as the doctor approached. "Then I'm all yours, sir," he said, giving him a salute. "Just let me know when you're ready to discuss particulars."

"Later," Jim said distractedly as his doctor started un-peeling the strips of cloth from his injury. "Harrison will take care of you until then."

"I figured as much. Thank you, sir." He turned to Harrison, raising an eyebrow.

"Alright, come with me," she said tersely, turning around and heading back the way she had came with a click of her heels. She said nothing else.

He followed after her, waiting until they cleared the warehouse to speak. "I didn't harm him more than was necessary."

"Which is why I didn't hurt you," she snapped, opening the door of the Rolls Royce and sliding in. "Get in."

He climbed in behind her, not commenting on the fact that she was clearly annoyed. She'd address it if she wanted to.

"You're going to have quarters on the same floor as mine. You can pick between the two of them," she said as the car started forward. "Rank wise, you are now only below me and Jim, and you're above me on matters of his safety."

He nodded at that. "Understood. I'd like access to whatever I have the clearance for regarding personnel, security, and upcoming engagements. I want to start getting a lay of the land."

"I'll have someone bring the files to you," she replied, adjusting the hem of her dress. "You can call the operator and ask for anything you need."

"I appreciate that, thank you," he said, matching her tone for tone, expression carefully cool. She wanted to be the ice-bitch? He didn't give a damn.

The ride back to the front firm was short, and as soon as the car stopped she got out, still fuming. He'd hurt Jim, and she couldn't do shit about it.

He climbed out behind her, following her inside and letting her walk him through security for what was likely the last time, and to the elevator.

She pulled a key out of her pocket as they entered the elevator, and held it out to him. "This key will open all three doors on our floor. I have a key just like it as well, as does our longest-employed cleaner. It also unlocks the elevator for Jim's and ours' floors. If you enter my quarters without my permission or abuse the key privilege in any way, I'll have to change the locks and your access will be limited. Is that understood?"

He nodded, taking the key. "That won't be an issue," he said calmly, though he had doubts about the same key opening so much. He might have to address that.

"I'll send the cleaner to you later today, so you can talk to her. If you feel she's not up to your
standards we'll change cleaners," she said, watching the floors go by on the dial by the ceiling. The bottled up anger was starting to lessen. Maybe she didn't have to go out tonight to find someone to take it out on. "If you need me, pick up the phone and just ask the operator where I am. I keep them updated to my location so Jim can reach me when he needs to."

He nodded, stepping forward as the elevator stopped to slide the cage back, stepping aside to let her exit first. "Thank you, Ms. Harrison. I look forward to working with you."

"Likewise," she replied, stepping out and heading for the door to her quarters. "Ring me up sometime," she added as she unlocked her door, finally cracking a bit of a smile over her shoulder. "We'll go kill some innocent old man."

He smiled back, then headed over to one of the two remaining doors. He chose the one with a better view of the lobby as a whole from the peephole, and then keyed in.

She locked the door behind her and headed for the sofa, suddenly very tired. Nap time.

The rooms were very similar in layout to Harrison's. It was sparsely decorated, containing only the bare necessities such as a wardrobe and a bed, but he didn't mind. He preferred simplicity to the extravagance of Harrison's apartment.

He spent a few minutes exploring his new home. There was a top of the line refrigerator, which he'd never had before, and he took a few minutes exploring that. It was stocked with food, and there were cans of food in the cupboard, and after a few more minutes of exploring he decided he was hungry and set about making himself dinner. He ended up making meatloaf and mashed potatoes. He wasn't a fantastic cook, but he could do alright for himself. He'd learned that early on. He stuck the leftovers in the refrigerator and then set about unpacking the rucksack he'd brought with his gear, making a note to ask that the rest of his belongings be retrieved from his father's house where they were awaiting his return from the front.

When Lorna woke up again, she sighed. Her dress was all wrinkled now, and her hair had relaxed out of its impeccable curls. She hoped Jim didn't call for her tonight, because there was no way in hell she was doing her hair again.

She set about getting things done from inside her flat, which involved calling the operator and relaying a bunch of instructions. She had the files sent to Moran, then got started erasing him from the military.

He looked up at a knock from the door, and opened it to a bored-looking man with a trolley, piled with boxes of files. He took them all, setting them about the main room, and after the man had left he sat down to start working his way through it all.

She finally picked up the phone and called Jim, sighing. She needed to check on him.

Jim was lying on the couch in his office, actually going so far as to contemplate the bottle of the painkillers the physician had left him. He glared at the phone as it rang and sat up, ignoring the way his arm ached in its sling as he crossed the room to pick up.

"What?" he snapped acidly.

"Just calling to check in, sir," Lorna said politely, cautiously. He didn't sound to be in a good mood.
He sighed through his nose. "I'm fine, Harrison. Nothing a few bandages can't handle."

"Sorry, sir, it was better to be safe than sorry," she replied, running the cord around her finger absently. "I've set the necessary motions in place to take care of Moran's military enrollment. He's looking over our personnel files right now."

"Excellent," he said, nodding slightly. "Tell me honestly, Harrison. What do you think of my choice?"

"He's young, and a serial killer," she pointed out, shrugging a little, even though he couldn't see it. "But he's a good shot, and creative, and I'm sensing he's the type to throw himself behind a cause if he likes the tagline. He was the best choice."

He nodded a little. "I'm glad that you agree. On that note, Harrison, let me get shot again when I give you orders to intervene at your discretion, and I'll make sure you share the injury. I have a bodyguard now, so I don't anticipate the situation repeating itself, but the point stands."

She didn't bother arguing that he'd moved faster than she could react, just sighed. "Noted, sir. I'll keep it in mind."

"Do. And pass along the order that I'm not to be disturbed for the remainder of the evening," he clipped, before hanging up and walking over to pick up the bottle of pills.

She sighed and called the operator, putting in a blocking order for Jim's phone, then she hung up and headed for bed.
Jim's recovery was slower than he would have liked, but that was mainly because instantaneous healing technology hadn't yet been invented. He worked uninterrupted after that first night, however. His primary focus was ensuring that Moran was properly trained to step in as his bodyguard, and as the head of security. The previous head of security grumbled some, but significantly less so after Jim put a knife through his ear, and the transition went smoothly.

The more he worked with Moran, however, the more he was intrigued. Physically, he was fit, attractive, but relatively unremarkable. But mentally... once or twice Jim caught a glimpse of the bloodlust as the man struggled to wrangle it into place, and more and more he found himself thinking about what it would be like to tap into it.

It was thoughts along that vein that prompted him to call Harrison to his office late the following week.

She entered his office a few minutes after she'd been called. "How can I help you, sir?"

He motioned for her to take a seat, finishing reading through the file he was looking at before setting it aside and looking up. "I need your assistance in a grifting matter."

She sat where he motioned, raising her eyebrows a little. "Well, that is what you pay me for, isn't it?"

"This is of a more personal nature," he said, though he waved his hand slightly, conceding the point. "I need you to..." He trailed off, searching for the appropriate phrasing. "To get me Moran," was what he settled on, though he instantly despised the grammar structure.

She folded her hands together on her lap, staring at him for a moment. "What?"

"You know what I mean," he said, waving her off and standing to pace. "Do I have to spell it out? I want to fuck him. Arrange it."

She was instantly offended, and very jealous. She cleared her throat. "Should I expect our own little... meetings to stop, then?"

He raised an eyebrow, turning to look at her. "I don't see how that would be related."

"You don't make a habit of fucking people, Jim. I didn't know if you had a one-person limit or something," she snorted, shaking her head. She'd only thought she was special. "Now would you like me to spring the idea on him or ease him into it?"

But he was studying her face, and becoming intrigued with what he saw, expression changing to almost childlike wonder and curiosity, tinged by a much darker amusement. "Why... my dear
"Of course I'm jealous," she snapped, then took a calming breath. "You're not like the others, Jim, as you so very clearly have said yourself. And here I was, feeling lucky that you wanted to fuck me. Of course I'm bloody jealous."

His smirk remained, though the amusement seeped out of it until it was little more than a gash splayed haphazardly across his face. "I see. Well, I can assure you that you're very special, Lorna, darling. I don't want to stop fucking you. I just want to explore Mr. Moran. He intrigues me."

She snorted, leaning back in the chair and examining her fingernails for blood. "If you really want to get him going, wear something red."

The amusement returned. "I see you've picked up on that little tendency, as well. As for your earlier question, I don't care how you present it to him. You're the grifter, not me. Do whatever is more likely to work."

"So you won't mind if I drag him into your office and fuck him on your desk at a time where you could 'accidentally' walk in?" she asked, looking up at him through her lashes.

He raised an eyebrow, smirking. "That was smooth enough that I'll actually allow it. Let's say tomorrow at..." he glanced at his planner. "Seven p.m.?"

She looked at her watch, then nodded. "Alright. Sounds like a plan." She stood. "I'll see you then?"

"See you then," he agreed, returning to work and quietly looking forward to tomorrow.

She left, still trying to sort out her feelings on the matter. She was still jealous, but not as severely as before. Now there was an element of curiosity.

Moran looked up the next night to someone knocking on his door as he was starting to make dinner. He walked over to open it, and smiled to see Lorna there. "Ms. Harrison, good to see you."

"Hello, Colonel," she smirked, with blood red lips. Her own personal favorite lipstick, and one that she was sure would catch his eye. "I was feeling lonely this evening. I thought you could help."

The lipstick was the first thing he saw, forming around words that took a moment to process. He took a clearing breath, and the smile returned. "I think that could be arranged. Come on in, I was just making dinner. You want a drink?"

"I always want a drink," she chuckled, stepping in as he made room. "Although I'm in the mood for something fruity tonight, how about you?"

He raised an eyebrow. "Whatever I have is yours to command. You mix drinks, I'll cook? I'm attempting salmon, there's plenty, though I can't necessarily speak for the quality."

"I'm sure I can choke it down," she quipped, heading for the liquor cabinet. She knew where it was, after all. "What do you feel like having?"

"I'll have a rum and coke, if you don't mind. There's coke in the fridge." He went back to slicing up herbs to season the salmon.

She followed him into the kitchen to get the coke and a couple glasses before returning to the
liquor cabinet. "After dinner, do you want to go for a walk?"

"Sure," he said over his shoulder as he finished dressing the fish and put it in the oven. "It's probably a nice night out."

"Oh, I'm not planning on going too far," she hummed, finishing mixing drinks and heading back into the kitchen to set one of the glasses down on the counter by him.

He took his glass and took a sip, humming in appreciation before setting about making a salad. "Oh? Where to, then?"

"It's a surprise," she chuckled, shrugging a little. "One that I promise you'll enjoy."

"Fair enough," he said, nodding a little as he tossed the salad. "A mystery adventure. Sounds right up my alley." He raised his glass to clink with hers. He was dying to taste her lipstick, but he couldn't tell where that would leave him.

"That salad looks good, at least. You teach yourself how to make food? Seems every man I know has to buy his dinner these days," she said cheerfully, sipping at her beverage.

He shrugged. "Guess I'm unusual, then," he said absently. He pushed aside memories of scraping a decent meal together out of whatever hadn't gone bad, when he could manage to sneak into the kitchen, or when his father was gone for a few days.

He set the salad aside, stooping down to check the salmon and deciding it needed a few more minutes. He straightened, leaning back against the counter. "Should be ready soon."

"Thanks for inviting me in to have it with you," she smiled, noting again just how far she had to look up to meet his eyes. "I know I haven't exactly been warm lately. I apologize about that."

He shrugged, giving her wry smile. "I shot your boss. That's fair cause for a bit of coolness."

She laughed her genuine laugh, the one that she didn't have to call forth on purpose. "Yeah, I suppose it does. Anyone else give you a hard time about that?"

He shrugged. "I don't think Mr. Moriarty has chosen to make it public information," he said, bending to check the fish again and pulling it out. "In any case, no one has mentioned it."

"That smells good," she hummed as it left the oven, taking her drink and heading to put it on the table. "Do you want me to get out plates?"

"If you wouldn't mind," he nodded, bringing the salmon and the salad over to the table.

She nodded and headed for where she knew the plates would be, grabbed a few, and set them out before she moved for silverware.

He set down the dishes and went to grab a spatula for the fish. He headed back, and plated the food carefully. "You want dressing?" he asked, heading back to the cabinets. "I think I have oil and vinegar around here."

"That would be delightful, thank you," she smiled, taking a seat at the table. Yes, there was no doubt Jim could have chosen somebody much, much worse. He had manners, at least.

He came back with a glass bottle with the aforementioned mixture, shaking it up and handing it to her, before taking a seat and starting to eat. The salmon wasn't bad. It wasn't as good as a
restaurant, but there wasn't anything obviously wrong with it, so he was fairly pleased.

It wasn't exactly saying much, but it was the best food a man had ever made for her without money being involved. "This isn't half bad," she commented when she was halfway done.

"It's edible," he conceded, nodding a little and reaching out to serve himself some more salad.

She checked her watch for the time and decided that she was done now that her plate was empty. She needed to get Moran on that desk soon.

He cleared his plate a few minutes later, sitting back and sipping his drink. "I'll do the dishes later. You mentioned a walk?"

She grinned, standing up and throwing back the rest of her drink. "Yes I did. Shall we?"

He did the same, walking over to grab his jacket and hat, pulling them on. "Lead the way."

She did with a spring in her step, leading him out into the hall and then into the lift, where she planted herself in front of the buttons as she pressed Jim's floor. *Surprise.*

He leaned against the wall, hands in his trousers pockets. "So where is it we're heading?" he asked, intrigued.

"Down," was all she said, her voice cheerful. It was a good thing he wasn't too suspicious. "It won't be *too* much of a walk."

He nodded, watching her curiously, a bit cautious but mostly just interested to know where she was leading him.

The lift opened onto the drab waiting room for Jim's office, and she reached behind to grab Moran's wrist, towing him after her.

He frowned as they exited, slowing slightly despite her tugging. "What are we doing here?" he asked, starting to become suspicious.

"Don't ask silly questions," she said over her shoulder with a grin, managing to pull him to the door, which she opened. "Jim's out, he won't mind. He'll think it's funny, actually. Come along!"

He frowned further at that, stopping at the door. "Are you trying to get me on his bad side? I'm not going to apologize for shooting him."

"Moran, if I wanted to get you on Jim's bad side, I wouldn't *so obviously* involve myself," she snorted, rolling her eyes at him. "This is... a bonding exercise."

He considered her a moment longer, but he decided if they were going to work together he needed to trust her, at least on the surface. He nodded a little, then, smiling. "Alright... I suppose I can believe that."

"Good," she chirped, turning around again, making a beeline for the desk. "Now, doesn't *this* look sturdy...."

He followed after her, raising an eyebrow and smirking just a little. "Have you been thinking about this or something?"

"I have, in fact," she grinned, turning as she reached the desk and boosting herself up onto it, holding a hand out to him. "It seems a shame to waste a good piece of furniture like this, doesn't
He smirked, walking forward to take her hand, turning it up to press his lips against her pulse. "Like what, exactly?" he asked, smiling.

"Like not using it for fucking," she chuckled, eyes observing him carefully, making sure he wouldn't back out. She needed this to go well.

He sighed, glancing at the door once more. The red of her lips had been calling him since he saw it, the curves of her body, and he'd be a liar to say the idea of fucking her into the desk wasn't doing things to him.

He glanced back at her, the rum fueled an enthusiastic *fuck it*, and he leaned in and kissed her.

She grinned into the kiss, sliding a hand into his hair and tugging him closer, her other hand already going to his belt, determined to get back on schedule. Jim wasn't known for his patience.

He kissed her back, his hand finding her thigh and sliding up, before closing around her hip. He groaned slightly as she grabbed at his belt, grinding into her grasp.

God, she loved men his age. So easy to convince, and very eager to please. She pulled off his belt with a clatter of the buckle against the desk next to her and then pulled him forward again, hooking a leg around his waist and shifting to kiss down his jawline, her pulse starting to pick up.

He rolled his hips against hers, one hand reaching up to push into her hair and get a grip, tilting her head back. His other hand got a grip on her dress and pushed it up her hips.

She started unbuttoning his shirt, teeth scraping over his pulse. "There's a condom in my bra."

"You came prepared," he breathed, stepping back just enough to pull the dress over her head.

"Who do you think I am?" she laughed, pushing his unbuttoned shirt off his shoulders. "I'm *always* prepared."

"That's fair," he agreed, pulling his wrists out of his shirt before reaching up to push fingers into the cup of her bra to retrieve the condom.

She smirked, reaching behind herself to undo her bra, simultaneously toeing off her heels with a dual thump onto the carpet. She tossed her bra towards the door, just as it opened.

Jim looked from the bra at his feet up in the direction of the couple going to town on his desk. Lorna had frozen, and if he didn't know that they had arranged this, he would have easily believed her shock. It was impossible, even with that knowledge, to find a tell.

He gave another beat for Moran to pick up why it was that Harrison had stopped moving, and then he had both of their undivided attention.

Without a word, he shut the door behind him.

"Sir-" Moran started, but then stopped, at a loss for what to say.

She cleared her throat, very obviously nervous, although she made no move to push Moran away. "Jim... how was your dinner?"

"Cancelled," he said, walking forward slowly. "And here I was thinking I was going to have a dull evening." There was a dangerous glint to his eyes.
"Sorry about the desk. It's just been a long time since I've been fucked on it, and you know once I get an idea in my head..." she murmured, her tone changing a little, fingers shifting across Moran's skin, tracing down to the indents at his hip.

Moran glanced at her like she was crazy, getting increasingly nervous as Jim approached. The smaller man smirked, walking around the desk and leaning over it to bite into Lorna's shoulder. Hard. He tasted blood on his tongue, pooling past his teeth, eyes on Moran.

She gasped, nails digging into Moran's hips, pulling him tighter against her with a reflexive motion, and from there it was immediately obvious the second he noticed the blood welling up out of her shoulder.

He took a few deep breaths, his grip tightening where it had shifted to the desk, jaw tensing as he struggled. Control. Control.

"Stop, Moran," Jim ordered, his lips rising off of Harrison's shoulder, a drop of blood slipping over his lip, teeth stained. "Let it go."

He looked up at Moriarty, interrupted in the middle of his concentration, his careful containment. His breath caught at the sight of the blood again, and he was slipping, scrabbling to get a hold...

He lost his grip entirely when Jim grabbed him and kissed him, the taste of blood rolling across his tongue.

She grinned through her pain at the moment of triumph - although, of course, it remained to be seen whether or not Moran had any homophobia that would crop up as soon as it went beyond bloodlust kissing. She decided she would assuage that as best as she could, running her nails down his bare chest, almost laughing when she heard Jim knock something onto the floor.

Moran pressed into her nails, gasping slightly as he pulled away from Moriarty for air a few moments later, his tongue coated in blood, some of which was his own judging by the way his bottom lip was protesting. This wasn't his first time kissing a man (the army had been eye-opening) and for the moment he was rather distracted. He bent down to kiss Lorna again, giving her a taste of the blood before he leaned up to start undoing the shirt of Jim's suit.

Jim shook his suit jacket off his shoulders as Moran unbuttoned his shirt, his hand going to grasp the back of Lorna's neck, digging into the bleeding bite on her shoulder mercilessly, a thrill going up his spine at the pained sound she made, his eyes snapping to Moran for his reaction. He'd wake that beast up if it cost him a million pounds.

Moran closed his eyes at the sound, taking a quick breath, but the hairs on the back of his neck rose. He was so used to fighting... But a split second later his eyes were open again, on her face as it contorted with the pain, and Christ... He reached out, grabbing her throat in his hand, holding her tightly enough to let just a little air slide past, feeling all that power beneath his fingers as he held her gaze. She wasn't afraid, far from it, and he had no intention of killing her, but he wanted that power in his hands again, wanted to feel her fading for just a second before he allowed the next breath...

She whined, fingers leaving a red mark on his hip, her other hand going behind her to find Jim's carefully styled hair. Everyone was hurting her and no one was touching her, and she was getting more frustrated by the second. Jim chuckled, just behind her ear. "Always so impatient. Hard to train that one out of you."

Moran gave a flash of teeth that could have been a smile, but looked and felt more feral. He could
take the hint of the hand pulling him closer, however, and lightened his grip on her neck. One hand slid up her body and found her breasts, massaging slowly, firmly, not giving into her demands quite yet.

"Someone get around to fucking me, for god's sake," she growled, leaning against the grip on his neck, nails digging into Jim's scalp. "At least undress me the rest of the way, Christ."

"You really are delightfully impatient," Jim smirked. "Moran, do give her what she wants before I get annoyed."

Sebastian didn't argue, ripping open the condom she'd tucked into her bra and rolling it on in a quick motion. Then he reached out and grabbed her hips, shifting aside her pants and pulling her onto his cock with littleceremony.

"Fuck," she gasped, nails drawing blood from Moran's skin, which however slight, didn't go unnoticed by Jim.

"I wonder; do you like receiving pain as much as you like giving it?"

He grit his teeth as her nails bit into his skin, thrusting his hips against Harrison's slightly. "Why don't you find out, sir?"

Lorna let out a strained laugh, her forehead falling forward to rest against Moran's shoulder, gasping another swear as his hips jolted. "Oh, you're going to regret that."

Jim himself chuckled, a dark sound, and he stepped away from the desk to finally start disrobing the rest of the way. As soon as he was finished, he opened a drawer in his desk, immediately coming up with a knife.

"Will I?" Moran whispered against Lorna's neck as he pressed his mouth against it, not sounding remotely convinced. There was the hint of a challenge in his voice, and he rolled his hips against hers slowly, just enough to keep movement.

She groaned impatiently, pulling at him a little as Jim slowly rounded the desk, the knife loose in his hand, the tip of the blade dragging gently across the mahogany - not enough to leave a scratch, he was too careful for that - just enough to make the slightest noise. He was taking the time of his slow walk to run his eyes over Moran's body, tracing every lithe muscle, deciding what to mark.

He could feel the anticipation building as he started to move his hips a little more powerfully. He knew Jim was behind him, could feel the presence tingling up his spine, and he was waiting for the bite of the knife, but he didn't turn around, keeping the anticipation alive.

She grabbed the back of Moran's neck, dug her nails in again. "You're being rude, Colonel," she growled, lifting her head to speak into his ear. "Until he touches you, I expect you to fuck me and mean it."

He grinned at that, but didn't comment, just responded in turn, gripping her hips and surging powerfully forward, his feet planting as she slid across the desk slightly with the sudden momentum, pulling almost all the way out before thrusting again. Every muscle in his body engaged as he went from playful to ex-special-ops in the span of a few seconds.

She barely even managed to make a sound, just a slammed a hand down and grabbed the edge of the desk, trying keep herself still. Jim finally reached out and touched Moran, with his free hand, just brushing the tips of his fingers across his shoulder blade. "Hmmm.... Do you think I should make you match?"
He rolled his shoulders into the man's touch, but didn't respond except for a grunt, his attention on the woman underneath him, eyes on hers as he read her expressions, changed his angles to match her movements.

Jim flattened his palm against his bodyguard's shoulder as he stepped forward, sizing up the place over his heart. "Hardly would know you've been in a war from the view back here," he smirked, hand running down his back, watching the different muscles play under the skin. His desire flared up a little, but he pushed it down. It could wait a few more minutes. "Having a good time, Harrison?"

She let out a moaning sigh, the hand on Moran's neck a little looser than before.

He arched his back under Jim's fingers, a moan sounding deep in his chest for just a moment. "Enjoying the view, s-sir?" he asked, shuddering a little as Lorna pulled herself against him more solidly, tightening around him.

"Yes, I am," Jim hummed, lifting the knife to press the cold metal next to his hand. "I wouldn't let you fuck my best employee on my very expensive table if I didn't. I wouldn't have asked for it if I didn't."

His breath stuttered for a half a second at the feel of the blade on his back. Despite the fact that he'd been expecting it there was a moment when his instincts kicked in and ordered him to turn and fight. He didn't, however, biting back the urge and pushing into Lorna with renewed vigor, a hand reaching up to tangle in her hair.

She made a pleased sound in response, tugging at his grip just to feel it sting, her half-lidded eyes on the man fucking her. All she could think was that he was far too good a fuck for a man of his age; in fact, she'd mostly forgotten about Jim, far too embroiled in the sensation Moran was supplying her.

She was tight and hot around him, and he swore as her legs tightened around his hips. He pulled her head back, leaning forward to bite her throat, feeling her pulse against his tongue and moaning, careful about the way his back moved under Jim's blade.

Jim finally turned the knife blade down as Moran leaned forward to bite Lorna, finally piecing his skin, a warning. "We've established that I don't like her being marked, didn't we?" He pondered cheerfully, slowing pressing down harder as the sentence went on. *The more irritated I get the deeper I carve.*

He took a short breath, pulling back just a little, lips still brushing Lorna's throat, though his teeth were now grit at the bite of the knife in his skin. He smiled a little. "Right. May I have permission to mark her, sir?" he asked breathlessly, hips slowing slightly so he could concentrate on the man's answer.

"*Only if you can make her scream,*" he smirked, the pressure of the knife releasing a little. Lorna didn't react much, aside from tightening her fingers a little on the Colonel's neck.

"I suppose I'll accept the challenge," he grinned, rolling his shoulder into the pain a little just to prove he would before leaning back down and closing his teeth around the muscle between her shoulder and her neck, biting down until just before he drew blood, preserving the aching pressure as he angled his hips to try and find a sensitive spot he'd noted earlier.

"*Fuck, fuck,*" she gasped, arching off the desk, hand scrabbling for purchase, trying to just be able to stay still and take it. He was sending *fire* up her spine, and if she stopped she would die; of that
she was certain.

Jim grinned, the knife starting a slow curve on Moran's shoulder blade.

"Stay still...."

He let out a low moan of pain through his teeth, which finally broke skin as they tightened in response to the knife. He did his best to continue fucking Harrison without moving his back, but it was difficult and he had to slow, his hands gripping the wood of the desk so tightly that it creaked in protest.

Jim took longer on the J than he needed to; the pay for breaking skin on his favorite toy. The longer it took, the more it would hurt. If he used any more pressure now it might scar unevenly, and that wasn't something he wanted. "I haven't heard her screaaam yet," he said lowly, pressing his thumb into the bleeding J.

He bit back a cry of pain at the pressure on his shoulder, increasing his pace again once the knife was clear, his hands shifting to grab Harrison's hips and pull her against him, teeth ripping through her skin now, blood flooding his tongue as he scraped it against her skin, desperate to hear scream.

And she did scream, but it was more of a shout of pain and pleasure than anything else, and the hand on his neck repaid him with raking her nails down the side of his throat.

Jim laughed, starting on the M and watching the blood roll down his shoulder.

He finally released his bite on Harrison's shoulder, not slowing down this time, not really capable, just doing his best to keep his shoulders still under Jim's knife, teeth grit at the pain.

Jim finished up the M as Harrison's moans started to get louder, and he dropped the bloody knife on the desk beside her hip, then stepped forward and licked his initials, his now free hands sliding down Moran's back. "Don't let her finish," he said softly, but in a voice that commanded no argument.

"What the fuck, Jim?"

He growled, taking a breath through the pain, as the order registered. "Sir?" he asked, strained, letting his hips falter and stop, body trembling.

"The two of you can wait until I'm finished, I think," he murmured, leaning around Moran's arm, smirking down at Lorna, who looked up at him, dazed and bloodied, her eyes dark.

"Jim.... Please," she groaned, trying to pull Moran closer.

Moran barely noticed her efforts, but he was struggling himself. "Jim, if you could go about enjoying yourself, I think we'd both appreciate it..."

"I'm going to need a little participation, I think," he snorted, and Lorna swore, moving impatiently beneath Moran, intent on ignoring his orders.

"What do you want, sir?" Moran asked. He was pent up, but he was enjoying the way Lorna was twisting impatiently beneath him, and reached out to push a hand down on her abdomen, holding her in place.

"Don't hold me down-"
"Quiet, Harrison," Jim said with ease, reaching out a hand to trace a finger down her thigh. "Moran... surprise me."

He considered the situation for a moment, before pulling out of Harrison, ignoring her moan of protest. He turned to the smaller man, giving him a grin and leaning in to kiss him solidly, a hand reaching down to trace over his chest. His lips shifted along the man's jaw and neck, before he knelt, tongue tracing over pecs and abs.

Jim smirked, satisfied with this response, his cock very pleased to see they'd gotten around to the exciting bit. Without hindering his movement, he slid a hand into the other man's hair, blunt nails making themselves known against his scalp. Lorna sat up on the desk, face flushed and chest practically covered in blood from the bite on her neck. "I don't mean to rush you, but if I'm left hanging much longer I may make an attempt on one of your lives."

"Patience, Lorna," Jim said coolly, giving her a smile.

Moran traced his tongue over Jim's hipbone before centering, his mouth closing around the boss's cock, tongue tracing lines into his sensitive skin.

"With a sight like that in front of me? Not likely," she retorted, watching Jim's face as Moran went down in him, noting the very slight tinge of pink on his cheeks that happened when she did something really good to him.

Sebastian reached up to grab Jim's arse, pulling him closer, taking his cock deeper into his mouth and down his throat slightly. Jim's hand in his hair was both painful and invigorating, melding with the pain in his back and his aching cock to create a cocktail of distraction and pleasure that was completely intoxicating. Jim moaned, starting to thrust into his mouth slightly, and he accommodated the movement carefully.

Jim loved his ass being grabbed, even though she knew he'd never admit it. God forbid for a second she think he was the least bit submissive. She abandoned the thought and slid off the desk, stepping to the side and leaning up the kiss him, trying to distract him, even a little.

He smiled against her lips, his hips rolling against Moran's mouth. The man kept him fairly still, however, controlling the pace, and he growled slightly, grip on Moran's hair tightening.

"I don't think you're going to be able to control him," Lorna smirked, nipping Jim's jaw, her statement open to interpretation. It could be about either one of them. "Though I'd like to see you try."

Moran looked up while Jim looked down, and they locked eyes. Moran smirked, taking Jim a bit deeper and swallowing around him in a way that confirmed this was definitely not the first cock he'd had in his mouth. He gave Jim a wink, and the man responded with a rough thrust and a smirk.

Lorna bit Jim's ear, running her hand down his chest, scraping her nails lightly across his skin. "He almost as good as me, or am I going to have to step up my game?" she murmured, smirking a little.

"Are you suggesting you haven't... mmmm... haven't always given me your best, Harrison?" he asked coyly, a hand reaching up to tangle in her hair.

"I'm suggesting that even an old dog can learn new tricks, and I'm most certainly not an old dog," she hummed, kissing a delicate line down his throat that ended with a painless nip at his collarbone.

"Oh, anything but, Harrison. Anything but," he agreed, stroking her hair and tilting his neck for her.
Moran had added a hand to the mixture and he was starting to get close, breaths shortening. "He is good," he admitted after a moment, with a twist of Moran's hair to remind him who was in control. "Rougher than you are... but don't change..."

"Look at him, of course he's rougher," she said humorously, smirking, kisses trailing to his shoulder. "Not a soft angle on that boy. But that's why you wanted him, isn't it?"

"Don't know... what you're talking about, Lorna dear..." he smirked, his hand sliding from her hair to her throat, pressing fingers into the forming bruises there before closing his eyes and letting out a shuddering breath as Moran moaned around him. "Fuck..."

She hissed quietly, leaning away from him just a little, afraid he'd touch the fresh bite, her fingers sliding into Moran's hair besides Jim's, trying to exert a little control over the only person in the room she could. "Finish him, Moran. Then we can."

He didn't argue, just tugged against her grip a little as he took a risk, pressing a finger against Jim's asshole as he swallowed around him again. The risk paid off. Jim swore violently, body curling forward slightly and he came hard, grasping Moran's head to keep him in place. The man struggled for just a moment but then didn't object, only pulling away once the man finished, wiping his mouth, cheeks flushed and hair standing up on end from being gripped, chest heaving slightly as he regained his breath.

She didn't give him much time to recover before she hauled him up by the arm and kissed him, heart rate building up again.

He kissed her back immediately, picking her up without any decorum and slamming her against the nearest vertical surface, immediately beginning to fuck her for everything he was worth.

Jim sighed as the impact knocked a painting off the wall, moving to sink into his chair as Harrison moaned, watching her wind her arms around Moran's neck. He'd never actually seen her fucked by someone else. It was an interesting perspective.

He wasn't going to last long, but he did his damnedest while he could, each movement precise and solid.

She came hard and fast, crying out against Moran's shoulder, fingers raking into his skin again. Jim reached into his desk and brought out a bottle of bourbon.

Moran came a second later, letting out a cry of pain as her nails found the open wounds on his back, but that only drove him over harder.

She let out a long breath against his collar, carefully putting her feet down to take her weight, which she immediately discovered were not up to the task. "Christ," she huffed.

He nodded just a little, keeping them both propped against the wall while they regained their bearings.

"Alright, get out," Jim said casually, taking a swig of bourbon and looking very satisfied with himself.

Moran nodded, straightening slowly and stretching before walking over to collect his clothes from the floor. "Thank you for that, sir. Though the next time you want to fuck me, you could just ask."

"Luring you in was more my style, I think," he grinned, and Lorna snorted, collecting her clothes.
He pulled his shirt and trousers on. "If you say so, sir, he said, firing of a half-assed salute and heading for the door.

Lorna brought her things out to the waiting room, closed the door again, and gracefully got dressed. A skill she'd perfected a long time ago.

Moran set about buttoning his shirt, tie slung around his neck. "So. Care to explain what the fuck just happened?" he suggested.

"You just had your first sexual encounter with James Moriarty," she said simply, buttoning up her dress. "How was that for a walk?"

"So, what, you're his pimp now?" he asked with a snort as he pulled his jacket on.

"He's mine, actually. He's the one that set that up, after all," she pointed out, pulling her hair out of her collar. "He's a fixer."

"A fixer?" he asked, heading for the elevator.

"A man who will fix things for you," she shrugged, walking with him, carrying her heels in her hand. "Your wife's sister messing up your marriage? She'll disappear. You in trouble with the police? The problems will fade away. He fixes people's problems."

"And you and I not fucking, that was a problem?" he asked, pressing the button to call the elevator and leaning against the wall.

"He did that solely for himself, Colonel, I was just a means to an end," she corrected, running a hand through her hair. "He fixed that for himself."

He raised an eyebrow as the elevator arrived, pulling the cage open for her. "And how's that, precisely?"

"He wanted to fuck you. He told me to make it happen," she replied, stepping out with a grateful nod. "Even though I was his instrument, he still ultimately made the event happen."

He snorted, shrugging and walking out after her. "I have the distinct impression that I should be annoyed, but I'll just let it be, shall I?"

"For the best, when it comes to him," she agreed, stopping at her door. "Thank you for the salmon, Colonel. Do have a good sleep."

"Ms. Harrison-" he stopped her as she was entering her door.

"Earlier I was under the impression that perhaps the winter was over, but now it seems you were just having me on. Are we good, or should I continue to expect you to frost me over?"

She gave a bit of a startled smile, pausing with her hand on the door frame. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to freeze on you. I suppose I just fell back into a formal tone. At a certain level of tired, it's easier for me to just..." she waved her hand a little, sighing. "You know."

He shook his head. "That was a genuine question. I'm aware of your line of work. It would be unfair to hold you to behavior that was evidently simply following orders, and I don't intend to."

He shrugged. "I suppose this is more of a 'carry on'. If you're still angry with me, I won't get whiplash."

He unlocked his door.
"No, no, Moran, that's not what I meant," she frowned, shaking her head, lifting a hand pinch the bridge of her nose briefly. "I'm not angry with you. I'm just... slightly frigid sometimes, for no reason. Maintaining my cheerful personality is hard sometimes, so I just... grind to a halt sometimes."

He glanced over at her with a wry smile. "I'm not a grifter, but it's sorta funny how you grind to a halt right when I shoot your boss. If we're on good terms Ms. Harrison, I'll take it. Just giving you the chance." He gave her a lazy salute.

"A chance for what?" She asked, yawning.

"To return to your previously scheduled ice monarchy. Go sleep, Harrison. I'll see you tomorrow."

He stepped into the apartment, and closed the door behind him.

She shook her head and followed suit, heading into her apartment and closing the door.

He took a shower, before heading to bed, exhausted.

She stripped down, did the same, and then passed out diagonally across her bed, too tired to even crawl between the covers.
It was two days later that Jim called Lorna in. He hadn't contacted her in the interim.

She quickly finished some paperwork that she'd been filling out in her office and headed down, taking off the scarf in the lift that she'd been wearing to cover up the marks that they'd left. She knocked on his door as she always did, with two crisp, rhythmic knocks. "It's me."

"I know it is. Come in," he said calmly, setting aside the files he was reviewing.

She stepped in, shutting the door behind her. "How can I help, Jim?"

He smiled a little, beckoning her over. "I need to discuss some business with you, but come say hello first. You did well the other day."

"What, and you expected any differently?" She smiled, dropping her scarf on a chair as she passed by, moving around his desk to stand in front of him. "I can see you've neatened up in here."

"And you expected any differently?" he parroted, smiling. He reached out to take her hand, pulling her down into his lap.

That was new. He didn't initiate contact like this unless he was leading up to sex, and if he had business after this, it wasn't sex. But she took it with grace, resting her arm on his shoulder. "No, I didn't."

He kissed her shoulder, arms slipping around her waist. "So... tell me, are you still jealous?"

"Not really," she chuckled, leaning against him a little. "I'm poor at sharing, but I can get used to it."

"Mmm..." he agreed, hand reaching up to play through her hair gently, closing his eyes for a moment to shut off the constant stream of information, at least visual. Every other sense was still firing, but he was used to it.

She was silent for the moment, just taking in his casual touch, then cleared her throat a little. "... What is this, Jim?" she asked softly, looking at him even though his eyes were closed.

"Affection. I'm simply feeling affectionate, Lorna. It's a mood. Enjoy it, because you know how long they tend to last around me. They die faster than a Frenchman's morale," he rattled off idly.

She chuckled quietly, deciding just to take it in stride, and fell silent again, leaving the only sounds in the room their breathing and the slight rustle of his hand in her hair.

There was a knock on the door, and without moving Jim said "Come in Moran."

The door opened and Sebastian entered. He raised an eyebrow at the arrangement, clearing his throat slightly. "Ah... you called for me, sir?"

"Did he now?" She raised an eyebrow, looking down at Jim. So he didn't mind Moran seeing them like this? "Well, I assume this involves the both of us?"

"Obviously," he snorted, pushing her off of his lap gently but firmly, giving her time to find her feet. "An undercover operation."
"Yeah?" She grinned, relocating to his desk, sparing a glance back at Moran. "What, decided to do Christmas again so soon?"

Jim smiled at that, evidently pleased with her enthusiasm. "Something like that. I need you both in Italy."

"I speak Italian, should be easy enough," she hummed, crossing her legs. "Military or civilians?"

"Military is preferable," he said, handing over the file he'd been reviewing when she'd come in. "It will open more doors. But feel free to shift faces if you need to while you're there."

"What sort of information do you need? Dirt or plans?" She asked, taking the file and flipping it open, starting to scan. "It will change who I decide to be, and how long it will take."

"Neither," he said, leaning back in his chair. "I need you to plant an idea. Your target will be Galaezzo Ciano, Minister of Foreign Affairs. He's had some friction with Mussolini, but nothing major... I want it to be major. Plant the idea that Mussolini is inept. Be the time you're finished, I want him considering to overthrow Mussolini, leaning towards peace with the allies."

"Finally showing your true colors on where you stand in this war, or is somebody paying you to do this?" She asked curiously, not looking up from the file.

"My reasons are my own. It's enough that I'm ordering it," he said calmly. "Do whatever you want, just get the job done."

She shrugged, shutting the file and sliding off his desk. "Yes, sir. What are our travel arrangements?"

"My plane is waiting for you," he said, returning to the files on his desk. "I'll see you when you return."

She grimaced, but nodded and turned for the door, glancing at Moran. No travel would be good in war time, but she wasn't going to enjoy flying over enemy territory.

Moran, too, had balked slightly at the suggestion, and didn't plan on going so meekly. "Sir... Are you sure it's the best idea to send your two ranking officers in the same--"

"I've considered the risks, Moran. Dismissed."

"I've have to object--"

"Noted. Dismissed, Moran."

Lorna grabbed Moran's arm as she passed, pulling him along with her as Jim dismissed him for the second time, her grip gentle, but firm and insistent. He wheeled around and headed out after her, resigned, if still aggravated. "This is ridiculous."

"We'll find our own way of getting to Italy, if it bothers you so much," she murmured, heading for the lift. "It doesn't matter how we get there, it matters that we get the job done."

"I suppose," he agreed, sighing. "I'll get packed, then. How long do you expect we'll be over there?"

"Two months to be safe. I don't know this man, and I don't know how long it will take to manipulate him," she sighed, pulling the cage open and stepping into the lift.
"Right," he said with a nod. "Understood. I'll see you in a half an hour?"

She nodded, checking her wristwatch. "Sounds like a plan. Feel free to come heavily armed. It's wartime, it's expected.

He grinned. "I wouldn't dream of doing otherwise," he agreed, pushing into his apartment.

She chuckled and did the same, disappearing into her own apartment. This would be an interesting trip.

He emerged twenty minutes later with his army rucksack and a weapons bag, which were the grand extent of his possessions.

She stepped out a minute later, two large suitcases in hand that looked too big for her to pick up. She always needed a good wardrobe. "Alright. I'm sure the driver is waiting for us out front. We ought to get to the airport before nightfall. Unless you've got a better idea, that is."

"No, unfortunately I don't," he said, slinging his rucksack over his shoulder and bending to pick up her suitcases as well, heading for the elevator. "Wish I did."

"Me too. I'd suggest we buy a few tickets on a ship to the continent, but I can't see that being any better," she sighed, stepping into the lift, leaving ample room for him. "Thank you for grabbing those, by the way," she added, then smirked. "Are you going to want a tip?"

He laughed. "Of course not. It's an honor to carry the bags of the boss's special favorite."

She laughed too, bringing to mind that same enjoyment she'd experienced when she'd first found him in that bar. A boy with as much mirth in his eyes as there was danger, if you knew where to prod. "Alright, as long as I know," she grinned, shrugging just a little.

"Well, now you do," he smirked. "Seriously though, what was that with Moriarty? He was practically petting you."

"Couldn't tell you," she shrugged, looking frankly mystified herself. "That's never happened before. I don't know if it ever will again. I'm certainly not going to be the one to bring it up."

He laughed. "He likes you, Harrison. Face it, you're the teacher's pet."

"'Like' is way too strong a term," she shook her head, looking faintly amused. "But I can't contest teacher's pet, apparently."

"Not from what I saw," he chuckled. "You should have seen his face. He was utterly content. Not a care in the world." His tone bordered on mockery, and his smile was amused.

She rolled her eyes, stepping forward as the elevator stopped. "Please. In the years that I've known him, he's only ever shown three emotions. Rage, cruelty, and triumph. Content? Absolutely not."

He shrugged. "You may have known him longer, but maybe that's blinded you. I'm no grifter, but I'm a pretty good read, and if the man could have purred, he would have," he snorted, heading for the street exit where the car was waiting.

"Except Jim isn't a cat, he's a spider," she chuckled, shaking her head, feeling very short in her flat traveling boots, especially next to him.

"How so?" he asked as they approached the car. He placed their trunks in the boot, nodding to the
driver who opened the door for them.

She slid into the back, waiting for him to get in before elaborating. "He's building a web. And the strands he's already got, he watches like a hawk. Nothing slips by him. A cat goes looking for prey, but a spider's prey comes to it."

He nodded slightly at that. "That'd explain the lack of purring," he said finally with a grin.

"You're ridiculous, Moran," she shook her head, still mildly amused. "Don't let him hear that, though."

He shrugged. "He won't be around for a few months. Unless you plan on telling him."

"I won't, but don't fall into that habit and then forget to get rid of it when we get back," she pointed out, "You might not want to be gutted."

"I'll keep that in mind," he said with a small grin.

She just gave a bit of an exasperated chuckle and a shake of her head, crossing her legs. "Alright, we should get our story straight now, so we don't get surprised later."

"That'll be your area, I think," he said, nodding. "You're the grifter. Just tell me what I need to remember."

"Well, we don't look anywhere near enough alike to be siblings, so we're going to have to be married. Nobody will care that we don't have rings, especially if I need to be sleeping around. Anyways, it's Italy and we're foreigners, I doubt they'll give much of a shit about us. I speak Italian with a passable accent, and with the dark hair I could claim heritage. You, I don't know. You at least fit the Nazi ideal," she rattled off, only meeting his eyes for a moment before looking into empty space, still thinking up details. "We obviously can't claim to be locals, we won't know the area well enough, but that might end up working to our advantage. Of the Powers Italy's the weakest, so far. They're not an enormous target for espionage. I don't know if we could pull this kind of mission in Germany, not with that fanaticism."

"We could be co-workers," he pointed out, but he wasn't really arguing. He nodded when she mentioned Germany. "It'd be a hell of a place to go play around if you could do it right, though," he muttered. "Some of those Nazi scientists are sick bastards. We'd fit right in."

"Not me. I don't think they like women coming up with those ideas," she sighed, shrugging a little bit. "2nd class citizen? No thank you."

He frowned a bit. "Second class seems a bit sharp. Just because women are given different roles in society doesn't make them a lower class."

"Moran, think of any job a woman can have that isn't a homemaker, or a nurse, or teacher, or a secretary. Or a factory, these days, with half the men on the Continent," she shook her head, her voice calm, "I don't think a place that has such a distaste for one religion that it makes them wear signifying marks in the streets limits itself to just Jews."

He raised an eyebrow. "And yet you're the second ranking figure of a multinational enterprise."

"In a criminal organization, and its because I've been with Jim since he took over one of his first drug rings. You know the Nazis pushed all of their women out of government, don't you? I used to be quite fond of German politics before all this shit happened, they had their heads on straight," she shook her head, clucking her tongue once.
He nodded a little at that. "I suppose that's fair. But then, they are extremists."

"You just can't claim that women are equal anywhere, not right now," she sighed, frowning a little. "But I became used to it a long time ago. I've used it to my advantage."

He didn't argue, just nodded a little. "I suppose that you do what you have to."

"Survive, right?" she shook her head, lifting a hand to adjust her hair. It was something her father had used to say, on late nights after he'd returned from a job, and rumpled her hair affectionately.

"Whatever it takes," he agreed. He watched her adjust her hair, smiling a little at the way it caught the light, almost glossy. "So. Married," he said after a moment, smiling.

"Married. Only a few months, and it was a quiet ceremony. No big weddings in war time, it's impractical," she said, vaguely conscious of his attention, as she'd learned to always be around men. "We met on your leave, decided to get married before you went back. Very whirlwind, very impulsive, very likely to end badly."

He nodded. The story was a good one. No one would think twice about it. "Ought to do. Hell, I almost believe it."

"Good, it will make it easier for you to act like it's real," she nodded, shifting the hem of her dress up a little to straighten her nylons. "Lie as best you can, and if you can't, play surly and let me talk."

He nodded. "I'll probably play surly as a safety, then talk if I want to," he said calmly.

"Alright, but don't draw undue attention to us by being difficult, the last thing we want is being arrested on suspicion of being spies," she cautioned.

He nodded just a little. "I know how to avoid drawing attention," he said with a small grin. "That, I can do."

"Alright, good," she nodded. She wasn't sure why Jim had sent Moran with her. She had a small but dedicated department of grifters, and it would have made more sense to send her with a trained spy, not a young man they'd had hired for only a few months, and most of that time in a consultant position. Jim had an ulterior motive here, and she was irritated that he hadn't deigned to tell her. Was she meant to give the Colonel a crash course in espionage, or had he sent him along just for the superior protection he offered? She had no clue.

He was quiet until they arrived at the airport, and then exited the vehicle, grabbing their luggage again and waiting for Lorna before starting for the plane. "Have you been to Italy before?"

"I have, but it was years ago. I learned Italian later, in New York," she said, shrugging a little bit, giving a slight nod to the pilot who was waiting by the stairs and leading the way up. "Have you?"

He nodded just a little. "Once or twice," he said with a small smirk. "Got shrapnel as a souvenir."

"Against Italy? That has to be some sort of achievement," she teased, entering the plane proper and taking a seat.

"Never said against," he retorted. "Said in."

She laughed. "Alright, explain to me how that one works."
"Can't," he said, flashing her a cocky grin. "It's classified. A lot."

"Everything you did in the army stopped being classified as soon as I made you disappear from it's ranks," she snorted, rolling her eyes at him a little. "Ridiculous."

"By the government, yes," he said calmly. "By Moriarty, no. I thought you knew, but if you don't, that's not my place."

She glanced at him, a spark of irritation in her eyes. "It is your place, actually. Don't keep things from me, and definitely do not keep things from the boss. You forfeited most of your privacy as soon as you signed on to be his bodyguard. Do not forget."

He glanced over at her with a laugh. "Easy there, princess. The boss knows. He's the one that stamped it confidential. I'm saying it's not my place to tell you. If you want more info, ask him."

She just let out a small smile, not letting it show how very much that angered her. So Jim was keeping things about the staff from her, now? From her? She would be having something to say to him when she got back, whenever the hell that would be.

He climbed onto the plane, glancing back at her. She was carefully controlled, but if he'd learned anything from his days fending off the ice queen, she was probably steaming. "Relax, you're still his favorite," he pointed out with a small grin, an attempt at a truce.

She gave a genuinely amused snort. "I know. We were both witness to his behavior at HQ. You'll know if I ever truly get jealous; I'll poison you."

"I have no doubt," he said with a grin. "There are worse ways to die."

She chuckled, leaning back in her seat as the pilot came up the steps. "Yeah, you're right. Not my preferred method, but not the one I dread, either."

He stretched out, rubbing his eyes a little before looking out the window. "What a morning."

"Yeah, that's an appropriate statement," she agreed, looking out the window as the plane made a little lurch as it started moving forward. "Hopefully we won't get shot down before the afternoon."

"That would be preferable," he agreed, nodding a little. He closed his eyes, deciding that if he was going to get shot he might as well be rested.

She let the conversation drop, deciding to let him sleep while she figured out what the hell exactly Jim was up to.
They weren't shot out of the sky by some mystery of chance, but it seemed that that scraped the bottom of their barrel of luck. Their touch-down was delayed for weather, and when they finally landed it was pouring down rain in torrential droves. Moran raised an eyebrow as he looked out the window. "Isn't this supposed to be the land of sunshine or something?"

"I thought that was Japan. Or America. I'm not sure, there seems to be a lot of conflicting sun ideology. I prefer to think of Italia as the land of dust. Someone always kicks up dirt from the road onto my skirt," she muttered, standing as they came to a halt. "The car better be waiting for us."

He nodded in agreement, letting her precede him. An attendant was waiting with a large umbrella, and another had gathered their bags, so aside from their shoes they remained fairly dry.

The car was, in fact, waiting for them, so she didn't have to call for a cab like she'd been afraid of. The taxi service from the airport left much to be desired, and that was all she would say on the subject. As she shut the door and flicked a strand of hair out of her eyes, she took a breath. "Alright. We're here to consider investing in the war effort, and we're interested in becoming expatriates. That should lower suspicion, and I can always wire for money, should we need to wave it around. We agree with Nazism, but my Italian heritage makes me more compelled to help Italy out. We can slip in that Italy hasn't been doing so well, help convince Galeazzo Ciano that Mussolini isn't the commander he dreams himself to be. Any questions?"

He nodded a bit. "Sounds good. I'll follow your lead, play it like I'm married into the money and not too savvy, let you do most of the talking."

"Good idea," she nodded, smiling a little bit. If he could handle himself on this mission, then she'd award him a little more respect. "Now, do you know how to dance?"

He shrugged. "A little. Not well. Learned enough to snag my victims, that was it."

She gave the smallest sigh, but nodded. "Okay, well, I'll give you a lesson or two while we're here, never know when it might come up. Never met a G.I. who didn't frequent dance halls before, but I don't know if anyone else will look twice at that," she said, looking out they window as they began to enter Naples. The city was looking a little worse for wear. She could see the docks in the distance, under heavy construction; they'd been hit several times since Italy had joined the war, and she couldn't imagine the Fascist government letting them sit still long, not with the Germans breathing down their neck. She sighed again, more obviously. "God, I hope we don't get hit by one of our own bombs."

He let the comment about dance halls slide. He frequented them, alright, but they were his hunting grounds, not a place for leisure. He nodded a little at her comment. "In the end, though, it doesn't really matter all that much, does it, whose bomb it is?"

"No, but it changes the nationality of the poor son of a bitch I'll haunt," she snorted with a wry amusement.

"I suppose that's fair," he chuckled, turning his attention to the narrow, winding streets outside. It was a strange landscape, ancient buildings mixed in among the new like rotten teeth, slanting and
crumbling stone stained dark by years. Occasionally there were the familiar spans of rubble, blast zones where bombs had taken their toll.

She didn't break the silence, observing out the window alongside him, silently noting that there weren't nearly as many hollow, burned-out buildings as there were back home. But then again, the Luftwaffe hadn't been raiding nightly here with intentions to hit civilian homes, so she couldn't expect the damage to be the same.

It was a few minutes later that they pulled up in front of the house where they would be staying, and he climbed out, getting their luggage out of the car. The block was in one of the nicer areas of the city, a haven for the rich that had done its best to hide the signs of war. He could see a place where a building had obviously been destroyed, but the rubble had been cleared and a small garden freshly planted on the plot.

"I see Boss was considerate enough to put us up in the nice part of town, far away from the industrial parts," she observed as she stepped out, rounding the car to stand beside him. The house looked typical of the area, with tan stuccoed walls and orange-ish terracotta shingles, a few hints of stone peeking out from the stucco at the corners and windows. She wondered if Jim had rented or bought the house. "I guess it lessens the chances of his employees getting bombed."

"He would be in a hell of a hole if we both died," he agreed, walking up the front path, through a slightly overgrown garden. The door was opened for him by a young woman, who bowed as he and Lorna entered. "Welcome," she said in English that was thickly accented. "Mr. Moriarty has had everything prepared for you."

Lorna gave the woman a cursory scan and then headed further into the house, eyes examining the furnishings. "Are you the help, or have you just been watching the place for him? I can't imagine it's the first; no one unimportant knows his name," she said casually, running a finger down the obviously new wallpaper.

"I have been working for Mr. Moriarty for many years, managing his Italian estates," the woman explained. "My name is Adelia."

"Estates? I think the two of us will be having a small talk about transparency when I get back to London," she mumbled, shrugging off her travel coat and heading down the hall, her heels clacking against the hardwood floor. The house was definitely big enough for her appetites, and it had spare room to act as a buffer between her and Moran; for all she knew, living together might be extremely difficult, and if she wanted the mission to go successfully, keeping in good spirits was necessary.

"Don't mind her," Sebastian said with a buttery smile. "She's tired. Where should I put these bags?"

The woman blushed just slightly under his smile, and led him into the house. She was beautiful, difficult to pinpoint age-wise, but strong. He was instantly drawn to her. If she were in a bar he would have targeted her immediately. As it was, she worked for Moriarty, so he was going to have to behave. He might as well keep his options open, however.

Adelia stopped outside of a door. "This will be the lady's room," she said, before pointing to another door. "And yours is just there."

"He had two bedrooms set up? That might be slightly difficult to explain," Lorna said, slipping past the woman to open the door to her room, trying not to let her irritation towards Jim well up too far. He was frustrating her, and she didn't know whether it was on purpose or not. She glanced from the inside of the generic bedroom towards Moran, who had his eyes practically fixed to Adelia. This
was also irritating, but for a completely different reason.

Moran glanced up, and gave her a smile. "I'll keep my things in your room, and if we have company we'll call it a spare. We can even make it obvious that it isn't if we need to play the 'marriage tension' card. Or, if you'd rather share a room..."

"No," she sighed wistfully, meeting his tease with one of her own, "I'll just have to keep those late-night sex dreams all to my lonesome," she ho-hummed, stepping into her room with the faintest hint of a smirk on her lips.

Adelia was very red now, but Moran just gave her a wink before following after Lorna, setting the bags down. "Didn't your mother ever tell you it's nice to share?"

"My mother never told me to share anything along those lines," she laughed, heading for the armoire in the corner of the room and opening it to hang her coat up in. "To this day I get lectured by her about being a proper young woman. My father sometimes gets sick of it and interrupts with a 'For god's sake, Francine, she started smuggling when she was fifteen and that's what you're worried about?'"

"But sharing is so much fun," he grinned, walking up behind her and tracing light fingers over her shoulders, in the premise of helping her out of the coat.

"I really hooked you with that, didn't I?" she smirked, shutting the door of the armoire again and turning to face him. There was a vaguely smug feeling rolling around her head at having reeled him back in; and she knew she was vain, but she couldn't find it within herself to give a damn.

"Because I really would have objected," he snorted. "That's like selling water to a man dying of thirst and attributing it to your marketing." His tone was playful.

She chuckled, raising her eyebrows at him. "I was merely teasing you in return, Colonel, I hadn't made any offers. But, well, if you'd rather share'..." she parroted back to him teasingly, reaching up to adjust his collar. "I'm sure little Adelia will keep it to herself."

He raised an eyebrow, still smirking. "Well, I certainly don't want to impose, Harrison. If you'd rather I stay across the hall, explore a little of what Italy has to offer..." He shrugged. "But yes, you're right, I'm sure Adelia is good at keeping many things to herself."

"As she should be, if she doesn't want to happen across my famous temper," she hummed, finishing adjusting his shirt and letting her hand drop back by her side. "But I think the odds are high that during this trip I'm going to have to fuck some very boring people, and knowing what you're capable of, I might need to enlist your services. Now, I can't do that if you're busy, can I?"

"My dear Ms. Harrison," he said, sobering, though his eyes still twinkled as he reached out to take her hand and press it to his lips briefly. "If I am ever too busy for you, they'll need wool coats in hell."

Her lips spread into a smirk, and she gave him a bit of a nod. "I do appreciate that, Colonel," she replied, "And I appreciate that I'm not going to have to teach you charm. That would take a lifetime, anyway."

"Charm is as useful a weapon as intimidation," he said, straightening. "As you well know. I've yet to decide which I prefer."

"I've found it's always useful to keep the second in your back pocket, just in case," she remarked, moving past him in order to sit on the bed and take off her travel boots. "You're still young; you
should learn to work with both at once before you, for lack of a better word, solidify."

He chuckled a little. "I'll take that under advisement, but watch it with the youth quips. You can't be very much older than I am."

"What are you, enlisting age? About 18? That makes me 4 years older than you, maybe a little more," she smirked, her eyebrows raised at him. "That's a little bit of a difference, at this age-bracket."

"Nineteen, actually," he snorted, a tad miffed. "Or nearly, anyhow. And it's hardly that incredible a difference."

"Not if we were in our thirties, no, but a few years ago you wouldn't even be able to buy a beer at the pub," she pointed out, shrugging a little. "I'm not trying to antagonize you, I'm just pointing out the truth. I don't think we'd get along as well if you were my age, anyway."

He relaxed a bit, letting the tension ease away. "Oh? And why is that?"

"People in our business are suspicious and cold," she stated simply, "And if you were my age you would already be that way. The only exception are grifters, because we have to be so involved with people. But with your marksmanship, you'd be in hits. No room for emotion, there. Grim people. Hard to play poker with."

"That's saying something, coming from the grifter," he said with a grin, raising an eyebrow.

"Why, because we're good liars?" she asked jovially, leaning back on her hands. The sheets were soft, which she appreciated.

"Because you're exceptional liars," he retorted with a grin, taking a few steps closer. "And known for your ability to read people."

"But we're fun to play with. You may lose your paycheck to us, but we're not going to make you leave feeling depressed because no one shed a smile the entire game," she protested, still smiling. "Sure, you pay for the entertainment, but at least you can call it that."

"What sort of entertainment am I paying for, exactly?" he asked with a smirk, leaning against the wall at the head of the bed, a few feet from her, arms crossed loosely.

"At a card game, our delightful company. Any other time, well..." she shrugged coyly, "It's your currency."

He grinned, eyes sweeping over her for a few moments, appreciating every detail. "It's your personage," he retorted.

She shifted a little, and drew out a switchblade from her back pocket, showing it to him and setting it on the nightstand between by his side. "You'll know what can and can't be bought."

"Well then," he said, straightening and walking the last few steps, reaching out to push a lock of hair back behind her ears. "What's your price for energetic, hopefully fantastic sex to break in a new bed and a new country?"

She smirked, lifting a hand to undo the first button on her blouse. "Don't let me catch you with the Italian girl. And the door stays open."

"Oohooohoo," he grinned, leaning in to finally press his lips under her jaw. "Do I hear jealousy?"
"I think you and I are both very aware of my jealousy issues. Jim, too," she snorted, grabbing him by the shirtfront and pulling him to the bed beside her. "Personally, I think it stems from my vanity issues."

He laughed as she pulled him down. "Look, consider it a compliment I don't look at you like you're prey, okay?" he chuckled, reaching out to work on the rest of her buttons.

She gave him an impish grin, loosening his tie. "Who says I don't want you to treat me like prey? Mind leaving extremely visible marks, but otherwise..."

"Because," he said, his voice lower now, aware of the open door, "My prey ends up a body in the Thames, often missing a few vital organs." He nipped her gently, hand sliding into her open blouse.

His tie dropped to the floor. "And what about the girls you take back to a room? How do you treat them before you kill them?" she hummed, voice soft, but not for the same reason as him. It didn't matter to her what the woman heard; she knew Moriarty's name, which meant she could keep her mouth shut. Her fingers busied themselves unbuttoning his shirt, tugging it out from his belt.

"I treat them like they expect," he smirked, pushing her blouse off her shoulders and cupping her breast, gently at first. "Sometimes I'm the sweetheart baby-faced soldier boy..." His grip roughened slightly. "And sometimes I'm the rough-edged fuck they're craving..."

She ran her fingers down his newly-bared chest, fingernails dragging lightly on his skin as his hand grew rougher. "I think you know which one I'm expecting," she said softly, almost dangerously. She flicked his shirt off his shoulders, letting gravity pull it down to his arms. Idly, she wondered what Jim would think of this. "I think you know there's nothing sweet about me."

"Had me fooled," he said sarcastically, hands sliding around her back and unclasping her brassiere. "Sarcasm will get you nowhere," she said, already unbuttoning his trousers. "Do watch your mouth."

"Yes ma'am," he said, on the border of snarky and respectful, tossing her brassier aside and slipping his hands down her back to the waist of her skirt.

She rolled her eyes at him, finishing with his trousers and shifting to straddle him, tired of sitting next to him so ineffectually. Once there, she slid a hand into his hair, getting a grip. It was about as long as she had seen it; she suspected he hadn't had much of a chance to cut it while waging a war, and he'd been fairly busy since. She liked it. "You give this much sass to your commanding officers?"

He was surprised by the turn of events. Not by her moving to his lap- that was the obvious progression of events- but rather by her taking the dominant path. It wasn't something he was used to. Not many people tried to dominate a man of his height and build. He liked it.

That did not mean, however, that he was going easily. He met her gaze, undaunted. "Never was a good soldier."

"Now that, I believe," she snorted, the hand in his hair tugging to tilt his head back just past the point of comfortable. "I wonder what your fellow soldiers thought of you? Did they like that smart mouth of yours, or were you too distant for them to really experience it?" she asked, grey eyes glinting with amusement.

He tugged at her grip slightly, very aware of his exposed throat. He felt vulnerable, his pulse
spiking, but still he pressed. "Oh, they never really experienced it," he shot back. "I experienced quite a few of theirs though. Just to remind them who was really in charge..."

Her eyes grew darker, her free hand coming to rest at his collar, her fingers just barely following the curve of his throat, just the slightest hint of a threat. The mental image of him, standing or sitting or on his back, with his hands in another man's hair, his cheeks red, his chest heaving, did things to her she didn't expect.

She licked her lips, raising her eyebrows at him a little. "Then who, pray tell, did you spend all that time practicing on before you got down on your knees for Jim? I saw you; you're no beginner."

Her touch left goosebumps on his skin, and he shifted his hips beneath her just slightly, swallowing. His trousers were strained at the fly.

"Anyone I pleased," he said, smiling still despite his growing restlessness. "Pretty boys who walked by, officers who needed buttering or needed to be taught a lesson..."

"You're lucky you weren't dishonorably discharged, throwing yourself at anyone you pleased. Only the Navy can get away with that kind of recklessness," she scoffed, her fingers tightening on him as he moved, her own center of gravity shifting just a little further down onto him. "How did you win all those men over? Not even a face as pretty as yours can convince the purest churchgoer."

"I was careful enough," he said with a smile that was slightly strained, nostrils flaring. "The officers were easy. They get so starved out there for their lives of comfort they'll stick it in anything. A pretty face is just a bonus... as for the others... Well, everyone loves a soldier."

Her smirk grew a little as she recognized the stress in his smile, letting go of his hair with one hand, the other sliding up to truly grasp his neck, although her grip remained light, teasing. "That they do. I always loved a man in uniform. The start of the war was a very mixed blessing, as you can imagine," she sighed, shifting on his lap again, as if unintentionally. "There were a good few months, though, before all the boys shipped out."

He let out a small, undignified noise as she moved, though he kept his expression controlled, pressing into her grip, loving the ache at his trachea. "And a good few months after, if you shipped out with them..."

"Too bad for them it's not the Crusades. Traveling whores following the main battalion," she laughed, very pleased with the sound he had made. "You might have had less chances to exert your 'dominance' over the other boys. They'd be a little bit busy."

"Lucky for me, then," he said with a grin. "I had traveling whores in uniform." He reached up to cup her breast, tweaking her nipple slightly, trying to get a rise.

Her fingers flexed on his throat, but otherwise she didn't react, deciding immediately that he was going to have to try harder than that to get her to show her cards. "It's a shame you didn't get into crime before you joined the army," she said instead, switching tactics, a wistful sigh escaping her. "I could have made a wonderful grifter out of you. Half the men I have in my department couldn't even dream of being such a cockslut."

The name was unexpected, rolling off her tongue with such casualness that it took him a moment to fully process it. He squared his shoulders despite her grip, and his ears reddened, a bit offended, a bit abashed, a lot aroused.

It also left him momentarily speechless. No one had ever said something like that to his face. He
didn't know what to do with it.

Finally he settled with "Now, isn't the pot calling the kettle black?" Not his best line, but he'd been scrambling.

She gave a sharp grin at his reaction, fueled by a smug feeling that she was winning this particular sparring match. "Most of the men I take to bed, I do so for an agenda," she retorted, the hand that had once held a grip in his hair sliding into the front of his trousers, while her voice still held the tone of a normal conversation. "It sounds to me as if you were just really craving some... different action."

He took a shaky breath as her hand approached where he so desperately wanted it. His own appendage- which had fallen still in his momentary fumble- slid across her ribs and down her side, over her skirt to slip under the hem and find her thigh.

"I had a lot of agendas," he retorted. "Got a lot done."

"I meant an agenda backed by a financial promise," she amended, her hand sliding over his erection through his pants, her touch still light, teasing. She was very aware of the hand on her thigh. "I got paid for taking the cock I did. I'm a professional."

"I got paid, too," he said, a touch breathless, his attention riveted on her hand at his trousers. "Promotions, favors, leave... coin isn't the-e only currency." He made up for the stutter by sliding his hand a little further up her thigh.

"No, but it's the one with the most receipts," she smirked, watching the width of his pupils, the hue of his cheeks as her hand started up a slow rhythm. "I can prove I wasn't just thirsty for a good fuck."

"Just thirsty... So you were thirsty then,' he managed, squirming slightly as he tried to press his hips more firmly against her hand, the feather-light touch maddening. His fingers found the band of her knickers on her thigh and slipped under the material, an encouragement, brushing against her heat.

Her touch grew firmer as his fingers brushed her, a sort of reward, a definite encouragement. "You get used to a certain amount of fun," she acquiesced, "God knows you start to get frustrated with the ones who don't know what they're doing; you start thinking, 'maybe this one....'"

"You're so high and mighty," he snorted as he slid the pads of his fingers over her folds, which were hot and slick. "You're no better than me. I was king in my world."

She had to bottle up an impatient whine, and just barely managed to keep herself from rocking into his hand. "King? That's the worst place you could be. I was a puppet-master, Colonel; that's where the real power is."

"I wasn't a figurehead," he snorted, feeling her tense and sensing that he was regaining some control. His eyes lit slightly. Her resolve was crumbling, he was winning. "I had power, total control, respect."

She squeezed him through his pants, determined not to let him take control so easily. "You're going to have to do a lot more than suck a few cocks to win respect from me, Colonel."

He moaned slightly. "I didn't just suck some cocks... I fucked people, I fought and threatened, killed if I needed to... I made it to the top."
"But you're here, in Italy, with a completely separate organization," she murmured, triumph flaring up in her at the moan. "Was any of it worth it?"

"Wouldn't be here if I hadn't fought tooth and c-claw for everything I had before that," he snarled, his fingers brushing over her clit teasingly, trying to distract her.

She jolted a little despite herself, her breath catching in her throat, but she powered through, slipping her hand into his pants properly, an effort for payback. "The only thing they did for you was teach you how to shoot," she smirked, eyes dark and wide, "I would have found you in that bar either way."

"You didn't know me before the army," he said with a smile, though it faltered as her hands brushed against his bare skin, lungs seizing for a moment in anticipation. But she went no further and he let his fingers continue their own exploration, still slow, still teasing. "I was nothing but raw energy. They gave me purpose, direction... Even if it was far off the beaten path they were hoping for."

"You can't tell me the first time you ever killed was after the army took you in," she scoffed, fingers tensing for a moment on his throat, a silent urging to hurry the hell up. "Please tell me you killed someone before then."

He got the message as his airway constricted, pushing his fingers into her, curling them slowly. "Oh, I had, but it was out of desperation, need, and I was afraid of it..." He grit his teeth, pressing up into her hand a little.

She moaned, rocking down onto his hand just slightly, her hand picking up pace a little in reward. "Who was the first person little Sebastian Moran ever killed?"

He was lost for a moment as she finally gave him a little movement, biting into his lip as he fingered her almost desperately, giving into the correlation. Then her question sunk in and he paused, pulling away for a moment- Not physically, but mentally. His fingers paused their movements for a heartbeat.

Then it was gone just as soon, and he started moving, the stutter barely noticeable. "My schoolmate," he answered, breathless. "He fascinated me... I wanted to see what his death would look like..."

Her hand shifted from his throat to his shoulder as he sped up, fingers digging into the muscle there, her breath coming harder. She noticed the split second pause, but ignored it, deciding now was not the time to dig into that weak point. "I assume i-it wasn't disappointing, then?"

"God, no," he groaned, watching her curl over him as he added another finger. "He was splayed out in front of me, and there was blood, and he died so beautifully...."

"You've got a bigger blood kink than Jim," she breathed, pushing his trousers further out of the way, impatience starting to build up in her spine. "Lucky me."

He smiled, canines flashing just a bit as she shoved his trousers down with tantalizing purpose. "It's not just a kink... It's... I don't know... a... h-hunger..."

"Lust, then," she corrected, grinding down on his hand unashamedly now, pulling him out of his pants. "D'you happen to have a condom in your pockets?"

He groaned happily at the freedom. "Maybe in my jacket," he muttered distractedly.
She made an unhappy noise. "That's not helpful," she complained, though obviously reluctant to get off him to go to her bags. "Can you reach it from here?"

He reached out, fumbling around and managing to hook his jacket's collar on the chair with the tips of his fingers, pulling it over and digging around the pockets.

She rested her hand on his hip, hoping that the lack of stimulation would give him a cause to hurry a little. It wasn't often that during a teasing session like this that she had the opportunity to turn up the pace, and she was eager to exercise that new power.

He growled slightly at that, finally finding the damned thing and ripping it open. He removed his fingers from her with a wink so that he could get it on properly.

She didn't waste any time sinking down onto him with a relieved groan, fingers flexing into the muscle of his shoulder.

"Jesus Christ," he groaned, head falling back as she was finally around him, the ache of her grip on his shoulder almost completely lost amidst the relief of stimulation.

She had nothing to say to that, too busy starting up a rhythm, her skirt hiked up around her thighs, the only thing that kept their spectacle from being extraordinarily explicit, if Adelia walked in at that moment.

He rolled his hips with her, thighs and abdomen flexing with each movement. His hands slid up her sides, finding her breasts and cupping them possessively.

She was already wound tight from their mutual teasing, and she was having a hard time keeping herself composed, her breath coming in pants and moans, and she drew blood on his shoulder without truly meaning too. Oh well.

The pain mixed beautifully with the pleasure, and he moaned, sitting up and lifting her as he shifted to a kneeling position, giving himself more freedom to move. He pressed his lips to her neck, sucking and biting gently. He was tempted to leave marks, but restrained in case Jim had instructed people to look for just that.

She groaned as he shifted, the angle changing a little bit, and the power behind his movements increasing slightly.

Sebastian slid his hands up along her spine, grasping her shoulders and using that to pull her down on him more firmly. "Fucking hell," he gasped softly as she tightened around him unexpectedly in response.

She did it again, on purpose, grinning at him, though it was more a show of her clenched teeth than anything else, her climax coming closer and closer, building up her spine and into the base of her skull.

He gasped for air, his body burning as she rode him, muscles rolling with each shift and movement. He opened his eyes to find her face, catching a glimpse of it before he came, letting out an unfettered groan of pleasure as he did so.

She came with him, something she never did with anyone but Jim, and that was because he knew how to play her body like a fiddle. She panted for breath against his shoulder, a small shiver going down her spine. "I guarantee you that was better than anything that blushing Italian girl could do, Moran."
He laughed softly, his lips pressing against her pulse. "Oh, but I could kill her afterwards. You, not so much..."

She shook her head a little, smirking and getting off him, flopping back onto the bed. "No, you couldn't. She's one of the boss's employees. Kill her without reason, and he might be..... upset."

He laughed, flopping beside her. "A man can dream. I just keep picturing all the things I could do to her... I was leaning towards taking her to an old church and carving the stained glass pictures into her skin."

"Fancy yourself an artist, or just a good mimic?" she chuckled, content to lie there for a quick minute while she got her breath back.

"Not a terrible artist. I can get by, anyway." He shifted, kissing her ribs before laying back against the pillows and closing his eyes. "But apparently a moot point."

She glanced at him at that, arching an eyebrow just a little. That was... interesting. "Uh huh. Even I can't kill with that kind of impunity," she said, the same amount of amusement in her voice, although she was musing. She sat up, sliding off the bed and stripping down the rest of the way to start getting changed.

He sat up, watching her. "So. What are we doing now?"

"We are settling in, and waiting for the party tomorrow that should let us start ingratiating ourselves to various parties. Mussolini, thank god, will not be there. We'd need to spend two thirds of our time on him if he were, he's such a fickle, vindictive man. But our target will be there, hosting a few foreign dignitaries. That should provide ample cover for a couple with money to spend and a political agenda to enact," she said, redressing in a loose dress that could have been made two miles from there. If she hadn't had to skin of a Londoner, she could have pulled off a convincing Italian.

He nodded, standing as well and dressing in dark slacks and a lightweight crimson shirt. It was warm, but he added his jacket anyway, both to hide his shoulder holster and because he felt odd in just his shirt-sleeves.

She fastened a thin wristwatch onto her arm and checked it, humming to herself. "Hm, I wonder whether or not that girl has made us supper. Do you think you could charm her into it, if she hasn't?"

He laughed. "You give very mixed signals, you know that? A minute ago you were warning me not to make eyes at her, now you're telling me to sing for our supper." He headed for the open door.

"Doing it for your dick is one thing, doing it for a purpose is another," she chuckled, beginning to unpack her things. "So yes, go sing."

"My dick is a purpose unto itself," he snorted, but headed out to find the girl.

She rolled her eyes and continued unpacking, wondering who the hell would be here in his place had she not approached him in that pub.

Chapter End Notes
As it turned out, Adelia had already been making food. She looked flushed, but he wasn't sure if it was because of the heat of the stove or the noises coming from the bedroom. The fact that she turned a few shades darker when she saw him tended to suggest the latter, however. "I hope you've found everything to your satisfaction," she said quickly. He gave her a smile, eyes twinkling. Well, if he had permission to flirt, might as well use it.

*Since when do you care about permission?*

*Good point.*

"Oh, very much so. I was just coming to see about food. Worked up quite an *appetite*..." He eyed her playfully.

If it was possible, she flushed even more, ducking her head a little bit with a sort of embarrassed smile. "Well, signore, it should be finished soon, so you should be able to whet it soon enough," she laughed nervously, giving the sausage cooking in a saucepan a few jabs with her wooden spoon, to an accompanying few hisses.

"And it looks delicious," said with a smile, walking closer. "I'm eager to taste your work." He leaned against the counter, admiring the flush of her skin, barely hidden by her dark hair. It would be so much fun to see that blood running in little rivers down her neck...

She giggled again, trying to hide behind her hair. "Glad you're excited, signore. Will you need me to stay on, or will Ms. Harrison be taking care of things?..." *Properly* was implied.

He raised an eyebrow. "*Ms. Harrison* runs most of this organization, and as such has a great deal on her *mind.*" For the first time there was a hint of a threat in his voice. A warning shot. Then he was all smiles again. "I think we'll be needing you to stay on."

"Ms. Harrison does what, now? Oh, Colonel, I didn't know you thought so highly of me," Lorna interjected smoothly as she entered into the kitchen, her bare feet silent on the brown tile, and Adelia flinched like she'd been slapped. "I do hope that will be finished soon. I'm simply famished."

"Yes, ma'am. Almost done," Adelia said with a quick nod, eyes focused completely on the pan. Moran smirked, reaching past her to get plates and brushing against her back as he did so. He did, however, retrieve only two plates. Oh, he was going to enjoy playing with this woman.

Lorna watched him with amusement in her eyes, her face otherwise neutral. She found him entertaining, but there was no need to encourage him too much. "You needn't make anything for tomorrow evening, Adelia, I doubt we'll be in until late, if at all," she said simply, eyes shifting to the girl.

Adelia nodded quickly, walking over to plate the food for them with a subservient bow and a slight smile at Moran. "Of course, Ms. Harrison."

She rolled her eyes, giving her a wave of her hand. "Don't overdo it."

She nodded quickly, sensing a line. "Of course. I'll leave you now," she said quickly, heading out.

Lorna kept the woman in her peripheral vision until she was out of sight, eating what was in front
of her without question. She wasn't a reader, not like Jim was, but she was good with people, and she knew who was and wasn't a threat. Adelia would never in a million years gather the courage to poison her. So she ate comfortably.

He ate quickly, hungry after their flight and the sex. He sat back eventually, eyes slipping shut in content.

"Do you need a cat nap, Colonel?" She said teasingly, finishing up her meal and pushing the plate aside.

"It might do me good, if tomorrow will be as late a night as you think," he teased with a smile.

"I was being serious about that," she said, smirking a little. "Who knows how long setting up the game here will take? If you think you might need it, get the sleep."

He considered, but then nodded a little. "Not a bad idea. I'll get a bit of sleep, wake me if you need anything."

"I doubt I'll need you, but I will," she nodded, shrugging. "Sleep in whichever bed it seems less likely I'll accidentally wake you up in."

He nodded, walking over to wash his dishes before heading into the bedroom that they hadn't explored yet. He flopped on top of the bed, shifting his hand onto his gun in its holster, and drifting off.

When she headed back upstairs after a glass of wine, she was pleased to find the bed was empty and she'd have it to herself. She was used to men growing obsessions for her, and if she could keep that from happening with Sebastian, she was less likely to face Jim's scrutiny. As she changed into her nightgown, she considered the pros and cons of wrapping Moran around her little finger.

He woke early the next morning. He hadn't slept too deeply, never did, but he was rested nonetheless. He headed downstairs to find that Adelia was in the process of cooking up a large breakfast, and he sat at the table with a mug of coffee, content.

She came down about an hour later, her hair curled and pinned, though her face was free of makeup. She generally didn't care to wear it if she wasn't going anywhere with a dress code, because she could get away without it, but it was early and she wasn't going to put any on just for Moran to see over breakfast. When she got dressed for the party, she'd do her face. She sat across from him with a small swish of her Japanese silk dressing gown, and picked up the newspaper folded on the corner of the table, briefly ignoring the food and plates set out in front of her. "Can one of you bring me a cup of coffee, please?"

Moran glanced at Adelia, who was quick to fill a mug and bring it over, smiling at him as she did. He took the mug from her, setting it in front of Harrison and pushing the cream and sugar her way.

"Stop giving each other eyes in my presence," Lorna said idly, not looking up from her newspaper as she carefully grabbed a nearby plate with a healthy serving of eggs and fruit on it, then taking care of putting in her preferred amounts of cream and sugar into her coffee. Still, not looking away from the paper. "You'll put me off my breakfast."

Moran rolled his eyes as she took his plate, standing and walking over to make another. "Just because we don't all have such intimate nose kisses with our paper each morning doesn't mean
we're making eyes," he retorted.

She folded the paper to give him an arch look, one eyebrow raised imperiously. "You seem to be doubting my peripheral spacial awareness, Moran. Adjust your tone or find out for yourself how good I am at doing or seeing things without looking."

He raised his eyebrows and his hands in surrender. "Yes, ma'am," he said in a tone that was a touch too respectful to be genuine, but without giving the hearer anything to actually complain about. It was a skill he'd honed over the years.

"I'm not your CO in the military, darling, you'd be careful to remember that," she reminded him coolly, unfolding her paper again. "I can do whatever I want to you without worrying about an ethics board. Show me some respect."

He raised an eyebrow, considering her. It was true, she wasn't bound by the restrictions of his usual quarries. She was also... changeable. It was difficult to pin down where he stood with her.

She let the silence stand, deciding to let him absorb that a little before she talked with him again. He was used to old men bowing to rules and convention, not a young woman grabbing life by the throat. It would be an adjustment for him, but she had no doubt he could make it soon enough. If he learned when to bite his tongue and when it was acceptable to let loose, he could be quite comfortable. But no one who worked beneath her got the hang of her hidden lines and boundaries right away. She quietly ate her breakfast, finishing an article about the sporadic bombings in the harbor and moving on to a piece about manufacturing. When she was halfway through with that, she cleared her throat. "A piece of advice to you, Moran. I function perfectly well during the morning, but I by no means enjoy doing so. Best to let sleeping dogs lie, isn't it?"

He wanted to make a snide remark about her not being asleep, but thought better of it and gave a short nod. "Permission to be excused, ma'am?" The tones were submissive, docile. As close to respectful as he could manage when he was rankling.

"Granted," she said graciously, doing him the favor of otherwise ignoring him, her eyes still on the paper. Nobody enjoyed meeting the eyes of the person who had just thoroughly demonstrated their power of rank. Slipping away with dignity still intact was the best you could ask for.

Moran was smart to play it that way. A more foolish man would have fought further, and started digging himself a hole. Not that soldier. She understood why Jim was interested in him.

He left the room quickly, bristling.

Part of him longed to get revenge, but anything he could do would either be petty, or would earn him much more than a nip on the ear. He was unused to being in a position where he had so little power, and whenever he chafed against it it was like a match against a rough surface.

He took a breath and rubbed at his eyes. Play this smart, Moran. It's just a different game, a different challenge. You need to rethink.

Lorna steadfastly ignored Adelia, who was doing her best to blend into the kitchen appliances, and finished up her breakfast, settling back to enjoy her remaining coffee. She'd let Sebastian cool down before they had to get to work. She had no doubt that if Jim were here now he would find the scene amusing.

The Adelia game would have to be conceded. She had won that one, there was nothing gained by hanging onto it. There were thousands of Italian girls waiting to be ensnared, Adelia could be let
Plus, the concession would give Lorna a taste of victory. He couldn't out-grift the grifter. Other strategies would likely prove more fruitful.

A few hours later, she decided that she'd given Moran enough time to cope with being knocked down a few pegs, and she went back upstairs. She got dressed, then knocked on Moran's door. "Put on something nice. The party starts soon."

He was already dressing, having showered, and came out, adjusting a break-away bow tie. He pulled his jacket on, feeling naked without his shoulder holster, but the knife at his calf was reassuring. "I'm ready."

She gave a small smirk, eyeing him in appreciation. "Well don't you look nice?" She said, putting a hand on her hip. She was wearing a scarlet red dress, and lipstick to match. It hugged her curves in a distinctly distracting way.

"I could say the same," he said with a friendly smile. Despite the invitation of her dress to visual exploration, he kept his relaxed gaze upwards, taking little interest in her body as he offered her his arm, manner congenial.

She noticed his lack of interest, but ignored it, deciding to put it to the side for the moment. For now it was time to work. "Are you ready to go?"

He nodded. "I'd like you to run me through the details once more before we arrive, but yes."

"I'll give you the file in the car, and we'll refine our story, too. If anyone looks too closely we'll just have to think on the spot," she said, turning and heading back down the hall.

He nodded in agreement. "Like I said, I'll stay quiet, play the silent type and let you do most of the talking."

She nodded. "That should work nicely. I had Adelia phone for the car, so if you're ready to go we'll leave now," she said as she led the way down the stairs and into the foyer. "Anything last minute that needs taking care of?"

He shook his head. "Not that I can think of, no," he said, offering his arm as they exited the house. Adelia opened the door for them, but he barely glanced at her, just lead Lorna through and out to the waiting car like the girl wasn't there.

She wasn't necessarily impressed with his newfound restraint, but she was somewhere along the lines of pleased that he had bothered to take her warning into consideration. He knew better than to test the will of someone not bound by an ethics board, a general, or the bloody Crown of England. So Jim's slight obsession - alright, no, fascination was more apt - made a little more sense. No one who held Jim's attention for long was even close to being his definition of an idiot.

She got into the back of the car, being careful of her skirt. Wouldn't do to walk around a fascist party with a less than perfect dress.

Harrison seemed content that he was ignoring the girl, but made no comment, which suited him nicely. "Do you have the file?" he asked once they car took off.
She leaned forward, grabbing the file from the front seat and sitting back down to hand it to him. "Yes I do. Have a good read."

He nodded his thanks, immersing himself in memorizing every bit of the facts. It also gave him an excellent excuse to ignore her excepting a few questions for the majority of the car ride.

When they arrived he set the file aside and climbed out, turning to offer her a hand. His expression was polite, caring, but little else. Everything a somewhat bored husband should be.

She paid little actual attention to him, her focus on the mission, not on his little hissy fit. Right now, it was inconsequential how he acted, so long as he did his job. She took his hand delicately, eyes roaming the people moseying their way across the grand front lawn towards the great oak doors of the villa, where several armed men in the Italian armed forces uniform stood guard with machine guns. Ah, fascist Italy. Charming.

She waved off the car and then started across the lawn. "Let me know when you see him. You have a better vantage point than me, and a fair number of people will be attending this little gathering. Otherwise we couldn't slip in so unnoticed."

He nodded just slightly. "Of course." He scanned the crowd carefully, eyes attuned to seeking out strangers at a distance.

It wasn't until Lorna had made their introductions several times that he saw their target, standing with a few men in varying army uniforms, chatting amicably. "There he is," he murmured as they filtered through the crowd, nodding in the man's direction slightly.

Galeazzo Ciano was a dour looking man, who at first glance looked like he'd spent one too many nights staying up late over dusty papers. At second glance, he was a little short. At third, it was extremely obvious that this man had imagined during his youth that he'd be doing something much different from being Minister of Foreign Affairs. Lorna sighed, adjusting her arm through his.

"Alright. We should make our introductions. He's married, so I don't need to appear single immediately. He's Italian, marriages don't really matter."

He nodded a little, adjusting her arm in his. "Sounds ideal. I'll follow your lead." His eyes were on the crowd around them, and the guards. No non-military persons were armed that he could see, but he wouldn't be surprised if many of them had hidden knives like his own. The soldiers were armed modestly, except for those on guard. They were hefting large semi-automatic guns. He was in the process of cataloging entrances and exits when they walked up to Ciano.

Lorna had to hand one thing to Jim; she felt less like she was going to be shot at any wrong move than she normally did on these missions. It was hard to say that was because Moran was good at his job, or because he was just so large in comparison to her that he would make for an ample shield, should it come to that. She let him continue appraising the crowd as they stopped in front of the Minister, her face spreading into a grin.

"Signore Ciano, hello. I don't mean to intrude, but I had to introduce myself. I'm Elena, and this is my husband, Alexander Morstan," she smiled, putting her other hand on Sebastian's arm, to pull him out of any lingering calculations. She could pull off pretending to be of Italian descent with a name like Elena, but him? No one would believe for a second he was from any Southern European stock. Alexander would have to do. "We're over from England; thought it was time we escaped that dreadful place and come back to visit Mother Italy. We're very interested in your policies, so we decided to come to Naples to meet you."
Ciano considered them- Lorna especially, and smiled a politician's smile. "Elena... Alezandair," he said, nodding, accent thick. He extended a hand to shake, first Lorna's, then Sebastian's. Moran toned down his usually iron grip, and gave a hesitant smile, one he usually used on shy women. It wasn't his favorite expression.

"It's a pleasure to meet you both. Welcome to Napoli. She is a beautiful city, if scarred by these trying times."

"I was rather pleased to see the damage centered around only the port, even if that is an awful thing to admit," she sighed, expression pained. "I feel like we've been dodging bombs left and right in England. I suppose I should be happy the damage isn't equal. Of course, Mussolini hasn't exactly been contributing..."

A few heads turned their way, and Ciano looked a bit surprised for a second, but then his smile broadened into something genuine. "Mussolini has many focuses at the moment. Some things must be sacrificed for the good of all. It is hard sometimes to tell what things."

"I've noticed," she snorted, though she had the good grace to look a little nervous about saying something against Mussolini at a Fascist Party's fascist party. "Oh well. Wartime is hard for all. I do appreciate your policies, Minister, so no hard feelings."

"I would be interested to hear your thoughts on the matter, Mrs. Morstan," he said with a smile. "You have the heart of an Italian and the eyes of a foreigner. It is a unique viewpoint- one I am quite interested in. Perhaps dinner...? You would be invited too, of course, Mr. Morstan," he said to Sebastian almost as an afterthought. Moran gave a bright smile, keeping his expression still somewhat nervous.

"That sounds excellent, signore."

Lorna beamed, giving what could be deemed and excited shuffle, squeezing Sebastian's arm. "Fantastic, then we're all agreed. I'll have the housekeeper send over our details, and we'll arrange something, shall we?" she suggested, just on the cusp of appearing a little too excited for a purely 'political' gathering, but that was how she wanted it. God, the Italians. Second easiest marks, after the French.

Ciano nodded happily. "Excellent. Would tomorrow be agreeable? Say..." He pulled a small green book out of his pocket, and opened it to the marked page. "6 o'clock? I'll have my cook whip up something agreeable to this damned heat wave."

"That would be wonderful," Lorna grinned, giving just a small bob of her head. "Is this your place, or will we need to direct our driver to another address?"

"This is mine," he said with an easy smile. "Though at the moment my wife is in the country with most of our staff, so it is far too large."

It wasn't extremely discouraging hearing he was married. He was among the Italian elite, where men considered marriage more of a guideline than a rule. And she had Sebastian with her, to distract the woman if need be. "Ah, yes, the help does often to seem to get in the way, doesn't it," she tsked, eyeing a waiter who went by with a plate full of hors d'oeuvres. "I'm sure we can still find a way to enjoy the evening. Heat wave or not."

He nodded. "I'm certain we will. It is nice to have the place almost to myself, I'll admit, but it does get quiet. My wife, she won't be returning for a few weeks, at the least." He reached out to take Lorna's hand, kissing it chastely. "Mrs. Morstan, it has been a pleasure." He turned to Sebastian and
shook his hand. "Alezandair. Pleased to meet you as well."

Lorna took that as a sign that they were being dismissed, and gave the smallest curtsy. "Have a good evening, signore," she smiled, taking a few steps back before turning around and heading for the table in the center of the room that was displaying the majority of the food, Sebastian's arm still tucked through hers. "We should eat before we leave, make ourselves visible. Don't want Ciano to mention us to any of his friends only for no one to know who we are."

He nodded in agreement, eyeing the spread eagerly. "I won't complain," he murmured, walking with her. "The food looks fantastic."

As they worked their way through the buffet, he returned his attention to the room, continuing to evaluate. It was an old habit by now, though he wasn't familiar with this sort of landscape.

She'd taken enough time to get a handle on Moran's reactions to be able to have some help reading the room. She had a practiced eye on who was and wasn't armed, but not as practiced as a military man. As she finished up a very good cannoli, eyes scanning the room coolly, she spoke again. "A good number of the upper class in here are packing. Interesting. Must be some inner turmoil."

He nodded in agreement. "Keep an eye on the body language. Those near Ciano are relaxed, but ready. The ones that are tense are political rivals. He's backing something," he said softly, taking another couple of meatballs.

She chuckled softly. "That doesn't exactly surprise me. He doesn't always agree with Mussolini, and that means there's bound to be some fighting for position. It'll make our job easier than expected."

He nodded in agreement. "You play into his hand at dinner tomorrow night, and we might be done inside of a week," he chuckled softly, pretending to sip his wine.

"I don't necessarily hold out hope for leaving that soon, but it would be nice to see that look on his face..." she smirked, legitimately sipping at her wine. She had no worries about becoming too drunk to do her job. She was too practiced to slip up.

"His face being Jim's...?" Moran asked as he continued to watch the room absently.

"Mmhm," she agreed, linking her arm through his again just to keep up the appearance of a happy couple. "He gets this face when you manage to surprise him. It's fantastic."

He smiled. "I have glimpsed it once, yes, when I interviewed for this position. I concur, it is a rather fantastic expression." It had been brief, of course, melting into fury at being shot a moment later, but it had been gratifying. "Shall we make our introductions? This place is a security nightmare, I'd rather not remain here too much longer."

"I think we've introduced ourselves to enough people, we can probably just make our excuses and leave," she murmured, giving the crowd another cursory scan in case there was anyone she'd missed. "Or slip out."

"Either way. Which do you prefer this evening- a sudden fainting spell, or stealth?" He set his full wine glass on the bus tray of a passing waiter.

"Stealth, I think. I rather not be detained by an overeager medic," she sighed, simply placing her empty wine glass on the table behind her.

He nodded. "Restroom and exit?" he suggested, heading in that direction.
"Good plan," she agreed, walking with him, turning off the persona she used to attract attention, the smooth slink of her normal gait toned down into something easier to ignore.

He did his best to make himself smaller as well, forcing himself out of his army-stiffened posture into something stooping and less intimidating. It wasn't as dramatic a change as she'd experienced, but it was something.

She noticed and appreciated the adjustment he made, declaring it in her head good work to be noted later. Even if he was determined to pull out the ice queen routine that he had been difficult with her about. That was just the nature of men though, to feel as if they could question her, as if she wasn't a higher ranking member of their crime organization. But she was well on her way to training him out of that habit. As they entered a hall free of the crowd, she ran careful fingers through her hair. "Alright. Let's find a convenient exit, shall we?"

He nodded in agreement, starting to walk down the hall towards a servant entrance he'd seen earlier.

She kept pace with him, only letting him get a step ahead to allow him to open and go through the door first, checking over her shoulder for anybody on their tails. "It's occurring to me now that I don't know if you have any prior experience as a bodyguard, Moran," she said idly, once she'd determined no one was following them. "That's a bit of an alarming realization, considering where we are."

"Jim trusts me to guard him," he pointed out as he cleared the street before they moved into it. He offered her his arm, pace leisurely, for all the world a couple out on an evening stroll. "But if you're concerned, I do have significant training protecting a mark. One of the first things you learn in special operations."

"Jim trusts you, but he hasn't exactly taken you anywhere important. I'm actually beginning to suspect he sent you with me partially as a test run, to make sure you can actually accomplish what he expects you to," she shrugged, slipping her arm into his. "Let's go a few more blocks and then hitch a ride home."

"Fine with me," he agreed, though he would have just as soon gotten in the car sooner. They were in a nice area, but the buildings were full of verandas and passages and shrubbery, and streets turned off at sharp angles. It was a mess of warrens and hiding-holes.

It was inconvenient having to operate without a vehicle of their own to use whenever they needed one, but in order to keep up a fluid cover, it was better to look recent and unsettled to an area. They walked in silence, which she was mostly comfortable with. It required a little less effort, but talking was natural for her. But he was still regaining his pride from her earlier shutdown, so conversation wouldn't be fun for her anyway.

He waved down a car a few blocks away, Lorna 'drunk' on his arm and him with a tipsy smile, and offered the driver a wad of bills to take them home discretely. He gave the man an address a street down from theirs, and they walked the rest of the way in silence.

As soon as they were through the door, they stopped touching, though Lorna detached from him with a frigid air about her. "Do what you please until the dinner party tomorrow," was all she said, though made an effort to say it in a way that wasn't off-putting, and then she went upstairs to change.

He immediately walked around the house, checking that everything was as it should be. Then he went to his own room, and closed the door, changing out of the tux and into pajama trousers. He
lay back on the bed, checking that his knife was still under his pillow, before falling asleep.

She read a book downstairs in the more comfortable room, on the sofa, studiously ignoring Adelia until the girl retired for the night. It was only then that she went back upstairs and fell asleep, more comfortable sleeping without the presence of a woman she had slighted hanging over her.
He woke early, and checked the house again. Finding nothing disturbed, he made himself coffee and sat at the table, reading the paper absently. He wanted to explore the city, but his duty was here, protecting Harrison, so here he stayed.

She had seemed unphased when he ignored her the day before, and the plot seemed childish now that his anger had abated. Still, the basics were in order. He wouldn't let her have any control of him beyond what rank granted her. That was all.

She woke up around dawn, got up, and drew herself a bath. She didn't appreciate the red dust of Italy. It felt like it got in her hair and under her nails, even when she'd really been nowhere it.

After she'd finished, she got out, brushed her dark hair, and went to her wardrobe. She bit her lip. To get to Moran, she would need to play a subtle game. If he knew that she was coming for him, making him her target, he would struggle, and that would make it much more difficult to get him under control. She perused the clothes at her disposable, wondering what would get to him. Ah. Red.

He abandoned the papers eventually. He'd read through the English ones, and his Italian wasn't good enough to get all he wanted out of the native articles. Adelia was up, making breakfast, but he was under orders and didn't so much as look at her, standing and heading for his room to get showered and changed.

She stepped out of her room and almost directly into Moran, and she gave the standard awkward smile and moved out of his way, hands smoothing down the hem of her crimson dress. It was a number she usually reserved for dances, because of the delightfully swishy skirt, which was cinched in at the waist in a way which almost gave the illusion of her being corseted (which, while not the style of the day, was apparently always attractive to men who wanted to put a hand there.) "Has Adelia made breakfast yet? I didn't realize how hungry I was until a few minutes ago, and now I think I might be a little cross if I have to wait."

The red material slipped across her skin, a liquid illusion, and for a moment he was captivated. She looked like she had bathed in blood, like it was dripping down over her skin in sheets. His eyes darkened just slightly...

But that was all. He nodded a little, without pause. "She was making it when I left. It should be ready now." He turned into his room and closed the door calmly, giving no sign of making a retreat. Still, this was certainly going to be a cold shower.

She smirked slightly and headed downstairs to eat breakfast, pleased with the start.

He came down a few minutes later, dressed casually for a moment. A black collared shirt and no tie, his standard uniform in England. He would dress up later. He sat down to breakfast having
prepared himself for her appearance, and kept himself in check without issue. He was a soldier, he knew how to behave. He ate the ham and eggs eagerly, hungry, and didn't shy away from looking at her every once in awhile.

"We have an afternoon to kill before dinnertime," Lorna said when she was finished with her breakfast, her silverware on top of her scraped-clean plate. "And I don't plan on leaving the residence, but if you like you can explore. Not too far, and not too long, but," she paused to shrug, "You're a predator. Keeping you locked up will do me no favors. Get a lay of the land, give us an escape route, if we need it. I can take care of myself."

He considered her quietly, then nodded. "I'll check in on the hour," he said calmly. "If you decide you want to leave the house, I would request that you wait until I return to do so, so I can accompany you per Mr. Moriarty's orders." His voice was almost flat, receiving instructions and relaying them with no emotion involved.

"As you wish," she agreed, giving a noncommittal wave of her hand. "I won't care to leave, though. I've already bathed and I don't fancy getting ash and red dust all over me. Speaking of ash, stay away from the harbor. I don't think we're likely to have another bombing, but I'd rather not risk it, if you please." Her voice remained perfectly pleasant as her attention turned to the papers he'd abandoned on the table, and picked them up to read, effectively dismissing him.

If he continued to behave, she'd reward him with more liberties. As it was, she felt as if she'd asserted her dominance enough for the moment. A healthy respect was all she asked for. Once he'd really gotten used to the idea, she'd ease him into a more comfortable working relationship. But if he ever forgot the lesson that she was currently attempting to teach him, it would be back to this.

He nodded a little, then got up and headed for his room. He pulled on his shoulder holster and a jacket, along with a breakaway tie, grabbing his hat at the door as he headed out.

She was right. He was a predator. It irked him that she thought him so volatile that he couldn't handle a few days in a house, but he wasn't going to argue at his chance at freedom. Adelia being off limits and his feud with Harrison had left him blue-balled and hungry. If he was free to do what he wanted, he was going to make the most of it.

She relaxed a little when he left, though not completely. It was easier to relax when she didn't have to worry about where he was and what he was doing in her immediate vicinity, but she wasn't in the bunker - letting down her guard wasn't an option. And while it was depressing sending someone else out to have a good time without her, she needed to be accessible, should Jim call before the dinner.

He returned on the hour, as he'd said he would, but made the most of the spaces in between. He got a feel for the city: the places where people frequented, the dark corners and bombed-out rubble, the spaces of silence between the pulses of life.

When he returned to the house, he walked around checking everything, then went to get ready for the evening. Harrison was right. The dust and grime of the place got everywhere.

He countered her crimson dress with a matching silk shirt, high-waisted trousers and a crisp black-and-red breakaway tie. He didn't know if the color had been intentional, but if it was he wanted her to know that he'd seen the play.

He emerged pulling on his black jacket, and headed downstairs to see if she was ready to go.

Lorna looked up from the sketch of Adelia she'd been doing on some old parchment, eyes landing
on Sebastian and a small smirk immediately showing on her face. Her move hadn't been a subtle one, and it was amusing to see him point it out. "You look ready to go," she commented, pushing the sketch aside. It was reasonably flattering - she didn't see the need to draw poorly just because she disliked the subject. "Shall we, then?"

He glanced at the sketch, and raised an approving eyebrow. "You're good," he said calmly, before he headed for the door, grabbing his hat off the stand and opening the door for her.

"Thank you. It's always been a hobby of mine," she said, nodding her head in thanks for holding the door and leading the way out.

A cab was waiting, and after checking the man's credentials with a private conversation of code phrases, Sebastian determined he was with the network. He opened the door for Harrison, and climbed in after her. The ride to Ciano's was short, and they didn't discuss much more than a basic overview of the evening's plans. He got out when the door was opened, surveying the area briefly before turning to offer her his arm.

"There's less guards than there were yesterday, that's comforting," Lorna murmured to him as she took his arm, eyes doing a less thorough scan of the grounds.

"Mm... Either he trusts us or underestimates us. Or knows something we don't. I'm hoping for the former." He started up the walkway to the house.

Ciano opened the door to greet them with a bright smile. "Mr. And Mrs. Morstan! A pleasure to see you again," he said, shaking Moran's hand and then taking Lorna's, kissing it chastely. "Please, come in!"

"It's good to see you too, Mr. Ciano," Lorna beamed, noting with interest that he opened his own door. There was something resembling humility in this man. That would make manipulating him into betraying Mussolini more difficult. Ciano closed the door behind them, and gestured them further in.

"Dinner's almost ready! Food to beat the heat, as promised. And I assume you won't mind partaking in some wine?"

"We wouldn't mind at all, Mr. Ciano."

"Please," he said with a laugh, shaking Moran's hand before heading inside. "Call me Galeazzo." He grabbed a decanter of chilled white wine from a bucket of ice and poured three glasses, handing them each theirs with a smile. "I'm so glad that you could make it. It isn't often I get to entertain on a smaller scale."

"I can imagine. The Foreign Minister can't have much time to entertain people separately." Lorna agreed, sipping her wine with a mildly amused look. "We're very honored, in fact. Surprised, but honored."

"Let's say I saw potential," he said, sipping his own wine. "Now... Please, unlay for me in more detail. What brings you here? We were so rushed last evening." He led them through to a large, comfortable sitting area. "Please. Sit."

She took a seat on a leather sofa, crossing her legs. "From what we follow of politics - and what we can follow, considering where we've been - we've noticed your policies. Even though they don't... quite line up with Signore Mussolini's. Although you can't disagree with him too much, if you married his daughter," she chuckled, trying to keep the mood light, although it wouldn't stay that
way for long. "You've done what's asked of you, but you've been against this war. We all know Italy wasn't ready for this. Fascist or non-fascist Italy, we have no business fighting a parallel war with Germany."

Ciano took a seat perched on the arm of a couch, while Moran sat with a careful, respectable distance between himself and Lorna. His job was to remain as unobtrusive as possible.

"I don't think anyone wants this war, Mrs. Morstan," their mark said with a smooth smile and another sip of wine. "Though you do speak truly- Our great leader and I do not always see eye-to-eye. Still, differing opinions only strengthen a state. Tell me, though, please- why does this difference interest you?" His eyes were sharp, interested.

"Because someone told the Belgians you were coming, and it wasn't Mussolini," she replied, looking at him just as sharply. "Someone in your government thinks Italy isn't prepared to go the distance. And they're right to be worried. When Germany lost the last war, they were punished, weren't they?" She raised her eyebrows, considering the both of them, and pausing to sip her wine. "I've seen Churchill, I've been in England. That's not going to be a simple victory. And with America up in the air..."

"Such words... such suggestions are unusual, nowadays, Mrs. Morstan." The way he said unusual implied dangerous. "Even if someone were to have told the Belgians, such a person would long ago have been found out. There are no informants in the great Mussolini's government. You are correct in a few things, however. Germany's punishment in the last war was quite grave, and we all watch America with bated breath. Still, this is the light of things: last time Germany lost. A man such as Hitler does not easily find defeat, no matter who may oppose him."

She respected that he denied his involvement in informing Belgium; to do anything else would have been foolish at this point in time. "Even a fanatic only needs to be shot by one bullet for his life to end, Galeazzo," she said simply. "And a man such as him will not share power. If he defeats the rest of Europe, he will turn on his allies."

"Fanatic... A word used to describe those whose charisma is great but whose results are uncertain, I think," Ciano said with a small smile. "Emperor Octavius was a fanatic, I should think. But also Nero. Tell me, will Hitler see Rome rise, or burn? Who can say? As for his allies... well. Mussolini trusts the man. As for me... I trust that he will be worse to his enemies than his friends, should he succeed. But how much worse?"

He looked up as a man in a crisp uniform entered the room. "Signore... Dinner awaits your convenience."

"Thank you, Voletti." Ciano stood. "My dear guests, if you would follow me through?"

"That sounds delightful," she smiled, standing gracefully, ever the perfect guest. "Discussion always flows easier with food as lubricant."

"Truly, you do capture the Italian spirit with incredible insight," their host said with a laugh. He led them through to a small, private dining room, the eight-person table set for three. Ciano took the head of the table, pulling Lorna's chair on his right out for her before he and Moran took their seats. "As promised, a meal to beat the heat," he said with a smile, as the first course- a crisp chilled olive and spinach salad- was set before them by his staff. The one he'd called Voletti refreshed their wine glasses, and Ciano raised his. "A toast," he said, looking at Lorna and then Moran. "To new friendships, strong alliances, and a swift end to the war."

Lorna clinked her glass with theirs, smiling wryly.
A few days later, they walked back through the door to their temporary home, returning from another dinner with Ciano. She was frustrated. Ciano wouldn't make a move on her, and any insinuation she made of making one herself, he withdrew from, despite the fact that he remained outwardly, (if chastely) flirtatious.

Lorna waited only for the door to click shut before she grabbed Moran's collar and shoved him back against it with the pure power of surprise, and kissed him hard.

He caught her wrist on the way in, waiting to see what she did next before he decided whether to break it or not. Then she was kissing him, roughly, and he smirked a bit in victory at her being the one to break the ice age first. He kissed her back, no holds barred, hand dropping her wrist and sliding around her waist. Still, he was waiting for a trap, and so when she pulled back for air his first words were "Why are we snogging?"

Something in her relaxed when he kissed back, but she still growled her answer, fingers tight in his shirt. "Because I can't Ciano to even glance at my cleavage, let alone even kiss me," she said bitterly, not drawing out of his space, looking up at him through her lashes, gaze intense. "Needed to make sure it's not me."

"It's not you," he shot back dryly. "Believe me." He didn't move to kiss her again, still leaving the ball in her court. He wouldn't come off as distracted. Desiring her. "Maybe you just aren't his type. His wife certainly isn't," he added with a shrug. "I walked past the master bedroom when I was using the restroom. They sleep in separate beds."

"That doesn't necessarily mean anything. I'm the only person Jim fucks with anything resembling regularity, and I live entire floors above him," she shook her head, eyes wandering off him for a moment, thinking. "But you could be right, I suppose. Wouldn't be the first time. First time that anyone's tried to pretend so outwardly that they were interested, maybe," she said, voice thoughtful, then her eyes came back to him, and she smirked, coming back to the present. "Why do you look disinterested? Don't tell me it's because I pulled rank on you...."

"Fucking and being married are separate animals, and Jim is never a good example of regular behavior," he said with a snort. "Or maybe the man just loves his wife. Who knows?" He raised an eyebrow at her next question, unperturbed. "You suggested I shouldn't be quite so distracted, and remember your position. Did I misinterpret your instructions?" His eyes were cool.

She laughed, releasing her hold from his shirt and stepping back, deciding if he was going to play cold, so would she. "Distracted from work, Moran. Right now, I am your work," she pointed out, voice entirely amused. "As for remembering my position - all you need to do to get along with me is to recognize the boundaries. You'll never learn them if you refuse to even try and act congenial. Be insolent all you want while we're fucking - it's the only time I dare be it with Jim. But don't push your luck outside of it."

His expression was still calm, unbothered. "I am learning your boundaries, and I am acting congenial. The only one making remarks is you." That was a risky sentence, but it was said in a docile enough tone. "I don't recall being insolent, only enjoying the local wildlife-" Here he gave a nod towards Adelia's room- "But as that seemed to make you... uncomfortable, I stopped. If you have further comments on my performance, or instances of insolence, I'd be happy to hear them."

She rolled her eyes at him. "Moran, you can be insolent without saying anything. When I told you to behave, you - admittedly, pretty quietly - challenged my authority. You thought you could get..."
away with it, because of what you used to do in the army. I'm not keeping grudges, Moran. I was willing to let it be a slap on the wrist. But you've been taking on my so-called role of 'ice queen,' not me. Now lighten up a little, Christ. Have a real drink."

He didn't falter. "I'll pass, thank you," he said calmly. "I want to add what I learned of Ciano's house to the schematics before I lose details. If you'll excuse me..." He nodded slightly, the barest inflection towards a bow, and headed for his room.

"Jesus Christ..." she muttered, waving a hand in his direction before she headed for her own room to get undressed.
It was a few hours later that it happened. The ink was drying on the addition to the schematics, and he'd changed into flannel trousers to sleep. He was reading in bed when the door opened quietly.

His hand was on his knife beneath his pillow before he could even fully process, but then he saw it was Adelia. He didn't relax—odd behavior was plenty of reason for suspicion—but he kept the knife hidden.

"Adelia...? What's the matter?"

"Nothing," she shook her head, a small smile on her lips. "I just... wanted to see you. While she isn't around."

Danger... He sat up, considering her coolly. "I don't think that's wise. I assure you any business you might have can be conducted in her presence."

"I don't think that her presence is really a good idea, Signore Moran," she murmured, shutting the door behind her and stepping further into the room, her hand straying to the first button on her dress.

He stood, then, leaving the knife under his pillow and shaking his head. "Adelia, I'm under orders, alright? You need to leave."

She took a few more steps, undoing the button. "She's asleep, signore. Don't worry. She won't know anything," she said softly, still approaching him, bare feet quiet on the floor.

"I don't care," he said, keeping his eyes on her face. Whatever disagreements he might have with Harrison, orders were orders. And there was no way the woman wouldn't find out. "Go, alright? I don't want you."

She shook her head. "We both know that's not true," she said, two buttons open now, the third well on its way. "I've seen the way you look at me...."

She jumped as the door opened. Lorna stood there, in her dressing gown, her hair in a loose bun. A book was in her hand.

"What's this?"

He stared at Lorna, evaluating the situation and the possible outcomes. There was only one path where he came away clean.

"Adelia here was attempting to convince me that you had been mistaken to forbid me from fucking her." The Italian woman blushed at the coarse language, but he didn't balk. "I was suggesting
otherwise. Is everything alright out there?" He wasn't sure if the visit had had to do with Adelia or not. It was best not to assume.

"I was merely bringing you a book Ciano mentioned this evening, to give us both a talking point for when we see him again," she said, setting the book down on the shelf by the door. Her eyes were locked on Adelia. "Moran, you have a knife in here, correct?"

He nodded, slipping his hand under his pillow and walking over, watching her carefully as he handed the knife to her in case she came at him. He wasn't sure what her game was here.

She took it gently, her fingers almost loose on the hilt, watching as Adelia's face morphed from worry to outright fear, her eyes on the knife. "I thought I made it very clear what I expected from the two of you, Adelia," Lorna murmured, stepping forward to brush her free hand over the other woman's cheek before it slid back and locked in her hair, tight and probably slightly painful, considering the way the girl's breath hitched. "Moran listened to me. You didn't. That was a mistake." She walked around Adelia, keeping her hand in her hair, and suddenly brutally kicked the back of her legs, sending her down onto her knees, where Lorna planted her feet, keeping her pinned there, ignoring as the girl starting to cry.

Her fingers adjusted their grip on the knife, going from casual to deadly in a second.

The next second, she plunged the blade into the back of the woman's neck, just to the left of the spinal cord, the sharp other end easily piercing through the other side. Without pausing to let Adelia scream, she cut to the right, sawing through sinews, her hand jumping as she hit bone. She was going to have the girl's head.

Moran watched at first with indifference, expecting a fear tactic and little more, but then suddenly the point of his knife was sprouting from Adelia's neck.

Her mouth opened in a gurgling cry of pain and abject terror as Harrison started sawing across, but he barely noticed, eyes on his boss with renewed interest. His nostrils flared slightly as they encountered the scent of blood, and he took a slow breath, walking forward as the knife finally cleared the spine. Adelia had been dead for a few long seconds by that point, but Lorna showed no sign of slowing. The efficient brutality with which she worked was completely unexpected, and the calm determination in her eyes told him that this was certainly not the first time she'd done something like this.

It occurred to him somewhere that he was going to have to cook breakfast, but he didn't care in the slightest. His eyes were dark with bloodlust and newfound respect as the knife finally cleared, leaving Adelia's head half severed. Both of them were splattered with blood.

Lorna dropped the knife on the floor as the resistance ceased and she was left practically holding Adelia's head on, derision entering her face. Her arms and front were coated in arterial blood, her white nightgown soaked with it. Ruined. Disappointing. "I wonder if Jim has a cleaning crew based here. I certainly don't feel like dealing with it," she said simply, looking largely unaffected by the entire process except for the fact that her pupils were huge and dark. "Sorry about the mess. You might need to sleep somewhere else."

He took a slow breath, then nodded, his pupils matching hers. "I'll call the cleaning crew. Jim gave me a number in my information packet. Don't worry about the mess, believe me." He eyed her up and down but forced restraint, closing his eyes until he had turned away, heading for the phone, his heart racing. He was going to remember her covered in blood like that for a very long time.

But there was also a new ease running under the surface. She was someone who understood. He
had seen her eyes. She felt that thrill as much as he did.

She stayed where she was after he had left the room, standing there considering the body, the blood on the floor, reliving the look in his eyes as she'd sliced through Adelia's throat, the way he hadn't blinked as a droplet of blood had rolled down his cheek. Funny that Jim's new recruit who he liked so much was just as bloodthirsty as her. Well, she'd picked him up in that pub for that very reason, hadn't she?

He returned a few minutes later with some damp rags, handing her one. "Cleanup is on their way. They should be here in ten minutes." He stared down at Adelia, and smirked slightly. "Odd. She was just destined for this in the end, wasn't she? If you hadn't forbidden me from it I would have done the same thing. Or near as like." There was no annoyance in his voice, just pure, dark amusement.

She chuckled, using the rag to wipe down her red arms, which didn't do much, mostly smearing it around. She sighed. "This isn't going to do it. Too much blood, not enough rag. Do you need help with your hair? You've got some blood in it. Might stain."

"What, you don't think pink is my color?" he asked with a grin, before sighing and nodding a bit. "Probably not a bad idea," he admitted with a laugh.

He was struggling to keep himself in check. If he hadn't been in the military, he would have already been kissing her. But if they'd taught him anything, it was restraint. He wasn't sure where that line was. So, if she wanted to help get the blood out of his hair... well, he'd see where they ended up.

She smirked, beckoning him with a wave of her hand to follow her, and she led him to the bathroom in the hallway, which was the biggest one in the house. She was pleased that he was joking again. Progress had been made.

When they were in the bathroom, she took a moment and considered the sink and the shower, and then herself. "I was going to wash you off in the sink, but I'm dripping blood just standing here. For the sake of the cleaners, shower it is. Take off what you want salvaged."

He blinked, then nodded just a little, glancing down at his blood-spattered pajama trousers. Favorites, and possibly still savable. He stripped them off, leaving him in just his boxers, and went to turn the water on, getting it running toward hot.

She decided that in the sake of cleanliness she would leave on her blood-soaked dressing gown and her night slip. At least the shower would wash the excess out before she got out again. As much as she wanted to press up against Moran without anything in the way, it would be better to drip watery pink instead of thick red. She waited a moment until the water heated up, then stepped under the stream. "Alright, c'mon. Rinse your hair out before it stains. Then I'll give you a good scrub, make sure you got it all," she said, her tone businesslike, though her eyes still betrayed her accelerated heart rate. Judging by him, the blood pouring off of her wasn't helping him much, either.

He stepped into the hot water, though cold would have been a better strategic choice at this point, and tilted his head under the stream of water, scrubbing his head to work the blood out. He kept his eyes closed, needing a break, but when he opened his eyes again there she was, in a soaked and see-through once-white nightgown, dripping blood onto the shower floor, her every curve shown off in crimson detail by the clinging fabric. He took a slow breath, but there were physical reactions he could do nothing about.

She busied herself with the soap, scrubbing as much blood out of her clothes as possible while she was still in a clean environment, though it wasn't long before she admitted to herself that she was
just putting off looking at him. She wanted him to pick her up and shove her against the wall, to get them both covered in blood again, but he'd spurned her only a few hours earlier, and she prided herself on not taking something that personal unless they consented, especially from Jim's employees, who might feel pressured otherwise. She cleared her throat when she looked up at him finally, and hoped that the way her cheeks reddened was hidden by the heat of the shower. She held up the shampoo. "Soap time?"

He nodded, reaching out and taking the bottle, considering her. Her eyes were dark, face flush, but he had had that look dozens of times after a kill. He poured a little shampoo into his hand, scrubbing it through his hair and rinsing again before considering her. "You're covered too. Here." He poured a much larger dollop into his hand and reached out, giving her a chance to move away before he started working it through her hair, fingers massaging her scalp gently and working suds down her dark locks. The bubbles were quickly tinged pink, and rivulets of red water ran down his forearms as he worked.

She relaxed under his touch, though she had to keep stifling little shivers from running down her spine, feeling like the base of her neck was humming with energy. She stepped a little closer, brushed him before she thought she would, and realized it wasn't just her. "You seem a little... distracted, Sebastian."

He started just slightly when she brushed against him, biting his tongue slightly as he continued to work the shampoo through his hair. "That depends. Are you asking as my boss, or as the half-naked blood-soaked woman I'm sharing a shower with. The answer will vary." His tone was playful.

She smirked. "I used your first name. And I didn't move away. And I'm very willingly continuing to share the shower with you. How does that affect your answer?"

He grinned. "If that's the case.... then my answer is probably somewhere along the lines of this," he said, pushing her soapy hair enough to the side to stoop and kiss the back of her neck, one hand going up, fingers threading into the hair near her scalp.

She shivered for real this time and leaned back into him, brushing against him again, this time on purpose. "Good answer," she purred.

He hummed slightly as she brushed against him, smiling, a hand sliding around her waist and pulling her closer to him. "You really do look fucking irresistible in crimson, I'll have you know," he muttered, nipping the side of her neck and then tracing his tongue over a lingering streak of blood at her neckline.

"Good; I've been wearing it to fuck with you," she grinned, tilting her head to the side, giving him better access for his teeth, even if they had to be gentle.

"Yes, I know," he snorted, nipping her neck as invited. The arm around her waist shifted, hand sliding up over her stomach to palm her breast through the sheer fabric of her nightgown. "Not your most subtle play."

"You haven't seen my subtle plays," she grinned, shifting under his hand, her arse grinding back into his very prominent erection. "Poor Adelia... throwing herself at you without even knowing what a monster you are.... Literally, or figuratively."

"I suppose if they were properly subtle, I wouldn't have," he agreed, words tripping slightly as she ground against him. "Literally I understand, I do kill people for the hell of it, but figuratively?" He turned her to face him, kissing her slowly, groaning as his inquisitive tongue was rewarded by lips
coated in flecks of blood. The taste was copper on his tongue.

"The literal part isn't you killing people," she said when they broke apart for breath, though she stopped to kiss him again, teeth nipping at his lip. "The literal part is the cock in your pants."

"Ah. So I see," he chuckled, turning to back her against the shower wall, watching red speckle against the white porcelain. He considered her for a moment, then grinned, kneeling in front of her and kissing her sternum before shifting downward, hands finding her thighs beneath her nightgown and sliding upwards, bringing the material with them.

She slid a hand in his hair, looking down at him with lust-darkened eyes, entranced by the way the water rolled off his powerful shoulders, the light catching on his slick collarbones. He was such a beautiful young man it took her breath away. No wonder he’d been able to sucker so many superior officers into bed with him. "You wouldn't have made a bad grifter, you know," she smirked, tightening her grip in his hair just for a moment, to see what reaction it gave her. "You're filthy attractive."

His eyes closed for a second when she gripped his hair, and he smirked, turning his head slightly to torque her grip even tighter. Then he turned his attention back to her body, to her now-bared thighs, which he was soon pressing his lips to, tongue trailing across her smooth skin as his hands pushed the material of her gown up past her waist.

"Something tells me there's more to grifting than a pretty face," he murmured into her skin, the thumb of one hand finding her core and tracing over it.

Her breath hitched just a little at his touch, tugging his hair a little in appreciation. "It does, but considering what you've done in the military... you seem pretty well cut out for it," she pointed out, voice just barely audible over the shower.

He kissed the inside of her thigh, tempted to leave a mark but aware that wasn't an option at the moment. Instead, he shifted upwards, tongue replacing his thumb, toying slowly across her heat. "If you say so... I think you'd find men as blue-balled as soldiers are easy targets, though..." he replied, his lips just brushing against her warmth.

"I think most men are easy targets," she retorted, nails scraping against his scalp as a distraction, to keep her hips still. She wouldn't immediately show how impatient she was.

He hummed in agreement, smiling at how hot she was against his tongue as he lifted her by her hips, settling her legs over his shoulders and supporting her weight with his hands as his tongue spread her and started exploring casually, tracing each line and fold like he was making a map.

"Fuck," she muttered, shivering under him, digging her heels into his back, trying to urge him on a little. How a man who had spent most of his time fucking men and murdering woman, she couldn't figure out how he was so good at this for his age....

He laughed slightly as her legs tensed, heels pressing into his back like she was urging a horse forward. He kept his pace, however, moving upwards and taking her clit into his mouth for a moment, tongue circling and pressing, before he moved downwards again, pushing his tongue into her entrance slowly. He was going to take this at an infuriating pace, his personal revenge for the red dress.

She groaned, partially because it was good and partially because it was frustrating. He was being so slow - which sometimes she could put up with, but mostly only from Jim - and she'd killed someone not even thirty minutes ago. She was wound up already, and he was just winding her that
little bit tighter.

Her grip on his hair was almost savage at this point, her body tense as he moved against it. He dragged things out for another minute or so, but eventually he knew he was at the tipping point between a good fuck and over stimulation, so he started to move more quickly, dropping the anticipation in favor of reward, his nose nudging her clit as his tongue started to move more freely.

She starting to pant as he got her closer, breath coming in high pitched gasps, one hand locked in his hair and the other tangled in her own, hips arching off the wall and into him. She went silent as she came, breath stuck in her throat, toes curling on his back. "Fuck," she breathed, when she was able, trying to catch her breath.

He eased carefully away when she relaxed, lithe arms shifting her off of his shoulders and lowering her to the floor of the shower, the warm water pattering against their sides. He was grinning, cheeks flush, his wet hair sticking up on end in clumps where she had grabbed it.

He watched her as she recovered herself, pleased by the limp, relaxed sprawl of her frame. It reminded him of the dozens of times he had done this before. That jelly-limbs effect made it easy to lock handcuffs in place, to slit throats, to place gags... Those few seconds of vulnerability had been his victory on so many occasions, and the thought of all of them made his pulse increase, eyes black.

"Jesus Christ, Moran," she breathed, her cheeks pink, her lungs still working a little hard. "You've certainly had a lot of practice with that, haven't you? Fuck..."

He laughed. "Smart, attractive women are always on the lookout for drugs," he retorted. "But few object to a good orgasm."

"No, no, they do not," she agreed, giving an amazed sort of chuckle. She looked back at him, eyes on his rumpled hair. "Now, what can I do to repay you for such a wondrous gift?"

He gave Lorna a crooked smile, teeth flashing for just a moment as he considered that. "Surprise me," he said finally, studying her with interest. "Someone of your profession... You must have a specialty...."

"I specialize in the entire area, you must remember," she smirked, shifting to be properly sitting and then moving to peel off her soaked gown, letting it fall onto the floor beside her with a wet smack. "What have you been missing? What has the average girl denied you?"

He stared at her for a long moment, eyes roving her body slowly before meeting her gaze. When he spoke, his teeth carved around the words roughly. "Challenge."

She leaned forward, moving her hands to brace on his thighs, her face only a few inches from him. "You want to fight?" She asked, squeezing his legs. "Challenge is a broad statement."

He takes a slow breath, leaning forward and closing the last inch, kissing her slowly and nipping his bottom lip. "You, who seems to have a running list of my faults... You can't find out how to challenge me?"

"Contrary to what you may believe, I don't spend all my time thinking about you," she smirked, hand wandering further inward. "You're not my mark, you're a complex predator. You don't have an ordinary man's idea of a challenge. With you, I don't know whether or not you want blood."

He laughed at that, not taking offense, leaning forward and biting the side of her neck, wishing he could bruise, break skin. "I always want blood. But seeing as I can't mark you... Why don't we see
what marks you can make, for a change?"

She grinned. "Alright. But you're going to need to fuck it out of me."

He laughed. "That I can do. Here, or somewhere more comfortable?"

"Not here," she shook her head. "I want the cleaners to have to work around us. As soon as you call them, that is."

"I already called them, remember?" he said, standing and reaching out to give her a hand up. They rinsed off briefly, and then he turned off the water, stepping out. "They should be here any minute."

She stepped out after him, reaching for a towel. "You may choose the locale. I just want them to know."

He laughed. "Oh, I liked the sound of them working around us quite a bit," he chuckled.

"Delightful. It will cause us to need another shower, but, well, I think that's worth it," she smirked, drying off her hair just a little before she dropped the towel and left the room, and headed for his bedroom. "No time to waste, then."

"No, none at all," he agreed, following after her, admiring the curves of her body as he followed after, leaving his towel as well. His strides let him catch up, and he grabbed her as she entered his room, pulling her against him and biting the back of her neck.

She gasped, arching back into him, letting out a small sound of amusement as she came across his soaked pants, which did absolutely nothing to hide his erection. "Those are going to need to go," she murmured, grinding back into him on purpose this time.

He groaned in agreement, rutting up against her slightly before stepping back just enough to work his way out of the garment and chuck it aside.

She walked out further into the room, surveying the blood and the corpse. "Shove me against or onto what you want to fuck, and then I'll start drawing blood."

"That was clinical," he muttered, grinning and surveying the blood as well. "The floor would be messy, but fucking hell I want to see you covered in blood again."

"I aim to please," she grinned, turning around and reaching out to grab his hand, and dragged down him down to the floor with her, promptly climbing into his lap.

He hummed happily at that, kissing her hungrily as she positioned herself, his hands sliding up her back.

She wasn't getting very messy, sitting on top of him like this, but they were just starting round 2. She kissed him again, grinding her hips forward again. Downstairs, she heard the door being unlocked and opened. Oooh, company.

He groaned slightly when he heard the door open, and decided he didn't necessarily have as much time as he would like with those lovely pools of blood. So he knelt up, her weight on his arms as he shifted her down and back, onto the carpet. He planted his hands on either side of her, thick, dark fluid seeping up between his fingers.

She couldn't help but laugh as she hit the cooling blood. "Oh, it's not warm anymore," she
chuckled, scratching her nails lightly down his stomach. "Warm me up?"

He shivered under her touch, and smirked a little. "Yes ma'am," he muttered, bending down to nip at her collarbone before ducking slightly to press his mouth to the skin beneath her breast, biting and sucking gently. His hand rose up to cup her other breast, leaving red smears wherever he touched, which just made him grin, eyes darkening. "For once I can mark you," he said with a grin. "A map of everywhere I touch you..."

"Paint me as much as you care to," she snickered, lacing her hands around his neck and pulling him in to bite his lip, a cheeky grin on her face.

He took that to heart, his hands leaving dark streaks across her torso and upper thighs as his tongue turned to exploring her bloody breast, the metallic tang combining with the softness of her skin irresistibly.

The sound of footsteps reaching the second floor reached her ears, and she slid a hand into Moran's hair to urge him on, hurry him up. "Let's give them a real surprise," she murmured, grip tightening in his hair, pulling him up. "Fuck me."

He groaned in protest at being pulled away from his work, but was suddenly very interested in where she was leading this project. He grinned, teeth stained red, and reached down between them to get his cock in place. She shifted her thighs up, and a moment later he was pressing into her, waiting just a moment for her to adjust before he started moving.

She let out her first groan as the first cleaner to a step into the room, dragging her nails down Moran's back, much harder than she normally would have.

"Ma che cazzo? Cos'è questo?" What the fuck? What is this? One of the cleaners exclaimed, stopping in the doorway. The second one pushed past him, and sounded weary and defeated.

"Lavoro intorno loro. Non faccia le domande." Work around them. Don't ask questions.

He laughed as they entered, absently picking up bits of the conversation, but his concentration faltered as Lorna clawed down his back. He swore, losing rhythm for a second as his hips surged forward. He pressed his forehead against her shoulder, moving his hips powerfully.

She moaned as his rhythm changed, hand going to his hip, nails digging in there too. She pulled him harder against her, gasping when he went just a little bit deeper. The cleaners got to work around them, one still muttering under his breath.

He could feel the sting of blood welling up on his back, and moaned. He opened his eyes to look at her, and found her smeared in blood, her dark hair fanned out around her and soaked. "Jesus Christ," he muttered, laughing smally as his pupils blew out wide.

She smirked at him, her own interest increasing in response to his, scraping the skin on his hip and rolling her own up into him, with a sticky sound of blood. "You really like red, don't you?"

"Blood, mostly," he returned, a bit breathless. "Not just the color... The...The smell, the taste...

He could feel the eyes of the workers, only a few feet away, and he laughed, drunk on the power of forcing them to work here, while they fucked. There was nothing they could do about it. It was enthralling.

She was amused, but after a moment she let her attention return to the way he was fucking her, biting her lip for a moment. "You know," she breathed, if you want me to really mark you up, you're going to need to do better than this."
He smirked at her challenge, and after a moment pulled away, lithe arms encircling her waist and hauling her up and around onto her hands and knees. Her back was covered in blood, like she had bathed in it, and it ran in rivulets down her arms. He knelt up behind her without pause, pushing into her again and starting to snap his hips forward, circling them slightly with each thrust. One hand was at her hips, pulling her back against him, and the other was pressed against her back, sliding slightly in the blood.

She cried out wordlessly, the new angle sending a shudder up her spine, her hands clawing for grip on the bloodied carpet for a moment, too overwhelmed by the lust that had overtaken her to do much other than take him for a moment. When she regained herself she reached back with one hand, raking her nails hard across his thigh in reward. One of the cleaners whistled.

He let out a sharp exhale as her nails clawed furrows into his thigh, and briefly considered how much fun it would be to kill this cleaning crew and make another crew come clean them up. But one of Moriarty's people was already dead, and he doubted the man would appreciate two more.

He reached down to spread Harrison's legs a little, pushing her hips forward and supporting her weight as he moved with her, her legs slanting back past his hips as he got a better angle.

She nearly reminded him that she was not a wheelbarrow before he hit a spot inside of her that made her drop her weight to one elbow, back arching down, hips jolting away from his for a moment, the sensation too much. "Fucking HELL," she gasped, fingers scratching still deeper at his thigh. "Do that again."

He looked up, surprised, thinking for a moment that he had hurt her, but then he grinned and obeyed, one arm slung fully under her hips now, the other bracing on the floor for support as he worked to hit the same angle again.

He hit it again and she just about lost her mind, all thought ejected from her head at once, her being reduced to her forearm covered in blood, his hand under her hips, the sheer heat and energy building up in her stomach, and the way every breath was a whine, a plea for more, no longer capable of coherent words.

The thrill of power that went through him was extraordinary. This was different than when he gained control of the women he coerced, different than when his officers had fallen to his temptation. This was someone he respected, losing herself under him. His world narrowed to her, to the noises she made with each of his movements, to the desperate way her hips chased his, the heaving of her back with her short breaths and the blood that rolled along her skin. His body was heat and power, tension rolling up across his back as he approached his climax, but that was secondary to the feeling of control coursing through his mind.

It didn't take very much time at all for her to hurtle into coming, a ragged shout leaving her lips as she shoved herself back against him, trembling from head to toe, feeling like she was about to burst it felt so goddamn good.

It took him a few more solid thrusts to get to his climax. He thought about trying to bring her over a second time, but she seemed to be well on her way to an exhaustive state. He pulled out at the last minute, grabbing his cock and finishing himself off with a short yell, coming across her back. He shifted off to the side, then, laying on the bloody ground. The cleaners had managed to mop up what was around them, but under them was a different challenge. He chuckled a little, groaning tiredly.

She let herself drop onto her side after he pulled away, her heart beating erratically in her chest, which was also heaving for breath. She couldn't bring herself to move any farther, especially not
with the aftershocks, which left her pliant and breathless, every drop of energy wrung from her body. They lay there for a few minutes before the feeling of bodily fluids cooling on her skin became too uncomfortable to ignore. "Moran... be a dear and help me.. get back into the shower, will you?" she groaned, looking at him with half-lidded eyes.

He nodded, mustering himself and sitting up with a small groan. He considered her for a moment, before standing and scooping her liquid form up into his arms, heading for the bathroom, leaving sticky footprints. He heard the rapid, quiet chatter of the cleaners as they left, but didn't have the concentration to translate.

He set her down on the bathroom floor, turning to get the shower going. The water was hot almost immediately, warmed for their previous shower, and he offered her a hand to get up and in.

She mustered the strength to reach up and take his hand, and let her haul her up, and then as soon as she stepped into the shower, she sat back down, leaning against the wall, looking rather like she'd just been in a fight for her life. "Good god, man. I think you may have fucked the life from me," she chuckled wearily, letting her eyes close under the pleasant heat of the shower.

He stepped into the water, starting to rinse the gore off. "I'll try not to let that go to my head," he said with a small smirk.

She chuckled again, watched the water run red off her for a moment, then shut her eyes, too exhausted to keep them open. She hadn't had a fuck like that in ages. Jim was a skilled lover, that wasn't in any doubt, but he was also usually a selfish one. She got off, yes, he wasn't fool enough to let her go unsatisfied (unless he was punishing her) but it was a rare event that he put in the particular brand of effort Moran had just put in, which was her favorite.

As soon as she had that thought, she shut it down. If she let that thought come out anywhere even close to Jim, she'd pay for it. Moran too, probably.

He finished washing off, then soaped up a clean cloth and handed it to her. "Here. I'm not the only one who'll stain," he chuckled. "Your skin is almost as light as my hair."

She couldn't help but laugh a little at that, opening her eyes and taking the cloth from him. "Yeah, you've got a point," she smiled, and shifted herself further under the spray, beginning to scrub herself down. "Thanks."

He nodded a little, still smirking. He stepped out of the water so that he wouldn't block it for her, and then laughed a little. "Christ, their faces."

"I'm sure they'll be talking about this one for a long time," she agreed, lazily soaping up her hair. "I'd be interested to see if they lodge a formal complaint against me. They probably know better than that, though."

"It would be interesting if they did. Wouldn't that just end up on your desk anyway? Or would it go straight to Jim?" He leaned against the wall, relaxing.

"It might end up on my desk, but I can't just hide things from Jim, things don't work that way," she said, deciding she was clean enough and reaching to turn off the shower, then examining the floor, figuring out how she should get up.

He solved the issue for her, reaching down to offer her a hand again, pulling her to her feet and grabbing a towel off the rack, handing it to her. He grabbed the one he'd had before from where he'd dropped it, drying off properly this time. He was tired. It had to be well past midnight now. He
wrapped the towel around himself. "What time should I make breakfast tomorrow?"

"You're a military man, you get up early, right? I should get up maybe an hour after sunrise. So a few hours after you get up is probably alright," she yawned, very lazily drying herself off. "I think the cleaners stole your sheets. If you can't find new ones you may sleep with me. Least I can do for that truly delightful fuck."

He nodded a little in thanks. "Let me look around," he said, heading out into the hall. True to form, his bed was stripped bare. He got dressed in pajamas, then found the linen closet, but none of the sheets there would fit the bed he was sleeping on. He wasn't very put out. He headed for Harrison's room, knocking lightly.

"Come in," she said, already in bed with the covers pulled up to her waist, a book in her hands. She'd gotten into a little slip of a nightgown, deciding she didn't care much for decorum, especially not after what had gone on in the other room. She looked up a little as he entered. "No extra linens, huh?"

He shook his head. "Must be in the laundry or something, I couldn't find them." He stepped inside, shutting the door. "The book Ciano recommended, what was it about?"

She gave a slightly helpless shrug. "The French Revolution, oddly enough. I think it might mean something, but I don't know what."

He sighed. "I'll read through it, and perhaps we can discuss the related military and political tie-ins. He might be trying to question our intentions."

"Yeah, probably," she sighed, shutting the book and putting it on the nightstand. "I don't love him as a target. He's not succumbing to my womanly wiles."

He shook his head. "Maybe you just aren't his type. What else can you do? He'll fall eventually."

"He acts interested, but he never follows through. It's more than just polite flirting. I don't get it," she shook her head, then patted the bed. "Alright, I'm going to turn the lamp off. Sit down at least before you trip on something in the dark."

He smirked, shaking his head a little and climbing into bed. He stretched, his feet hanging off the end, and then sighed, curling up slightly to sleep.

She turned off the lamp and settled down, keeping distance in between them as best she could given the size of the mattress, and shut her eyes, sighing.

He closed his eyes, doing his best to fall asleep without thinking too much about the way Harrison had looked, had felt, splayed out underneath him covered in blood.

She drifted off without any trouble, absolutely exhausted from their coupling, and dreamed about Moran spilling red wine on her white dress, and him smiling a crooked smirk, approaching and running gun-calloused fingers across her cheek, down her neck, finding the straps of her dress....

She woke up once in the middle of the night, disoriented and oddly aroused, and before she drifted off again, she told herself not to make him too much of a habit.
He slept well, once he actually fell asleep, and woke just as the first fingers of dawn were starting to creep through the windows. He rolled out of bed and stretched, heading for his room to shower and change. The events of last night still ran through his head, distanced now by sleep, but still vivid. He took his time in the shower.

By the time Harrison was up he had eggs benedict on its way to being finished. He nodded to her as she entered. "Morning."

"Morning," she yawned, sinking into her chair at the table, adjusting her dressing gown around her. She was wearing it more for warmth than modesty. "Mm, that smells good."

He smiled just slightly as he prepared a couple of plates- eggs benedict, potatoes, and fruit salad piled high- and brought them over, setting one in front of her. "Coffee?"

"Yes, please, thank you," she said, groaning in happiness at the sight of breakfast, pulling the plate a little closer to her and digging in ravenously. "Mmm. Good eggs."

"Glad you like them," he said. He returned with a large mug of coffee, setting it in reach and pushing the cream and sugar towards her before sitting down, digging into his own food.

She drank the coffee bitter, her need for caffeine outweighing her penchant for sweets. She ate breakfast mostly in silence, though not an uncomfortable one, in fact feeling very satisfied with the morning in general. When she was done, she sat back and smirked a little. "Better than Adelia."

He looked up, surprised, and then laughed. "Do you really think that I believed for an instant there would even be a comparison? If so, I might have to be insulted. That doesn't say much for your ideas of my mental capacity."

"Mental capacity isn't the same as cooking ability, Moran," she laughed, "I'm only giving credit where credit is due. Would you prefer I do otherwise?"

He opened his mouth to respond, faltered slightly as his brain caught up with what she'd actually meant by the comment. He shook his head a little. "No. No, I'm glad you enjoyed it," he said, nodding, though he wasn't quite able to stop the flush that reddened his ears.

She raised her eyebrows a little as he reddened, amusement lighting up her face. "Oh dear god, what on earth did you think I meant?"

"Nothing," he muttered, eyes on his plate as he shoveled potatoes into his mouth.

"Come on, tell me, I'm not going to be mad or anything," she laughed, shaking her head. "Listen, after last night I think we're awarded a little familiarity."

He sat back, coffee in hand, and rolled his eyes. "I thought you were saying you were better than Adelia would have been, to which I was agreeing emphatically," he muttered into his cup.

She laughed again, rubbing a hand over her face. "I'm extremely flattered, Sebastian. Nothing to be embarrassed about."

"Mmm," he muttered noncommittally, finishing his coffee and standing, reaching over start clearing the table. "What time did Ciano want us over? Seven? You know, it has to be a good sign
that he's inviting us over so often. You've got him in hand, he's just... subtle."

"I don't know. Something's off," she disagreed lightly, shaking her head a little and leaning back. "I've dealt with what feels like thousands of these jobs, and he's not falling into any of the familiar patterns. It's throwing me off."

"If you say so. You're the expert." He shrugged, turning back to the dishes. He was quiet for a while, before he said "Where did you learn to kill like that?"

"I don't know, really," she said, with a cavalier lift of her shoulders. "A combination of places and situations and people. I killed someone for the first time when I was fourteen, when I caught our maid trying to molest my little brother. Killed again, when I was seventeen. That time, I was autonomous enough to pursue it in my own time. My family was relatively well off, but my father is a hit man. They didn't care. My dad taught me how to use a gun, and I learned knives by myself," she hummed, as if speaking about the school she had attended. "Before I met Jim I was what you could call an assassin. I used my grifting skills to get close enough to kill targets. When there were specific requests, I had to learn a new way of doing it."

He nodded just a little, listening with quiet interest. He felt a twinge of jealousy for the education and freedom to explore he had never had, but between the army and his own experimentation he'd made it work, and considered himself better off for it. "And you ended up second in command of the world's strongest criminal network. Hell of a thing."

"That one was actually pure luck, not an opportunity from my birth," she said chuckled, looking just tiredly surprised with her circumstances. "Or maybe just hard work. I never asked him whether it was my name or me that he hired me for."

He shrugged. "I doubt Moriarty gives much of a shit about names," he shot back. "Or he would have been more cautious about hiring me." He stood to clear the table.

"Why? Because yours is still unknown?" She raised an eyebrow, sensing perhaps somehow she'd struck a nerve. "But it was told to him in person, by someone he doesn't wholly distrust."

He laughed. "Mine isn't unknown. My father is Riordan Moran, the man leading the crusade to root out the criminal networks in London at the moment." He set his dishes in the sink. "The Moran you frequently see mentioned in the news. Or didn't you make the connection?"

"I wondered, but it wasn't my business to find out. I'm sure Jim knows. If you were that Moran, it didn't affect anything. Your criminal record speaks for itself," she said simply, her voice light. "I don't give a flying fuck what your father is spearheading. No self-respecting military man who dismembers innocent girls would be a spy for him."

He scrubbed dishes quietly for a bit, then nodded a little. "Well, I appreciate that mindset, then."

"I try to be fair. I have to be, or one of my employees would kill me. Fear is one thing, respect is part of that. But hatred is another. Could drive someone into doing something stupid," she snorted, a little derisively. It wasn't directed at him; just people in general.

He smirked, and dried his hands. "Yeah. Emotions make idiots out of a lot of people when you're around, it seems." He turned back to her. "I'm going to try to read that book before we have to be at Ciano's. Is there anything else you need from me today?"

"No, I can feed myself lunch, I'm sure," she said, smirking a little. "If anything pressing comes up I'll let you know."
He nodded and headed for his room. Their romping of the night before had left him tired, and he was looking forward to a nap and the book.

He emerged at about half past six, dressed a touch more informally than he had dared in the past with Ciano. That had been Harrison's idea, and she would be doing the same. She said it would suggest trust. He didn't particularly see how, but didn't argue, just wore what she suggested.

She was pleased to see Moran had followed her suggestion. She herself was wearing a more casual dress, something that suggested being carefree and young, and she'd taken it easier on the makeup. "All ready to go?" she asked, sitting in the foyer. She'd only been ready for about two minutes, but she liked the illusion that she had been waiting longer.

"Ready," he said with a nod, offering her his arm. He wasn't worried about her apparent mild impatience- he was on time, and he knew it. He was used to such minor power-plays by superior officers. They didn't bother him.

They headed out to the waiting car and along the now-familiar route to Ciano's. He didn't make conversation, just relaxed and prepared for the evening, trying to think of ways to push Ciano toward Harrison.

She appreciated the silence. It gave her time to think. And thinking was high on her list at the moment. Not only did she have to consider a new approach to Ciano, she needed to discern the consequences of last night's actions. Keeping it from Jim wasn't a wise decision. But there was likely to be punishment of some kind for killing one of his people and then fucking in their blood.

They arrived at Ciano's, and walked up the large marble staircase that lead to the front door. Moran knocked, and after a few minutes knocked again. He raised an eyebrow in Harrison's direction, about to suggest that perhaps they'd gotten the time wrong, when the door was hauled opened by a flustered looking young man in servant's clothes. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," he said, stepping back quickly. "Please, come in."

"Thank you," Lorna smiled graciously, stepping inside.

"Please, go ahead to the dining room, Signore Ciano insists on feeding you before you retire to talk," he said, wringing his hands nervously, looking like he was really desperately needed elsewhere. "I must leave you, there's a matter in the kitchen I must take care of. Someone will be out to give you wine shortly. Excuse me!" He scurried off, leaving the two of them to fend for themselves. Luckily, they'd been here enough now that she knew where the dining room was, and after a moment of delay where she exchanged a bemused glance with Moran, she turned down the hall towards it.

He followed after her quietly, eyes cautiously scanning the house. Unusual circumstances and flustered staff could just indicate someone had lost track of time, but it could just as easily indicate a hostage situation or a murder. He walked softly, and held up a hand as Lorna headed for the dining room door, walking forward softly and turning the door handle slowly, opening it a crack and peering in. He froze, then, and softly closed the door, stepping back and trying to evaluate what he'd just caught a glimpse of.

Lorna raised her eyebrows at him, looking expectant. "What? What's the issue?" She asked, in
barely more than a whisper. What was making him freeze?

He blinked for a moment, then smirked in sudden amusement and reached out to take her arm, guiding her quickly down the hall, turning a few times before stopping.

"I know what your problem is with Ciano," he said softly, still smirking.

"For God's sake, Sebastian, what the fuck is going on?" She huffed, looking very impatient with him. She wasn't thrilled to be pulled halfway across an only vaguely familiar house.

He didn't care that she was impatient, the look on her face would be worth it. "The reason he isn't interested in you is that he is presently fucking his butler over a chair in the dining room. Gives a whole new meaning to butler, really..." He trailed off, still grinning.

Her face froze for a good second. The first thing to move was her eyes, which looked to the side as if to find the answer there. Next was her eyebrows and mouth, which respectively lowered, and opened and closed again. She leaned back a little, and put a hand on her hip. "Holy shit."

He nodded just slightly, watching her expression in amusement. "My thoughts exactly." He reached up to fiddle with his collar absently. "Now the question becomes: what do we do about it?"

She ran her hand across her lips thoughtfully, turning on her heel and considering the hallway. "We confront him. Honestly. Open discussion. Tell him we saw but we won't say anything. Tell him... we have our own extracurricular activities."

He raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure that's wise? In a situation like this, messy politics... He could be paranoid. Dangerous."

She turned back to him. "Which is why we admit 'fault,' too," she said. "We make it clear that we could go down with the ship too. And we'll do what we have to to prove it. It's nothing you haven't done before."

He took a breath, considering that, but then nodded. "If you think it will work I defer to you. Lead the way." He motioned for her to head down the hall.

She took the turns he had in reverse without much trouble, and opened the door to the dining room without hesitation, and found, amusingly, that the two were still going at it. "I certainly hope you haven't any food out here yet," she said, coolly. Both men's heads snapped to face her. They were significantly sweaty.

Moran kept a careful eye on the situation, watching for escalation. But Ciano just stepped away as quickly as he could, hastily retrousing as his butler scrambled to do the same.

"Ah.. I..." He was clearly panicking. Eventually he straightened and cleared his throat.

"Matthew, leave us. Close the door behind you."

The butler scrambled for his exit.

"Relax, signore, we won't spill your secret," Lorna said quietly, looking back at Sebastian for a moment, and holding out her hand for him to take, returning her gaze to Ciano. "Look... you're not the only one with some... deviant interests. The two of us... we have an understanding. We really do have a genuine relationship, but, well... We like to dip our toes in familiar waters every once in awhile."
Moran took her hand on queue, and watched as Ciano battled himself over whether or not to trust them. Eventually it seemed he decided he had no choice.

"I... cannot apologize enough for..." he waved vaguely around the room.

She gave him a sympathetic but slightly pained smile. She was British, after all. "It's alright. We all have poor timing sometimes. We can forget it ever happened, if you like. I'm certain it would make us all feel more comfortable."

He sighed. "I... perhaps. For the time being, please allow me to escort you to the sitting room. You'll forgive me if I leave you a moment to compose myself and my staff, and then- well, the night is beautiful. We'll dine in the glass garden and as you say- forget."

She smiled and nodded. "That sounds lovely," she agreed, dropping Sebastian's hand as Ciano nodded in return and turned to lead them to the sitting room, adjusting his clothes as subtly as he could manage.

They entered the room and Ciano left them quickly, presumably to bathe and change. He sat back, but didn't risk discussing the situation openly for fear they were being overheard. Instead he just took a slow breath, and looked over at Harrison, trying to suss out what she was thinking.

She looked back at him, and raised her eyebrows slightly, and smirked. "This has been an exciting twenty-four hours."

He couldn't help laughing at that, sitting back and shaking his head. "Fucking unbelievable," he muttered in agreement.

Ciano returned fifteen minutes later, in fresh clothes and looking well-kempt and put-together and very much not like a man who had been fucking his butler into the table minutes prior.

"Thank you for waiting. Shall we?"

"Yes, let's," she agreed, standing without any ado and acting as if she had never seen the man in front of her with his ass hanging out of his trousers, sweaty and ruddy from exertion. She was lucky she was such a good actress. She wasn't quite sure how Moran was managing as well as he was. It must have been thanks to his unflappable stone face, which she was rather convinced could be slapped with an armed grenade and wouldn't change expressions.

Ciano led them through the house and out the back into the greenhouse, which considering the average temperature of Italy, was not too far removed from the feel of outside. They sat at a wicker table, where wine and a selection of cheeses, meats, and fruit were spread out on boards for them to take as they liked.

Moran pulled out Lorna's chair for her, then sat next to her, eyeing Ciano quietly and letting Lorna guide the conversation how she pleased.

"I take it you have both been following Mussolini's latest... aggressions?" Ciano asked tiredly, pouring them all wine.

"Hard to miss it, with the way it's been pasted on the front of every newspaper in the city," she replied, a little warily herself. It wasn't all an act, the way she was concerned with Mussolini. "I hope you don't have more news of it."

"Not anything specific," he sighed. "He's keeping his plans very close to his chest. But he's happy. Which is never a... peaceful sign." He sighed. "He's building to something big." Despite their
frequent visits, Ciano had remained fairly closed off, himself. This was the closest the man had come to opening up to them. Moran was impressed, as always, with Harrison's ability to read a person. Ciano trusted them. He hid a chuckle.

Lorna frowned, looking disturbed. "That's not good. I don't find the prospect of a continuing war a good thing. Look at the damage to the harbor. Does he want that for the rest of Italy?"

"Honestly? I think he may. Nero watching Rome burn... He has a plan, I'm sure of it, but there are a lot of pawns in this chess game, and very few kings."

"And a few of those aren't even Italian," she snorted, shaking her head in disappointment. "I wish there was something we could do."

He looked hesitant, and nodded. "Indeed..." Then he sighed. "Well, we may just need to trust in the system. Sometimes these things... resolve." He took a grape, considering it before popping it into his mouth.

"Yes, well, one can only hope," she agreed quietly, picking up her glass of wine and sipping from it somberly. "It's unfortunate when the system is being actively changed by the person benefiting from it, though. Sometimes I think those crazy Americans are onto something, with their - what do you call them - checks and balances? I don't know. There's too much happening in the world right now."

He nodded a little, daintily spitting the grape seed into a cuspidor. "Agreed. But there are balances here as well. Not everyone agrees with the "all for a few" policy... We shall see who comes out on top when the dust settles."

"I suppose we will," she nodded with a small, tired quirk of her eyebrows, and took a nibble of cheese. Even this, this hesitant dissident speech, was more than everything else she'd gotten from Ciano combined. It was an enormous breakthrough. Vaguely, she wondered about his wife. Did she know?

Moran watched the man quietly, but it wasn't his face that gave him away, it was his voice. Beneath the platitudes, conviction vibrated. This wasn't a man thinking of doing something, this was a man who was already doing it.

They kept up small talk with Ciano for the course of the evening, the man gradually relaxing back into their presence. By the time they rose to take their leave, it was as if the events of earlier had never occurred.

"Same time tomorrow night?" their host suggested as he walked them towards the door.

"Sounds delightful." Lorna smiled, her arm entwined with Sebastian's. She'd been sensing something off about Ciano's speech tonight, but she couldn't put her finger on what. But Moran had been very quiet tonight, more so than usual, and his gaze was sharp and focused tonight, instead of bored.

They took their leave, and he waited until they were in the car to speak. "He's going to do something drastic."

She let out a sigh, rubbing at her brow. "Okay. Christ, I wasn't sure what was happening near the end there. Something was off, but, hell, I don't have your tactical sense. Well. This is what Jim wanted. We just need to find a way to steer it."

He nodded a little, watching out the car window as he thought. "He's got a plan, and he's fairly
confident. Seen that behavioral pattern before, plenty of times... And this would explain the faction divisions when we first got here. He has people with him."

"I need to call Jim tonight. He needs to know about this, it might affect what he wants me to do," she said, her face thoughtful. "This could go off like a bomb. I don't want to be too close."

He nodded in agreement. "If we can get him to tell us, we might be able to evaluate for stability and success and adjust if needed, but that involves getting him to trust us further."

"And if he doesn't trust us enough to let us influence him, we need an exit strategy. I'm not going down to Fascism, I'm simply not," she snorted derisively.

He laughed a little at that. "Agreed. We'll start work on that tonight."

She smirked a little, some part of her pleased that he'd been amused. He had a rewarding laugh, when he chose to use it. It helped that he was so pretty. "Shouldn't be too difficult."

He nodded. "We have exit plans in place. It's just a matter of adjusting to accommodate the new information."

"But does it cover a situation where we aren't at the house? If Mussolini marches into Ciano's villa with even a dozen men, do we have a way out? I don't think he's the kind of man to accept sympathizers of his enemies," she said, and sighed. Working had been easier before the war.

He rolled his eyes. "With all due respect, I had plans of Ciano's house before we even came here. There are eleven independent exit routes, all of which are very interchangeable. This is my job. I can get us out if need be."

She let out a bit of a surprised laugh. "Point taken. I'm used to worrying about these things by myself. My father taught me a fair bit but I never did get a course in military tactics. I'll defer to your judgment."

He tilted his head slightly in thanks. "Thank you. You worry about Ciano himself. I'll cover our arses." The car pulled up outside of their house and they got out, heading inside.

She dropped the house key on the entryway table as she passed, taking off her coat as she went, and headed for the nearest phone, which was the one in the kitchen. She picked it up, waited for the operator, and then gave the operator the number of the line that could be used to reach Jim. The phone rang for a minute, and then another woman picked up.

"Hello?"

"Henrietta, how are you? It's Lorna."

"Lorna! I've been delightful. Have you heard the latest news from the diner?"

"About the coffee? Sure I have, it was my favorite. Shame about the rationing."

"Absolutely. Is there anything in particular that made you call this evening?"

"Yeah. I have some news to pass on to John."

"Of course."

The line clicked, and then the phone began ringing in Jim's office.
Jim looked up from the newspapers he was perusing, and picked up the phone. "This had better be important."

"It's me, Jim," she said, rolling her eyes a little. So impatient. "We had a couple developments today that you should know about. First and foremost, we caught Ciano fucking his butler today, so file that away in your blackmail drawer. Secondly, Moran thinks he's got something big in the works, and I agree. The whole thing smells like the air before a lightning strike."

Jim raised an eyebrow, smirking as he sat back. "He's a sunday stroller, is he? Well, that's an interesting turn of events," he hummed. "As for him having something in the works, fantastic. That's what we were hoping for anyway. Do what you have to and get him to tell you what it is, and then fix it to our needs. Honestly, do I really have to spell that out?"

"I know the drill, Boss, but I figured you'd want a little warning, in case Italy collapses into a power vacuum in the next few days. Last time I checked, you enjoy being well informed," she said, almost tonelessly. She was used to his impatience.

"Very well, you've done well. Is that what you wanted to hear?" He sighed impatiently. "Sic Moran on Ciano if you have to. The boy knows what to do with a cock. Anything else?"

She rolled her eyes completely this time. "No, sir, that's all," she said, unaffected. She had no doubt that he could tell when she was just being patient with him, but as long as she didn't give any obvious sighs over the phone she could get away with it.

Jim didn't bother answering, just hung up and returned to his papers.

Moran was in the kitchen, making himself a sandwich. Cheese and grapes were all well and good, but he needed something a bit more substantial. He looked up as she came in. "Want something?"

"Sure, why not?" She shrugged, smiling. "Nothing too big, though, I don't need much food to keep going. Jim said I could 'sic' you on Ciano. Not that I needed permission, but I thought it was funny."

He raised an eyebrow, starting another sandwich, this one about a third the height of his own monster. "What do you mean?"

"I think his phrasing was amusing. But regardless, I was planning on using you on Ciano. Did that not occur to you?" She asked, raising an eyebrow, but there was no real judgment in the movement. "You've done basically the same thing on your own time, from my understanding."

He froze for half a second, mind racing to evaluate the situation. To be honest, it hadn't occurred to him. He wasn't the grifter in this situation, and there was a list of reasons why this was a terrible idea. But he needed to tread carefully. He went back to making the sandwich before she noticed his hesitation, but he guessed that she already had.

"No disrespect, ma'am, but fucking around with senior officers and performing covert operations are two very different animals."

She could see the surprise enter his face before he had a chance to hide it, and from there it was easy to guess where his thoughts were going. "I don't need you lying, Moran, don't get me wrong," she said calmly, carefully trying assuage whatever misgivings he had without looking like she was doing it. "Go ahead and continue doing what you have been doing. You don't need to be talking any more than you have been. All I need is for you to be situated close enough to Ciano that I can get more information, and that I can plant suggestions in his ear through you. You're a pretty young
"Are we certain of that?" he asked, turning to her with two plates, setting her sandwich on the table near her. "We have no idea how close a relationship he may have with his butler. In addition to that, I can only focus on so many things. My job is security, safety, exits, the importance of which you just highlighted in the car. If I'm focusing on Ciano then I can't focus on that. It might seem like grunt work, ma'am, but there's a lot of constant calculation involved." He was tense, formality slipping out as a reflex.

She pulled the plate closer to her, but didn't touch the sandwich yet, focused on him. "Moran, look. I don't have a choice. If I end up needing more information than he's giving us, you're going to need to do this. He's not going to bite at anything I bait him with, he just isn't. If you weren't part of my cover and we had more time I would ship in one of my people, but all we have is you. Inform me on the basis of the exits and strategies, and I will keep on top of them while you're with Ciano. I believe it's not grunt work."

He sighed, leaning back and considering her. "I can brief you on the subject," he agreed slowly. "But..." He sighed, leaning back further and shaking his head. There wasn't much he could do about the situation. He straightened up, and nodded, resolved. "Of course I'll do it. I'll prepare my notes for your review." He stood, picked up his sandwich, and with a slight incline of his head, headed for his room.

She looked after him for a moment and then reached for her sandwich, letting out a quiet sigh. Well, she couldn't deny that he was a good soldier. Good - great even - at following orders. Now they would just have to see if he was any good trying to make someone lovesick for him.

He ate his sandwich in silence, before starting to write up the notes he had memorized what felt like months ago regarding Ciano's residence, and sketching out the blueprints of the various floors. He had a good memory for this sort of thing. It was part of what had made him so adept for this sort of work. He set the plans out on his desk, each route carefully notated, with various crossovers marked where available. Then he went to relax on his bed, awaiting Harrison's summons.

She let him be, though. In her mind, there was no reason to call him back tonight. He had agreed to do what she needed him to do, and the details could be worked out tomorrow. She knew she would be irritated if she had left to get some space to do things she needed to do and then was forced back into a non-private space. So she finished her sandwich and took care of the plate, washing it and putting it away like she did in her own flat, and then turned off all the lights in the kitchen and went upstairs, heading for her room. She walked in and immediately wondered if he had clean linens to sleep on. Well, he would just have to deal with it as he saw fit, with or without her.

He didn't, as it happened, which he remembered once he pulled back the blanket he had used to cover his bed and found the bare mattress. He didn't have it in him to go up to her though, hat in hand, so instead he folded the blanket in half and rolled up inside, going to sleep quickly. He'd slept in much less comfort many times.

She waited for about a half an hour out of courtesy before she crawled into bed and fell asleep as well, mostly untroubled by the job ahead of her.
Switching Places

He woke before the sun, and headed downstairs to make breakfast, bringing his plans with him and leaving them on the kitchen table for Lorna's perusal.

She got dressed in the morning in a comfortable white shirt she'd stolen from a boyfriend long ago and trousers that looked like they were for gardening, her hair left loose around her face. She didn't feel like putting in the effort of getting actually dressed this early, and she didn't feel like dealing with a dressing gown. So she went downstairs as informal as Moran had ever seen her, and sunk into her seat at the table without ado, picking up the first sheet of paper and beginning to absorb.

He glanced over at her, muttering a good morning, and did a double-take, before quickly returning his eyes to the food, flipping the omelet he was currently working on. "Let me know if you need any further information or if something isn't clear. I did my best to make it comprehensive, but it isn't a subject which lends itself overly well to paper."

"I know. I should be alright," she said, shrugging a little, still looking over the papers. She had a very, very good memory for the written word, which made her a good spy.

He nodded a little, bringing over a plate of breakfast a few minutes later and setting it in front of her. "Hope fried tomatoes are alright. If not, I can make you something else."

She chuckled, looking up from his notes to appraise the dish. "I like tomatoes, I like fried foods, how bad can it be? I'm not picky, don't worry, you can relax," she smirked, grabbing her fork and knife and beginning to cut up the tomatoes. "The only things I won't eat are organs, generally. Kidney, liver, stomach, what have you."

"I'll keep that in mind. Good thing you mentioned it, I was going to do liver-chutney-stuffed kidney for lunch, but now I'll just do pasta," he deadpanned.

She shook her head, laughing. "Christ, I don't know where you got that sense of humor," she chuckled, forking a piece of fried tomato into her mouth and making an appreciative sound. "Mmm. Fried goodness."

"Me either. The military attempted to relieve me of it, but found it a bit stickier than they liked," he said with a small smile, returning with his own plate.

"We'll see if this business will manage to wring it out of you, but somehow I doubt it," she shook her head. "It'll help you're not a grunt. A little more freedom of speech allowed in the higher regions of the echelon."

"Ain't that the truth," he said, sitting down and digging into his food. After a while he looked up. "So... Any advice for dealing with Ciano?"

She finished off another couple of pieces of tomato first before she answered, taking the minute to think. "You seem to be a relatively good observer of people. You need to get used to using that. Watch Ciano when you're with him. If he seeks your attention more when you are cooler towards him, do that. But if he draws away then and only responds when you make the first moves, adjust accordingly. You want him to swallow the hook, but be careful about it."

He nodded a little, considering that. "I can read people well enough, I suppose. Always managed to do it with the girls I picked up. But they were what you'd call an easy mark... Ciano's intelligent, wary..." He shrugged. "I'll do my best."
"Ciano's intelligent, wary, but remember, it's slim pickings for a man like him, especially with the climate in Italy right now," she pointed out, giving a vague explanatory wave of her hand around her. "You're probably the prettiest man in at least a 100 kilometer radius. It will be easy for you. Trust me."

"Flattery is an interesting choice at the moment, boss," he said with a small smirk, but he nodded. "But I concede your point. I'll do what I can."

She snorted, finishing off her tomatoes. "It wasn't my intention to flatter you, it's just how grifters speak to each other. How we look is our chief weapon, and it's important to be realistic about it," she chuckled, pushing the plate away from her enough to leave room for her hands to fold together on the table. "Now, if you ever need advice from me, don't hesitate to ask for it. I'm sure he'll still have me visit with you, to aide in his cover. I should be close."

He nodded slightly at that, accepting the information for what it was. This was a world that he wasn't familiar with, and he needed to understand its rules before he went blundering into it.

She picked up the papers again once she determined that he had nothing else to say for the moment, and began reading them again.

He spent the rest of the day reviewing his mental notes on Ciano's behavioral patterns. They weren't much, he wasn't a grifter, but he knew enough about reading enemies that he had a few ideas. While he thought he cleaned the house up and did his weekly intensive bug check.

Lorna had the notes memorized by the time the light coming through the windows was dimming a little, and then she stood and stretched, and headed upstairs to get ready for the night.

He had showered and was in the process of shaving, but not paying much attention. He was lost in thought. He could walk into a zero-odds combat situation without batting an eye, but this... His gut was tight. He didn't like the idea of having sex with Ciano. When he'd had sex with his senior officers it was different. They were men he had specifically decided he was attracted to, men he had worked with and respected. And he hadn't done this nearly so often as he'd made it seem to Harrison. He nicked himself with the razor, and swore.

She finished the complicated but familiar process of doing her hair and makeup and then dressed in a plum dress cinched at the waist, with sleeves that came down to her elbows and a skirt that went just past her knees. Then she went downstairs, grabbed a bottle of gin from the cupboard, and went back upstairs to knock on Moran's room.

He opened the door a few moments later, shirt half buttoned, a cloth held to the nick on his jaw, trying to stop the bleeding. "Sorry, almost ready."

"It's fine, take your time," she shook her head, uncapping the bottle of liquor and holding it out to him. "Here. Have a few swallows. It'll make all this easier."

He raised an eyebrow, but didn't argue, taking the bottle and helping himself to a long pull, before handing it back. He headed back to the bathroom, checking the cut in the mirror. It was still oozing, but slowing, and he put the cloth aside to finish buttoning his shirt.

She just leaned against the doorframe and watched him for a moment, considering him. "I know you don't want to do this kind of work. I appreciate the cooperation. I will be letting Jim know."

He shrugged. "It's what needs to happen," he said, voice expressionless. He finished buttoning his shirt and dabbed at his jaw one more time, before turning back to her. "Alright. Let's go."
She nodded, setting the gin on the dresser to her side and then turning to lead the way downstairs, where she slipped on black heels and then went outside. She'd called for the car about a half hour ago. It was nice working with someone who wasn't at the core a grifter. There was way less coddling.

They got into the car and started off for the now-familiar destination. He normally would be admiring Harrison's attire just about now, but his focus was elsewhere. It wasn't that Ciano wasn't good looking. But still...

He turned to Harrison. "Another question. Forgive the crudeness, but I would imagine it's easier to fake arousal for a woman than a man. Ciano's handsome, and I like men, but..." He made a gesture, the meaning unclear even to himself. "This is complicated."

"There's a reason I gave you the alcohol," she said simply, eyes on him calmly. There was an air about her that hadn't been before; almost something nurturing, a soothing, trustworthy aura. Training grifters in this particular area was sensitive work, and she knew it. It wasn't something she enjoyed doing (she rathered they came to her already versed in this area, so she didn't have to be the one to introduce them to it), and it was a bit of a risky business.

But if it needed doing, sometimes it simply had to be done. "The trick, I'm told by grifters of your gender, is to drink just enough that you care a little less about how they look, but not so much that it affects your... performance, for lack of a better word," she said, shrugging a little and folding her hands together in her lap, and her eyes focused on him a little sharper. "For you specifically I would rely on your imagination. Memory, even. Pretend you're going to kill him. Imagine him coated in blood. If you feel that won't work, I'll do my best to frustrate you a little beforehand, which should be transferable onto him."

"Right," he said, shifting uncomfortably and trying to let that swathe of information digest. Christ, he hated this. It felt so bloody... clinical. The alcohol would set in soon, as she'd pointed out, but he was going to need another drink or two before he was relaxed as he needed to be. Which went against his nature in many regards- one of the first rules of his job was never to become inebriated. Drink, sure, for cover if necessary, but lightly.

"I would like to express again my misgivings about the security of this operation," he said finally.

"As you have a right to do," she said. "But tell me, do we have another course of action? Doing it tonight isn't necessary. Not yet. But in a few visits time, without us having the information or influence we need, what then?"

He shook his head slowly. "I know. I'm aware. You'd better wind me up some if you can. I need to be careful about alcohol."

"Alright, I will. Keep in mind the plan for tonight, at its basics, is to get his attention. Assess for yourself if just teasing him will only make him disinterested. That shouldn't be the case. It almost never is. But be aware of it," she said, looking out the window. She could just now see the villa approaching.

He nodded. "I will. Flirting I can do." He took a slow breath as they pulled up, and got out, walking around as he usually did to offer Lorna his hand.

She took it like she always did, getting out and leading the way to the front door with her arm entwined with his, and she waited a second to knock, looking at him to make sure he was collected before she did.
He was composed, externally relaxed. Any concerns he might have had were buried deep.

Ciano opened the door and smiled. "Welcome, my friends! Come in, come in."

"How are you this evening?" Lorna smiled as they stepped inside, Ciano leading the way.

"Excellent, now that you've arrived!" He replied jovially, "Excellent, but hungry. I've had the cook prepare something a little more substantial for tonight. Is eating on the patio agreeable to you?"

"Perfectly," Moran said with a smile and a bit of a nod. "It's a beautiful night out. Please lead the way." It was more than he usually spoke, but not by much. Upping his involvement a little at a time.

"Happy to," Galeazzo smiled, and did so, leading them to the same little table that they'd sat at the previous night, a similar spread of cheese and crackers laid out, though it was obvious that they were just an appetizer. "Please, take a seat."

Moran took what had traditionally been Harrison's seat, the middle ground between the other two, though not before pulling Harrison's seat out for her. Ciano poured wine for them all, and he accepted his with a moment's eye contact and a smile as their fingers brushed in the exchange of glasses.

Lorna watched the two of them idly, though she was really paying quite a lot of attention to Moran. He was doing well, so far, but if she was being honest she was just as nervous as he was. This was a high-stakes play, and if it failed... it would end badly. Ciano, on the other hand, looked to be vaguely pleased to have Moran closer to him, if only because he was a curious man and wanted to get to know the more quiet of the pair a little better. "I thought we would have a simple meal tonight. Pasta, made in the village nearby. Have either of you ever had fresh pasta?"

Moran shook his head. "I haven't. I didn't realize it made a difference, but then I am rather ignorant to that sort of thing. I look forward to it."

He chuckled, leaning forward to pick up the bottle of wine on the table and tucking it under his arm to uncork it, then pouring it into the three glasses in front of him. "You would be surprised, the difference it makes. Less time in storage, less time losing flavor. Or maybe it is just our imaginations," Galeazzo joked.

"Well, then I suppose we'll have to judge for ourselves," Moran conceded with a smile, raising his glass in thanks and taking a hearty sip.

"Yes you will," he agreed, and he and Lorna both took a sip out of their wine. "Now tell me, how have you been enjoying your time here? I know it's difficult to sight-see, with the war, no? But nonetheless, I hope it is not time wasted."

Moran sat back a little, considering his answer. "I have been," he said, nodding. "It's a beautiful country. I understand now why my wife is so fond of it," he said, a hint of teasing in his eyes, looking over at Lorna.

She chuckled, shrugging a little. "It's difficult not to, you know. Look at the place! It's beautiful," she smiled, gesturing around her. Ciano nodded in agreement.

"See, she knows. Smart woman you have here, signore."

"I don't have her," he chuckles. "If anything, she has me. Believe me. But you are right. She is smart."
"Glad to see you can admit it," she said wryly over her glass of wine, eliciting another chuckle from Ciano.

"You two are a unique couple, my friends," he shook his head, grinning, and raised his glass. "A toast, to friends!"

"To friends," Moran agreed, though his heart sank. Not the word he wanted to be hearing right now. Still he smiled, toasted, and drank.

They left that night without anything happening. Lorna could tell Moran was both frustrated and relieved, but she said nothing about it. If he wanted to confide in her, she would.
A few days later, with no progress, she knew that she needed to step in. At dinner one night, Ciano excused himself, probably for the bathroom, and she followed down a side hall. "Mr. Galeazzo, a word?"

He looked around, surprised, but then nodded. "Of course, Mrs. Morstan. Anything."

"Let us speak frankly, Galeazzo. I'm certainly about to," she said, folding her hands in front of her. "Excuse me for what I'm about to say, but my husband is not good with words."

He frowned, looking concerned. "Please, speak your piece. I hope I have not given any cause for offense.." It was clear he was nervous.

She smiled, shaking her head, her hand reaching out towards him a little in reassurance. "No, no, please, relax, it's alright. There's been no offense. I just wanted to speak to you on behalf of my husband. He's... a shy man. Not good at displaying his interest."

The concern ebbed, only to be replaced by uncertainty a moment later. "I'm not certain I follow you, signora..."

"Look, Galeazzo. I mentioned my husband and I.... have a unique arrangement, did I not? He is free to pursue who he desires. He is just... bad at it."

He laughed a bit, shaking his head. "I have seen relationships of this sort, but never quite to this extent, with one courting for the other. Who is it who has caught his eye, dear signora? I will do my best to assist."

She folded her hands together in front of her, and gave a slight shrug, slightly sheepish. "It's you, signore. Anyone else, perhaps it would be easier for him. I think he views you as unapproachable, though."

He was surprised, that was clear, and reached up to fidget with his tie slightly, habitually. "I... I see." He took a breath. "I'm... flattered. Certainly. Your husband is..." He trailed off, face flushing slightly.

Lorna smiled sympathetically. "Yes, he's a very handsome man. Overwhelmingly so, sometimes," she admitted, looking mildly flustered herself. "Of course, it is up to you whether or not you decide to act with this information, but I was tired of seeing him in inaction."

He nods just a little, adjusting his tie once more. "Thank you. I..." He laughed nervously. "I'm not accustomed to pursuing this... openly. This isn't very open, of course, but..." He shook his head. "I'm sure you understand. This isn't to say no... I'm interested. It's merely... new."
"We're used to it, but we've both been there," she smiled. "We're both quite lucky to have married the other, believe me. It's removed the lies from one part of our lives."

He nodded just a little. "I can see that. Thank you, Mrs. Morstan. Do you think it would be better to speak with your husband on the matter, or just to..." he trailed off, gesturing in vague helplessness.

She shook her head a little, chuckling. "No, I wouldn't talk to him about it. He's not fantastic with words. I mean, don't *jump* him, but I imagine you'll only make him uncomfortable if you try to speak to him about it."

He nodded just slightly. "Perhaps I could invite him over for drinks tomorrow. Would that be sufficient, do you think?"

"I think that should work," she smiled, then tilted her head back the way she had came. "I better return to him. He's probably wondering where I've gotten to."

Lorna had considered all night how best to send him on his way, and that morning, she'd ordered a groundskeeper. She let him do the normal gardening work before she called him in at dusk, offering a cold glass of lemonade, which she'd conveniently drugged. "Moran," she called, leaning against the kitchen counter, appraising the man passed out on the floor. "Come down, will you? I've gotten you a present."

He came down the stairs a few moments later, eyebrows furrowed. Then they lit on the body on the floor and he was immediately tense, until he saw that the man was breathing. Still, he looked around for any other breaches of security. "What happened?"

"Relax, Colonel, I'm the one who brought him here," she snorted, picking up the lemonade glass for a second and giving it a light shake to bring his attention to it. "I thought you could use a little blood to make your day a little easier. If I was wrong I can just send him home when he awakes..."

He relaxed at that, and then smiled a little. "You weren't wrong. Thank you. I should probably take this away from the prying eyes of the window..." He stooped to shift the prone man into his arms. "Care to join me?"

"Of course," she smirked, pushing off the counter. "Upstairs, in the bathroom, perhaps?"

"Excellent choice," he agreed, heading for the stairs. The gardener was a slight man, luckily, and he had little trouble maneuvering upstairs.

"What does Jim think of all this?" he asked as he set the man down in the bath. "The killing, I mean."

She shrugged a little, perching on the bathroom counter. "He tolerates it as a little eccentricity of mine. Sometimes it amuses him. Sometimes he uses it to scare an enemy of ours. Other times, when someone has really fucked with him, he enjoys laying into them a little. But otherwise, he generally likes me to be clean when he fucks me. Unless it's my blood."

He nods just a little, smiling. "Still, good to have a boss that encourages one's interests," he said, smiling and pulling a knife out from where it was tucked into his boot. He offered it to her out of courtesy.

"Oh, no, please, it's a gift," she waved off, scoffing. "If it will wind you up a little, I'll partake, but
please, by all means, have the first cut to yourself."

He smiled, and flicked the knife through his fingers absently as he looked for a good place to make his first cut. They were isolated enough that if the man woke and screamed it wouldn't be an issue, but still... "Pass me a washrag?"

He gagged the man with the rag and some string he found in the cabinet, and used strips of rag to bind his hands to the faucet. He then returned to his contemplation. It only took him a moment to decide, then, and he cut away the man's shirt, before shoving the knife under the skin at the top of his chest and running a neat autopsy line down the center of his chest, skin parting like clay.

It was a testament to the quality of the drugs she'd used that he didn't wake. Lorna didn't need him screaming. She only needed the blood. And while it was primarily for Sebastian, her eyes darkened too as the crimson welled to the surface, staining the man's sun-tanned skin.

His eyes darkened, and he smiled, pressing his fingers into the wound and drawing them away coated thick with crimson warmth.

His next two cuts reflected the autopsy procedure, creating an inverted 'y' on his torso. He didn't waste time, peeling the skin away from the muscle and watching it ripple in his wake.

"Why, Moran, it's almost like you've done this before," she smirked, biting her lip as bare muscle was revealed, the thick slab of skin dripping blood into the tub, spreading the red further.

"Once or twice," he retorted with a smile, cutting into the muscle as well. The man shifted slightly under the knife, a moan muffled by the gag, but he remained under, and Moran ignored him.

He left the bowels covered for the most part. He wasn't very interested in those particular aromas. Instead he headed up toward the rib cage, stripping away flesh to reveal white stripes of bone and cartilage. The blood was flowing freely now, and he had it up to his elbows. The smell of it overwhelmed him, and he paused to bask in it for a moment. His pulse was racing, and he put a hand on the man's ribcage, feeling the heart pulsing underneath. He breathed deeply until his own pulse matched that of his victim. He felt alive.

He extended the knife toward Harrison, eyes not leaving the man in front of him. "Have a go, love," he said softly.

She took the knife, her fingers slipping a little in the blood that lathered the hilt, and shifted off the counter, moving to sit on the edge of tub. Her grey eyes appraised the man within for a moment until she leaned forward, the blade slicing a precise, curved line along the orbital ridge of the man's face. She wanted to see his whole eye.

He looked up when she put knife to skin, watching as she removed the man's eyelid with surgical precision. "We'd make good surgeons if we had any interest in putting people back together," he said absently, eyes trained on the way the bright blood flecked across her skin.

"I know some basics, courtesy of my father," she hummed, flicking the extraneous flesh off the knife blade and then carving a little deeper, slicing into the tissue keeping the eye secure in its socket. "He was a hit man. Got banged up sometimes."

He nodded just a little. "We tend to do that. What the hell did you give him?" he asked, nodding to the unconscious man currently being carved up like a choice roast.

"A cocktail of things that'd he be unlikely to survive even if we weren't cutting him up," she said, tilting her head as she looked down at the now nearly-freestanding eye. "Fentanyl, thiopental, a
couple of other things. Without breathing aid, he'll probably die soon."

He whistled lowly, admiring, as he smoothed his hand over the shivering muscle he'd excavated. "Some day if we have time, I'd love to learn a thing or two. I know enough. Had to, playing with the girls like I did. But not like that."

"How steady are your hands?" She chuckled, happy with her work and offering the knife to him. "You'll need to be steady, if you want to learn."

"I meant about the drugs," he returned with a smirk, taking the knife again and starting to slit through the skin on the man's hand, peeling it back and manipulating the joints and muscles, vaguely interested. Red dripped onto white porcelain. He smiled.

She laughed at the display of skill, shrugging a bit. "I have a book at home I write in whenever I learn something new. New things cross Jim's desk all the time."

He smiled. "That has to be an interesting book," he said with a sigh, before setting the hand down. He looked over at her, stooped over the body, flecked with red, and gave a toothy smile. "I suppose standing Ciano up is a bad choice."

"You may want to shower before you go," she said, smirking at him. "I'll call the cleaners. Should be taken care of by the time you're back."

He sighed, sliding his hand over the man's chest again. His pulse was gone. "Shame... But thank you."

"Any time. There's plenty of people in the world to kill," she smiled, standing and moving to the sink, bending and using her elbow to turn on the faucet to wash her hands.

"Very true," he said, standing and considering for a moment before just reaching out to turn the shower on and stepping in next to the body, fully clothed. He was covered in blood from the waist up, this was the easiest way to deal with the situation. "Would you mind terribly putting a towel in my reach?" he asked, unbuttoning his ruined shirt, red running down his body and getting lost in the sea of blood and flesh around his ankles.

"Of course," she said, voice unaffected, but eyes locked onto him. She reached and got a towel without looking away, and put it on the closed toilet, where he could grab it once he got out.

He thanked her, glancing over at her and raising an eyebrow as he shrugged out of his soaked shirt, raising an eyebrow and hiding a smirk. "Alright there?"

"You're not the only one affected by this sort of thing," she said simply, giving him an appreciative look up and down and then pushing off the counter. "I suppose I'll give you some privacy. Do you need assistance picking out clothes for this evening?"

He sighed, then shrugged. "Do you think I need assistance? If so then I probably do." He reached grabbed the soap and started scrubbing his arms down.

She waved her hand a little. "As long as you wear something tight, it should do. Dress like you're going hunting. Same principles apply."

"Got it boss. Will do."

After he had washed, he stepped out of the tub and dried off, getting the last of the blood off of his feet before heading for his room.
Ten minutes later he headed downstairs, dressed in his best crimson shirt, one which hugged his
figure slightly. Black trousers and suspenders and a wide black tie kept things formal. He grabbed
his jacket and hat, nodding a goodbye to Harrison. "Any last minute advice?"

"Ditch the tie once you've had a few drinks, or at least pretend to, and unbutton a couple of buttons
on your shirt," she suggested, looking at him over a cup of tea.

He nodded a little. "Thanks," he said with a nod. "Will do. See you later, I guess." He headed for
the door.

She watched him go and sipped at her tea again with a mild sigh. She wished him luck, but telling
him aloud would only keep him for another moment, another moment in which self-doubt could
start to cloud his head. She would have scotch waiting out for him on his return.

He arrived at Ciano's twenty minutes later, after spending the car ride mulling over the kill,
savoring the details, trying to keep his mind off of his impending mission.

Now, he knocked on the door, before reaching up to straighten his tie.

The door opened a moment later, revealing a only slightly nervous-looking Ciano, who gave
Sebastian a big grin. "Alezandair! Please, come in, come in! What would you like to drink?"

"Anything," he said with a small smile, stepping inside. "Whatever you're having's fine..." he took a
look around, though he had seen the room a dozen times before. "Thanks for inviting me..."

"Thank you for coming," he rebutted, leading the way into the lounge and then making a beeline
for the liquor cart. He needed alcohol to smooth this whole thing over just as much as the man
behind him needed it. He was nervous about this whole affair, but excited at the same time. How
could he not be, with a man like that? "A martini alright?"

He nodded. "Dry, if you don't mind." He took the drink gratefully, taking a long sip. "So my wife
spoke with you, I take it."

"She didn't tell you? I thought she would," he said, a little embarrassed, and took an equally long
drink from his glass.

"Oh, she did, just not verbally. She was quite smug," he said with a smirk. "I as good as guessed.
She's a mover, my wife."

He chuckled. "That she is. Had I those inclinations, perhaps I'd be jealous of you. As it is, I'm
jealous of her."

He smirked, taking another sip of his drink and trying to relax. "You wouldn't be the first. Lucky
for the both of us, she's a generous woman."

"Lucky indeed," he agreed, raising his glass a little in toast. His eyes were having difficulty looking
at anything but the man in front of him. It had been a long time since he had run across another
man, a new man, who shared his predilections.

The way the other man was staring at him was oddly appealing. He stared right back, answering
the toast with his own glass and drinking. The man was not handsome, per say, but there was a
rugged charm to him.
He was starting to relax, partly due to the alcohol, but mostly due to the fact that he was becoming more able to forget the specifics of this encounter and just enjoy it for what it was. "You know, I find myself intrigued," he said with a smile. "You're an incredibly powerful man. Surely even with modern... stigmas... being what they are, you could have almost anything you wanted?"

"Under this government? I wish," he said, shrugging lightly. "Should Mussolini get wind of it, it wouldn't be ignored. Not like it might have been, ten years ago. I would be removed from my position at the very least, if not imprisoned. Adolf Hitler is partially to blame for the rigidity in the current administration, but," he sighed, sipping at his martini. "At this very moment, I must bide my time."

He nodded in understanding. "Well. Hitler and your father-in-law aren't here at the moment. I am. So if you had your liberties... What might you do with them?"

He smirked a little. "I would do the same thing I would do now. Pursue you."

He smiled back, walking over to the liquor cart. He poured himself a bit more vodka and returned to his host, loosening his tie. "My kind of game," he retorted with a smirk.

"I'm glad you're of the same mind," Galeazzo said, taking a step closer to him. "Otherwise, this might have been uncomfortable."

He nodded, leaning against a divider and setting his drink aside, reaching up to undo his tie, leaving it hanging around his neck and undoing the top button. He retrieved his drink, taking a sip and watching the other man with a small smirk. There was the feel of the hunt now- letting the other man approach him, reeling him in...

His eyes flickered to the movement at the other man's collar, and then lingered there on exposed skin, at the dip in the center of his clavicles, the hint of muscular definition just beginning... He swallowed, forced himself to meet 'Alexander's' eyes again, and finished off his drink.

He watched the other man, saw the nervousness, but suddenly his was gone. This was hunting. He had hit his stride. "Come here, Galeazzo," he said, his voice soft and deep.

Galeazzo froze for a second, surprised, and then set down his glass, and did as he asked.

He smiled, reaching out and grabbing the man by the collar, pulling him into a kiss.

He got home a little before four in the morning, closing the door behind him quietly and heading for his room.
Lorna stepped out into the hallway as he came up the stairs, looking tired in her nightgown but mostly awake. She gave him a once-over. "How’d it go?"

He nodded a little. "It went well. He seems happy." He reached up to rub at his eyes. "I didn't get the chance to look at any papers, he walked me out. Next time."

She nodded in return. "That's fine. I knew you wouldn't get information that quickly. It will take a week, at the absolute least," she said, folding her arms together. "You did well, Moran. I'll grant you a request. Anything you like, action or item. Within reason. Sleep on it."

*Like a gorgeous genie.* "I will, thanks," he said softly, nodding a little. "I'm exhausted."

"I know. Go on, get some sleep. Don't worry about making breakfast tomorrow. I can handle it, I have the capacity," she smiled, nodding her head towards his door. Doing what a good handler did. What she'd always done with her new grifters after a job. Speak softly, be gentle, show understanding. "Have a good rest, Moran."

He nodded and headed for his room without another word, closing the door behind him and heading for the shower. Ten minutes later he collapsed onto his bed buck-ass naked, and fell asleep.

She woke up early in the morning and headed downstairs to see what was available to made for breakfast, and discovered the larder near bursting to fullness. She shook her head a little and got to work making pancakes, sausage, and scrambled eggs, figuring it was better to make too much than too little.

He woke earlier than he would have liked, but once the sun announced its arrival he had difficulty sleeping through it. Once consciousness came over him fully, he was entreated further by the scent of bacon. He groaned, rubbing his eyes, then got up to shower and dress.

She heard the creak of the floorboards upstairs as she was taking the first of the pancakes out of the pan, letting her know that he was awake. The eggs were already freshly on the table, along with the bacon and sausage. She'd known he wouldn't be able to sleep past breakfast. He was too much a soldier.

He came downstairs a minute later, as crisp and clean as he usually was, despite feeling the drag of little sleep. He was a soldier. That was what he did.

He nodded a little to her as he headed immediately for the coffee pot, filling it with water and putting it on the stove to heat while he got to work grinding beans. He needed the caffeine this morning.

She finished up a couple more pancakes as he made the coffee. "How are you feeling, Moran?"

He shrugged, getting out mugs. "Tired, but nothing I can't handle. Yourself?"

"Fine. I had an easy day yesterday, considering. The cleaners took care of the body, so that bathroom is available for use again," she informed him, taking the plate of pancakes from the
counter to the table.  

He nodded, following with the coffee pot and the mugs, sitting and pouring himself a large cup. The details of last night were blessedly hazy, and he wasn't particularly interested in digging them up, so he just contented himself to focusing on breakfast.

She began eating in silence, content to let him begin a conversation if he were so inclined.

He was quiet for a bit, content to just eat, but eventually curiosity got the better of him and he looked up. "This reward you mentioned... could you give me an example or two of what you mean so that I understand the scope?"

She shrugged a little, washing down a swallow of eggs with orange juice before answering. "Whatever you want, Moran. Want a cat? Okay. Access to a particular brand of liquor that's been affected by the war? On it. You want me to dress myself up like a Christmas tree and then have your way with me? Fine. I could recommend you get a salary increase, but that's not surefire, or I could authorize renovation on your quarters, if they're not to your liking. If it's in my power, I'll take care of it. If it isn't, I'll let you know and you can try again."

"Pass on the christmas tree," he snorted, shaking his head. He took another bite of toast, considering. "I want revenge on my father," he said finally, calmly.

"What kind?" She asked, skipping the What for? She would find out, eventually.

He looked up, surprised, a mixture of hope and sadistic anticipation flickering in his gaze. "That would depend on my resources."

She shrugged. "I'll give you whatever you need, as long as it's not outrageous. Now, are we talking about the disappearance of Lord Moran, or just the punishment?"

He leaned back, looking a bit dazed. "I'm not... I need to think. This was never a possibility until a minute ago. I want to ruin him. But I need to figure out how."

"Take whatever time you need," she said, finishing off the last of eggs. "This won't expire any time soon."

He nodded, looking quietly thrilled as he started sopping up the rest of the egg yolk on his plate with his toast. "Thank you."

"You earned it. Keep earning it and we'll get along swell," she said, leaning back in her chair, mostly finished.

He nodded just a little, finishing his food. "I'm surprised, to be honest, but I won't complain."

She shrugged again. "You're special, Moran, as much as I hate to admit it. I probably won't again. But the fact is that you're Jim's bodyguard, and we will be seeing a lot of each other. We'll both be at Jim's side together until one of us dies. You're entitled to certain privileges, and one of those is closure. If you're not at your best because you're distracted by something else, you're not as useful."

He snorted. He considered saying that he wouldn't be distracted, but didn't want to risk her withdrawing his sudden boon. Instead he just downed his coffee and stood, clearing their empty plates. "I appreciate your interest."

"You're welcome," she replied, smirking a little. This wasn't something she would have offered to just anyone. A smaller version, maybe, but no-holds-barred? Unlikely. "When are you meeting
with Ciano again?"

"Tonight," he said with a small shrug. "He was rather eager. He said to extend the invitation to you if you wished, but I got the impression that wouldn't be his first choice."

"Of course it wouldn't, how would he fuck you if I was standing right there? No way he could keep it up," she chuckled. "He's far too nervous."

He smirked. "That he is. Before I go tonight, though, I'd like a list of exactly what information I should be looking for. Exactly what we want to know."

"Sure. If you write it down here, though, don't bring it with you. That could be an awkward encounter," she snorted.

He turned from his place at the sink, meeting her gaze with a long, sardonic stare. A look which clearly read Seriously? How stupid do you think I am?

She rolled her eyes at him. "I'm only being cautious, Moran. You never know when you'll stumble across the hole in someone's common sense. Everyone has one. Just depends how serious it is."

"And given the fact that I memorized and burned the fifty-seven page info dossier that was provided me before our arrival, you thought that was mine...?" he ventured a touch sarcastically, coming over with a cloth to wipe the table down.

"I can't assume anything, Moran. That's how you get dead," she retorted. "I can only trust you to a point."

"Then we aren't going to get very far." He set the cloth down and sat across from her, meeting her gaze. "I am your chief of security. If you can't trust me to know the most simple aspects of my job, what use am I?"

She sighed, giving a small lift of her hands off the table in acquiescence. "You've made your point, fine. I'll try a little harder."

He eyed her with a hint of suspicion, then nodded, evidently satisfied that she wasn't just brushing him off. He stood, then, finishing wiping the table down and returning to cleaning up.

She got up a minute later and returned to her room to find the materials she needed to write down the list Moran had to memorize.

She returned fifteen minutes later with a list in lazy cursive, and put it down on the table for him. "Here's your list. Standard things. Dates, times, places, names and number of people involved. What his plan actually is..."

He glanced over the list for about thirty seconds, then nodded, walking over to the stove and lighting the paper off the gas burner, tossing it into the sink to let it burn to ash. "Understood. I'll keep an eye out. No problems."

She frowned slightly as he tossed the list in the sink. He was going to scorch the porcelain. But she said nothing.

The next few weeks, he became a grifter. He wasn't exactly fond of the situation. It was more
stressful than any military mission had ever been, and his mood suffered. He could feel Harrison's attempts to keep his morale up, but he mostly shunned them. His emotions were drained by his interactions with Ciano, and most of his free time was spent meticulously performing his security duties, or holed up in his room.

Lorna phoned Jim, alone in the foyer. Moran was being anti-social somewhere else. But Mussolini was coming back into town, and she could no longer wait to report to Jim on Ciano's rushed, ill-fated plan.

Jim glanced at the phone on his desk as it rang, walking over from where he'd been glancing over his bookshelf. He picked it up. "Hello."

"It's me. I'm reporting in," she said, getting straight to business. She knew that he didn't like small talk. "Mussolini is going to be in town in a few days, and Ciano is going to stage a coup. Unless there's a miracle, he's going to fail."

"Hm." He was silent for a minute, letting that simmer. Then "How many of my personnel are you planning to kill for a lark, Harrison?"

She laughed, startled. "I only killed the one. The gardener wasn't connected to us, was he?"

"You honestly think I would let you treat with just any gardener? Stop slaughtering my employees. It's annoying." He sighed. "Back to Ciano. Why is failure so certain?"

"Because he's a terrible military strategist and there's not enough time to win him over to another plan by Moran," she sighed, amusement fading from her voice. "His plan is shoddy at best. I've seen bombings less dangerous."

He sighed. "Very well. Then we adjust. If you're certain he's bound to fail... then we bet on the other horse. Gather your notes and present the information to Mussolini."

She nodded a little, even though he couldn't see her. "Alright. Do you want us to stick with Mussolini when it's over or come back home?"

He considered that, tapping his finger on the desk. "Evaluate the situation, exploit it as best you can safely. I trust you won't be an idiot."

"Thank you sir, I appreciate that," she said, entwining her finger in the phone cord absently. "I won't disappoint you."

"No, you won't," he agreed, though the connotation shifted slightly. "And Harrison? Kill any more of my people without permission, and you and I will have words."

She smirked. "In my defense, sir, Adelia disobeyed my direct orders. But I understand. It won't happen again."

"I can hear your smugness, Harrison... Don't push it. I'll speak with you later." With that, he hung up.

She smirked to herself as she put the phone back on the receiver, then turned and headed for the stairs. She needed to start writing down a report of everything Ciano was planning.

Moran was in the kitchen, chopping vegetables. He'd gotten bored of the book he was reading, and had decided that cooking would at least give him something to do.
She came back down when the smell of cooking reached her nose, a sheath of papers in her hand. "Good news, Moran," she said, moving to sit at the table. "No more grifting for you."

He glanced up as he scooped a pile of chopped garlic in with the onions. "Oh? And why is that?"

"New plan. We're joining Mussolini. Betting on the winning horse, so to speak," she said, running a hand through her hair.

He stiffened slightly, considering her. The roping muscles along his neck and shoulders tensed, but he turned back to his vegetables. "Seems reasonable."

"What's the matter? I thought you'd be pleased to have it over with," she asked calmly, raising her eyebrows at him a little. It wasn't hard to see his tension.

He shrugged, chopping peppers with a vengeance. "It's underhanded. Not my style." Despite his irritation, the knife never moved a line out of where he wanted it. "But it's the job. It's fine."

"Is that really what's bothering you, or do you just not want to admit that working on the same side as someone for a month makes you somewhat sympathetic to them?" She sighed.

There was a stutter in his chopping, but he covered it by grabbing a tomato to dice. "I'm a soldier, ma'am. I'll outright lie if it suits me, sure. But putting my loyalties one way and then swinging them around... That isn't natural."

"You were a soldier. Now, you're closer to a mercenary. You have to be ready to leave your post when the cash runs out," she said simply. "It's hard to get used to, after joining the business. But you need to be ready to betray anyone. Marks, and colleagues. There is no honor among thieves. Not among most of them. It's a luxury they can't afford, and in your first few years, you should follow their lead. Otherwise someone will betray you."

There was silence except for the rhythmic thuds if blade on wood as he mulled that over. He pushed the tomatoes into the now simmering pot. "I'll take that under advisement." Another pause. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it," she said offhandedly, flipping open the folder of papers in front of her and pulling out the pen she had tucked away earlier, starting to scrawl down some notes she had forgotten to add. "You're going to be very close to Jim as your profession. I'd rather keep you in my good graces, for my own safety and comfort."

He nodded just a little. "Should I cancel the plans with Ciano this evening, then?" he asked, turning to look at her again.

"Yes. Say you're ill. Not unusual, considering the times," she shrugged, putting the pen down. "He shouldn't suspect anything. Why would he?"

He nodded in agreement. "Perhaps you should make the call? My illness might be more convincing were I too unwell to call myself."

"Alright, sure. I'll give him a call in an hour or so. Closer to the date. Make it seem like you hoped you would be better. In the meantime, we can eat. What are you making? It smells delicious."

"Gumbo," he said, peeling shrimp he'd bought from the fish market two blocks over. "We fought alongside an American unit for a few weeks and they gave us the recipe. Traded it for fags."

He tossed the shrimp into a pan where garlic had been simmering in butter and spices.
"Americans, overseas? They getting paid to be here or are they simply being lent to us?" She raised her eyebrows. "Last time I was in New York, times were pretty tough. I wouldn't be too surprised to find them looking for a way to feed their families."

He nodded. "Mercs. Quite a few armies have been eager to hire anyone that can breathe, and for a pretty fair sum. The Americans organize themselves into units for hire." He stirred the vegetables, then turned the heat down slightly.

She made a thoughtful noise, indicating she'd heard him, and was silent for a moment, considering. "How old would you say the average merc was? Veterans of the Great War? I don't know how many mercenary training camps there are just lying around in America...."

He shrugged. "On average? The command were vets, yes. The rest were just anyone they could find and train up. A few months in intense training is enough to toughen up a willow-wisp." He turned to look at her, leaning back against the counter. "Why?"

"Curiosity. Wondering how many vets would willingly return to the battlefield. Especially to the trenches. But with the Depression in America..." she shook her head. "I guess people will be willing to do what it takes to feed their families, pay the rent. My father served, and I know he would never willingly go back. And he's a hitman. An expensive one. Seen his fair share of guts and glory."

He shrugged. "I don't know their motivations. Didn't particularly care. Excellent gumbo, however." He poured the shrimp and butter into the tomato base and dishing rice from another pot into two bowls.

She smirked to herself, amused with his absolute disregard in anything that didn't involve security or blood. Did he even have any hobbies? Besides cooking? "Well, at least we have one benefit from the Americans."

He smirked, nodding in agreement, and dished gumbo over the rice before bringing it over. He set a bowl in front of her and sat with his own, digging in.

She followed suit, and began eating in silence, mind beginning to go over the logistics of getting the information to Mussolini's offices in order to betray Ciano.

"So how do you want to do this?" he asks finally, setting his empty bowl aside.

"Well, at least one of us needs to deliver the papers in person, to prove that we're not traitors. Probably me, so you'll be coming along. We'll tell the truth to anybody we need to in between the front door and Mussolini. Ciano doesn't have control of enough, if any, key players to deter us. We'll go as soon as Mussolini arrives in town."

He nodded, not arguing. The whole situation still felt against his nature, but he accepted her advice and did his best to get used to the idea.

She finished up her gumbo in the silence. Then she leaned back, glass of water in her hand, considering him. "So tell me. Any plans regarding your father?"

He ran his thumb along the lip of his glass of water absently as he considered that. "Bits and pieces," he admitted quietly. "I want to get him into our custody. I have some restitution to make. But I need to..." He trailed off, and then shook his head. "I need to ensure that I don't become... caught up."

She raised one of her eyebrows at him. "Care to elaborate on that?
He was silent for a moment, evidently evaluating the situation before speaking. "I'm emotionally involved in the situation. I need to create a system where I am as removed as possible from the portions of this operation where that might pose a risk."

"Isn't the point of this operation that you're emotionally involved? Revenge is, inherently, very personal. There's no way to get around that. Are you worried that you're susceptible to letting him go, or treating him with some degree of mercy?"

He laughed sharply at that. "Neither," he snorted. "If anything, I'm concerned about killing him too quickly. But I won't. My primary concern is doing something rash which in some way risks something in the network. I don't want Moriarty executing me over this. So my plan needs to be cautious. That's all."

She shrugged. "Simply run anything you want to do past me, and I will let you know what is and isn't safe. You'll need me for authorization to most resources, anyways."

He raised an eyebrow, but didn't contradict her. As Jim's bodyguard, he had unfettered access to most of the network's resources, but she and Jim seemed to be on odd communication terms regarding him, and he wasn't eager to highlight it further. Besides, he would need her authorization for a few things. Best not to annoy her.

She smirked at the look he gave her. "I know what you're thinking. Yes, you've technically got the access you need. But I'm the one allowing you to pursue this. On paper, it's my operation. That will keep anyone from questioning about your personals later."

He nodded slightly, smirking a little and nodding slightly in acknowledgment as she brought him to task. She was a grifter. That was for damn sure. "I have time to plan in any respect. It's not like I can do anything until I return to London."

"No, but it's good to think about things to look forward to when you need to get through something you're gritting your teeth about," she said, standing and taking her dishes to the sink. "Getting into a funk about it never helped anyone."

He nodded slightly, considering her quietly. She had said many times that she was invested in keeping him in top condition, but she was more... proactive about it than he was used to from previous employers. He was more used to the 'get your shit together or get shot' approach of the army.

She let the silence stand while she washed her dishes, looking out the small window above the sink at the darkening backyard, just for something a little more interesting to look at than soap. She knew that Moran wasn't a man to take help easily, but she couldn't afford to just leave him alone and hope that he came towards her open hand in a few years or so.
He watched her doing her dishes, quietly analyzing what he knew about her. Finally, he asked something brazen, because he wanted to know. "Is sex ever anything but business for you?"

"Yes," she said immediately, not turning around as she dried off the dish in her hand. "I'm human, too, Sebastian. Do you really think that when we met on the New Year, I slept with you on business? Sleeping with Jim is, primarily, not business for me. It's considered part of my duties, I think, but it's not really a job for me. I don't have any control there. It's a nice change." Her voice was calm, soft. She didn't mind talking about this, especially with him. She rather he not keep curiosity bottled up about her.

He processed that, adding it to his growing file on the woman. "But- not in contradiction of that, but... in my mind a bit incongruous, you were willing to sleep with me as a reward for my work with Ciano. Which- as I am not an idiot- I would not classify as more than business. The degree of separation intrigues me."

She chuckled, setting the clean dishes to the side and turning around to face him, leaning against the counter. "Sebastian, women have been sleeping with men as a reward for their behavior since the beginning of time. Your mistake is considering business and pleasure in two separate categories. Sometimes they're inextricably entwined. With you, there's always going to be association of both, just on the principle that we work together."

He nodded, accepting that for what it was, still studying her. "And if I wanted to sleep with you again?"

She shrugged. "I'd probably say yes. You've certainly made it worth my time in the past," she replied, meeting his eyes steadily. His were so sharp, if inexperienced.

He considered that, tilting his head, and nodded slightly, standing and grabbing his own plate, walking over to wash it.

She stepped out of his way a little, moving a foot or so down the counter to lean back against it again, not watching him, but considering him. He was hard to predict, even with his inexperience. It was hard to tell what he was thinking about doing. Maybe because he was so inexperienced. He thought differently than she did. In less layers.

He dried his dish, putting it in the cupboard and starting to quickly wash his prep dishes, putting them on the drying rack. He set them aside, dried his hands, and leaned against the counter for a moment. Then he turned to look at her, tilting his head, stepping away from the counter and reaching out, touching her neck and tracing the line of her clavicle. His eyes stayed fixed on hers, defiant, waiting for her reaction.
She turned her head to look at him, her expression not changing for a moment, her eyes flicking over his face, looking for his motivations. But he didn't sleep with people for business purposes, not unless she needed him to. So she didn't react, just let him touch her, curious to see how bold he was.

He considered her, fingers sliding back up her skin slowly, his hand encircling her throat, eyes full of a mixture of curiosity and hunger flickering in his gaze. He considered what she had said about the lack of control with Jim, about how it was a welcome change. For a moment, his fingers tightened just a little, gripping her throat, his eyes darkening, but then he let the pressure drop, and he instead he pulled her forward slowly, leaning down the considerable distance between them to kiss her.

She could feel the flush in her cheeks as his fingers tightened around her throat, her stomach fluttering, and when he leaned in she shifted up onto her toes to meet him, his slow movements making her heart stutter.

He saw the warmth that rose on her cheeks at his grip, and he felt a rush of power thrill through him. He kissed her firmly, but didn't rush his movements, each shift and motion carefully calculated. His fingers slowly tightened at her throat again, body pressing hers back against the counter.

She kissed him back, extremely aware of every brush of his body against hers, unaware she was even moving away until she was pinned against the counter, and she pushed back against him, against the grip on his throat, her fingers curling in his shirt as the pressure increased, her breath hitched...

He smiled as she arched against him, pressing into his hands, nails scraping his skin as she grabbed at his chest. He didn't loosen his grip on her throat, but neither did he tighten it, keeping careful control of the situation. He nipped her lip, free hand moving to grip her hip. His hand covered the whole of it easily.

She nipped him back, the hand in his shirt pulling him tighter against her. She could feel the pulse in her neck against his fingers. It still surprised her just how much he dwarfed her, compared to Jim. She was a little surprised to find that she was really into it.

He released her neck just long enough to lift her up onto the counter so that he wouldn't have to stoop. Then his grip returned to her neck, both hands now, thumbs tracing along her jugular, hands along her jawline as he pressed his hips between her legs.

She slid her hand from his chest to his back, then shifted it under his shirt, her fingers splaying against his skin, feeling the muscle shift under the surface. Then she grew a little more impatient, pushing his shirt further up, her other hand at his hip, nails scraping at his skin.

He laughed as she grappled him, and ground his hips forward between her legs slowly, purposefully pushing his shoulders in the opposite direction of her hands' insistent pressure.

She bit his lip when he laughed, but then stole the thunder from right under herself as he ground forward and she moaned, an embarrassingly needy sound.

He hummed, his thumbs tracing her neck, feeling her moan beneath his palms. He pulled back to look at her, admiring the reddish tint to her face caused by either embarrassment or the pressure of his hands on her neck. He released his grip, then, reaching down to push her skirt up around her hips as best he could.
She took the opportunity from the space between them to start unbuttoning his shirt, rather eager to see his muscular chest, rather than just feel it. She ignored his gaze - if she met it, she would only melt further, and to spare her dignity she would try to keep a controlled descent.

He returned the favor with her shirt, growled in annoyance as he was met with resistance, did a quick evaluation of risk versus reward, and then pulled the thing open, buttons flying as they popped. He pushed it down her shoulders and set it aside, considering her brassier with equal consternation before he started to work carefully on the delicate hook-and-loops, fairly certain that a ripped brassier would be harder to forgive than a ripped blouse.

She sucked in a startled breath when he ripped her shirt, and then focused on him again, finally getting his shirt undone and shoving it off his shoulders, and then she leaned forward to kiss down his throat, bite the groove of his collarbone, her newly freed hands going to his trousers to fumble blindly with his belt.

He finally managed to get the brassiere unfastened by some miracle, and her breasts tumbled free of the constraint. He set the item aside, tilting his head back with a low hum of eagerness as she bit his neck.

He weighed her breasts in his hands, rough palms brushing against her nipples before his thumbs took over instead, circling and pinching gently, exploring.

She got his belt undone and wasted no time on the button and zipper, and then she slid her hand inside his trousers to massage his hard cock through his pants, nipping her way back up his neck to catch his earlobe between her teeth and tug. He had far too much composure. She would fix that.

He laughed, deep and soft, at her eager hands, but the noise trailed off into a groan as she palmed him through the thin wool of his army-standard pants. His fingers traced the furrows that had been pressed into her skin by her brassier, and his teeth dug into his lip in a mirror of hers in his ear.

He dropped one of his hands to find her knickers, pressing against her heat through her knickers playfully in response to her hand in his trousers. "Ready to put your money where your mouth is?" he asked with a smirk.

"I'm always ready, Colonel; are you?" she hummed into his ear, the slightest breathlessness to her voice at the location of his hand. She pulled him out of his pants without further ceremony, impatient.

He didn't respond, just pushed her knickers aside and slid his fingers along her slit, dipping them inside of her and then moving back up, groaning softly at how hot she was against his palm. "Always," he agreed, reaching between them to get his own pants out of the way.

She breathed a little harder as he touched her, toes curling in anticipation, and she nipped his throat. "Fuck me, please."

"'Please,' that's a new one," he said cheerfully, but didn't bother to pretend delay, pulling her knickers down quickly and shifting his hips slightly. He reached up to grip her shoulders, and pushed into her slowly.

She groaned, pressing her forehead into his shoulder and rolling her hips against him, the delicious burn making her heart jump.

He moaned happily as she rolled against him, and wasted no time. Despite his cool demeanor, he had been aching with need. Now he took to her body like a cow to a field after winter, his
movements unrestrained and energetic.

"God, you're hot," she moaned, fingers digging into his muscular hips. "It's honestly hard to keep my hands off you..."

"Well what the hell are you doing that for?" he retorted breathlessly, groaning softly as her fingers bit into his skin. He continued thrusting his hips, and bent to nip her shoulder. No marks, he reminded himself.

She desperately wanted him to leave marks on her, to leave the imprint of his teeth, bruises in the shape of his hands, but it was too risky. So she just hung onto him, gasps being forced out of her in a consistent rhythm.

He shifted one hand to her thigh, pulling it further around his hip, and up higher, letting him move more deeply into her. His other hand slid up her back, getting a grip once more in her hair, exercising little control, just to see what it would get him.

She swore, pulling harder against the grip in his hair, egging him on, the new angle already driving her up the wall. "Fuck, fuck, Colonel-" she moaned, one hand falling to the counter to give her leverage to move with him.

He swore as she writhed against him artfully, planting his feet a bit wider for leverage, eyes locked on the way she looked, splayed out on the counter in front of him like some goddess that he had managed to seduce. He was getting close, and leaned into his movements slightly as they became more erratic, the hand at her hip joining hers on the counter for balance.

She grew higher in pitch as he pushed her closer to the edge, the arm that wasn't occupied bracing herself wrapping around his neck and clutching his shoulder. Her eyes fell shut, unable to take the added overwhelming stimulation.

He pulled her head back with his grip on her hair, biting her neck, and for a moment he forgot the rules, heat and energy pulsing through him as his teeth sunk into her skin. He tasted blood, and that was it for him. He came with a howl against her skin, buried deep inside of her.

The shocking burst of pain catapulted her to where she needed to go, and she came, shuddering and panting, the skirt she'd never bothered to remove stuck to her sweaty skin. "Fuck..." she breathed, forehead still resting on his shoulder.

He relaxed his bite, easing his teeth out of her skin, but not pulling away otherwise, catching his breath.

She lifted her hand from the counter to press over her neck, hissing a little as the small wound complained, but was otherwise content with letting him gather himself in his own time.

He pulled away eventually, glancing at her neck, and his bravado faltered slightly. "Sorry," he said quietly.

She shrugged, taking a look at her reddened fingers. "It's alright. I'll just wear scarves for a little while."

He nodded a little, eyes on the issue with a bit more gravitas that was his actual concern. "Ah..." He reached up to rub the back of his neck, his ears a bit pink. "Look... I didn't... uhm." He cleared his throat. "Condom. Didn't have one."

"I noticed, Sebastian, believe me," she snorted, sliding off the counter top, topless and her skirt
wrinkled beyond belief, and went over to the sink, turning on the faucet. "Don't worry, I'm sterile. I only bother with condoms with new bedmates. I've seen syphilis. Not interested in getting it."

"Ah. Well, then..." He cleared his throat again. "Right." He shook himself slightly, and then set about rearranging his trousers. "Good, then."

She chuckled, wetting a towel from the basket under the sink and matter-of-factly cleaning up. "You can ask. I don't mind talking about it."

"Alright..." he said quietly, studying her for a moment. But he wasn't going to pass up freely offered information. "Well, then... Consider yourself asked."

She tossed the dirty rag into the sink and went back to the counter to retrieve her bra and shirt, beginning to put them on. "I was your age, maybe just a little older. Got pregnant with a kid I didn't want. No way I was going to let one of those hacks bleed me to death in an alley, so I waited it out," she shrugged, fastening her bra behind her. Vaguely, she wondered what she would say if he asked about the father. She knew who he was. But that had never made any of it easier. "Something was wrong with the pregnancy - I was in severe pain after a month. Kid came two months early. Whatever it did in there, I've never been right since. Fine by me. I never wanted one."

"And the kid?" His first question, the first thing that came to mind, though there were others. He studied her quietly, uncertain why she was telling him this.

"I don't know," she said honestly, slipping her arms into the sleeves of her ripped blouse. Easier to put it back on for the trip upstairs past windows than to wander about in nothing but her bra. "I never wanted to see it. I passed out during the birth, anyway. They were happy to take the baby away from a young, unwed girl alone in the hospital. They tried to tell me about it, when I was checking out. I didn't want to know. Don't know if they had good news or bad news. And this was in New York. So where ever that kid is, dead or alive, I'll never see it again," she shrugged, voice matter-of-fact. Her mind was in a different time, a different place. When she'd been desperate to leave Vince and his smothering affection, she'd told him, just to cut him deep. It had worked long enough for her to slip away, disappear.

"And the father?" He wasn't being shut down, so he pursued the line of questioning further. Information gathering wasn't natural to him, but the army had pressed it into him and he'd found it a useful habit.

She didn't speak for a moment, considering what she was willing to tell him. But none of this could be used against her. And Moran would never be the type of man with a loose tongue, even if she had been worried about it getting out to anyone else. Jim already knew, of course. "An American, still in New York. Aspiring crime lord himself. I didn't tell him it was his until it was all over."

He nodded slightly, considering other questions but eventually letting the topic drop. It wasn't his business, not really. Plus he couldn't really think of any further question. "Right... Well. I'm going to go shower, if you don't need me for anything."

She waved him off. "Go ahead. Get some rest."

He nodded just slightly, and headed for his room. He showered and changed into pajamas, and lay out on his bed. Not sleeping, just considering the events of the past few hours.

She cleaned up the kitchen and then went upstairs to take a shower herself. When she got into bed, she fell asleep almost immediately. She was unaffected by speaking about it.
He must have fallen asleep at some point, and when he woke, the first light of dawn was just starting to sneak through the shutters. He lay there for a few minutes, relaxing, but realized suddenly that, to his knowledge, they had never called Ciano the night before to tell the politician about his 'illness'. He swore, climbing out of bed and heading for the shower, trying to think of a way to resolve the situation.

Lorna got up and made breakfast, and thought about contingency plans. It was almost second nature by this point to think of ways she could talk herself out of things.

Moran came downstairs a few minutes later, dressed and clean-shaven. He was surprised to see Harrison awake already, but didn't comment. "We didn't deal with Ciano."

"That's fine. If you were really sick, we would have forgotten to call, anyway," she said, shrugging slightly. She was doing the dishes in the sink. "He won't be suspicious immediately. Soon, yes, but not immediately. He'll be too entranced by your ass."

He considered that, but then nodded just a little. "I should probably ring him up today, and sound horrid, to get things back on track, then."

"We don't need to fix things too much. Mussolini should be in town within the next two days. We only need to delay until then," she said, shrugging slightly.

"Right." He shifted, stuck his hands in his pockets, and then sighed, heading for the coffee pot and sneaking it in amidst her dish washing to fill it with water.

She finished up the washing in a few minutes and then stood there, hands resting her weight on the sink, looking out the window over it, contemplating the conversation they had had last night. The fuck they had had last night. Both equally memorable, for different reasons. She didn't recall the last time she'd opened up to somebody that wasn't Jim, and that kind of opening up wasn't exactly in her control, or necessarily even verbal. "Moran," she said after a period of silence, "I assume you know better than to repeat what I told you last night. It isn't common knowledge. Someone might view it as a potential weakness of mine. It isn't, but I'd rather they not try at all."

He looked up from where he was putting the coffee pot on the stove, and the corner of his mouth twitched slightly toward a smile. "I wouldn't have gotten far double-crossing the army if I didn't know when to keep my mouth shut, ma'am."
She smirked a little, turning her head to look at him. "And you'll make it far with us, if you keep your mouth shut about me and Jim. Anyone else," she shrugged, "Do as you please with their secrets."

He nodded just a little, leaning against the refrigerator. "Can I ask something?"

She raised an eyebrow just a fraction, but nodded. "You may."

He watched the coffee pot on the stove for a minute. "Jim doesn't seem very open with you about me. Why would that be?"

The hitched eyebrow rose a little further. "Define open with."

He shrugged. "We've encountered several situations where he has chosen not to reveal seemingly useful pieces of information about me to you. I'm not trying to start a fight. I'm just genuinely curious as to why that might be."

The corner of her lips twitched up. "I know you're not. He does that because that's what Jim does. He's always playing a game that only he knows the rules to. It amuses him to watch the rest of us dance. He hasn't told me all the useful information about you, but that's what he always does. He hasn't talked to you about me, has he? I assume I'm fairly high on your security risk list. I have access to him at all hours, I know where he sleeps, I know what little habits he has. But he hasn't told you anything about me, has he. It's just Jim." She paused for a moment. "Which information are you referring to, about yourself?"

He shrugged. "You were pissed that Jim hadn't told you some or my service record, as I recall. Other things, too. Small things. Biographical information Jim has, but you don't seem to. My father, for example. I'm just surprised. I would have thought my ties to political figures would have been part of the vetting process."

"I'm not included in the vetting process," she shrugged. "He's smarter than I am. Why would I be included? I don't have a background in security."

He shrugged. "You're his second. It would seem to make sense. Perhaps that's just the military in me talking." He took the coffee pot off of the heat as it started boiling.

"No, it's not the military talking. It's your common sense built on a life of dealing with people who play by normal rules and think in predictable ways. Don't assume anything of Jim, especially in front of him. If you catch him in the wrong mood he might take offense, and you don't want that," she sighed, lifting a hand over her shoulder to brush her fingers over the scar on her spine. That had been her first mistake. Assuming she could get away with taking some space to cool down, that she could leave without telling him.

He caught the movement, but didn't question. He had seen the scar. He could connect the dots. "Coffee?" he asked instead, opening the cabinet with mugs.

"Sure, thanks," she nodded, turning away from the window and leaning back against the counter, watched him pour her a cup. It struck her suddenly that despite Jim's madness, she actually sort of missed him when she was away.

He walked over, handing her her mug and returning a moment later with his own, and cream and sugar. He sipped his own coffee, black, and sat back. "So what does this leave us doing today?"

She shrugged again, as she picked up the cream and sugar and turned her coffee a light, creamy brown. "Whatever you feel like. Nothing we need to do today."
He sighed, but nodded. "Is it always like this? Sedentary?"

"No," she snorted. "These missions? Kinda."

"Remind me to avoid these missions where possible in the future," he sighed. He was quiet for a bit, then glanced at her. "We could go kill someone. Someone not on Jim's payroll."

She raised her eyebrows a little, taking a sip of her coffee. "You're right. We could. Who?"

"Whoever we want," he snorted. "I've cased this city on my free time. The areas by the docks are a haven."

"Hmmm," she considered, running a thumb around the edge of her mug. "That sounds like fun... We'll need to be very careful. Extra careful."

He smirked confidently at that. "I was a serial killer in the army, and you are the second of a major crime syndicate. I think we can handle ourselves."

She rolled her eyes a little at his bravado, but she smirked a little despite herself. "We need aliases and a plan for luring away a victim," she pointed out, raising her eyebrows at him as if making sure he was paying attention. "We need to limit our exposure in public, considering we're swimming around with the biggest fish. I don't want this coming back to haunt me."

He rolls his eyes. "Easy there, Boss. I'm not saying we walk down Front Street and cap someone. I think we can manage to kill someone quietly. Don't you?"

She took another sip of coffee, considering. Jim wouldn't care if she killed a random civilian, as long as she didn't get caught. And she was good at not being caught. Despite never really having killed with Moran before, even if he made any mistakes she could likely compensate. She put the mug back on the table. "Get dressed for going out, then."

He smiled and stood quickly, almost jumping to his feet. "I'll be ready in five minutes," he said, heading for the stairs.

She snorted in amusement, continuing to sip her coffee for a moment before she stood and followed him up the stairs, heading into her own room and changing into a shirt and a rough pair of trousers. She pinned up her careful curls in the typical fashion for working women these days, and then she was suitably ready.

He returned a few minutes later, dressed in a charcoal suit that had never fit him quite properly, and a hat that mostly hid his hair. There was nothing to do for his light skin, foreign in the tanned Italian streets, but it would have to do.

She chuckled when she saw him, at his attempt to hide his eye-catching hair. "Shoe polish is less likely to fall off your head in a scuffle, you know," she pointed out in amusement, her hand in her pocket, weight resting on one hip. It was a familiar position for her; it made her curves more prominent. These days, she fell into it naturally. "Don't worry too much about looking like a foreigner. There are enough Nazis in Naples for most people to look away from you."

He considered that, then nodded a little and returned to his room.

He worked the shoe polish through his hair, doing his best not to get it all over his face and ears in the process. When he was done, his hair was black, and he washed his face in an attempt to rid himself of look of a chimney sweep. He considered himself, then nodded slightly. It wasn't perfect, but she was right- it would do in a scuffle. He replaced his hat and came back out. "Ready?"
She nodded, stubbing out the cigarette she had lit in his absence after taking one last drag, and then stood, a smile on her face. "Next time, we'll pack a fascist uniform for you. Now let's get going."

"That would have been a good idea," he agreed, following after her out the door. "The one question is getting back here afterwards," he pointed out, pausing. "We should pack changes of clothing."

"That shouldn't be necessary. Why rob the fun out of stealing someone else's clothing? Or being careful enough not to have to?" She challenged, raising her eyebrows at him as she continued backwards towards the door. "We have the whole day ahead of us, Colonel. Have you already called Ciano, pretended illness?"

"I gave him a short call, yes, a few wheezing apologies, he was sympathetic. Offered to stop over, I told him perhaps tomorrow.." He followed after her, a small smile on his face.

"Good, then we have the whole day," she grinned, opening up the door and leading the way out. "And the whole night, but who's paying attention?"

He stepped out after her, closing the door behind him and locking it. "Not me. Let's go see how much trouble we can cause."

She smirked, flagged a cab, and they were on their way.

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The ride to the harbor was short, but felt longer. She'd never done this before, not really. Gone out with someone else to find someone to kill. Her dad had taken her once, but that had just been to show her how, once he'd gathered that she had a knack for the family business, and she'd barely been more than a child then. Her mother had not wholeheartedly approved.

He was silent for the ride. He wasn't sure he trusted himself to speak. His body was buzzing with energy. It had been far too long since he'd gotten to make a proper kill. Adelia had tided him over some, but that had been Harrison's kill, not his. The gardener had been the only person he'd offed in his time here, and that had been too long ago, and a bit rushed, tainted by his work with Ciano immediately afterward. He had started having restless dreams lately, reliving old hunts. The hunts were paradise, but he woke up needing to make them a reality and finding himself trapped in diplomacy and civility. Now the thought of tasting blood again, of feeling a pulse go out under his fingers... He was dying for it.

Lorna was silent, reflecting on her past, and only returned to the present when the car pulled to a stop and the cabby turned around to collect payment, which she handed over wordlessly and got out, standing with her hands on her hips, observing the bustling harbor before them. "Look at all these sheep," she stated as Moran stepped up beside her.

He smiled, then, a feral motion that was more hunger than happiness. "Shall we browse?" He offered her his arm.

"Mmm, let's," she hummed, taking his arm smoothly, and suddenly they looked like a young couple out on a walk during their lunch break.

"So, do you have any preferences?" he asked, eyes wandering through the bustling crowds.

"I usually enjoy killing men more," she hummed, her eyes doing the same exact thing. "It's a power thing. What about you?"
"Women are my standard, but you know that. I don't really care though, I'm versatile. What age man?" He turned down to walk along the harbor.

"Old men aren't as fun as young men," she said, conversationally. "I like them to fight back a little. Just before they know they're going to die."

"There we agree," he nodded. "So, a young gentleman, preferably with a bit of muscle, as well. That doesn't really narrow it down much... See anyone that catches your eye?"

"Hmmm..." was her response as she scanned the crowd, looking for anybody that her eyes stuttered on. After a minute of walking along the docks in silence, she squeezed his arm a little. "There. That one." She nodded her head towards a man carrying a fairly hefty box on his shoulder, passing about a hundred yards in front of them. He was young, handsome, and strapping, and probably would have given her a decent time if he'd ever paid for her services, just by eyeballing what kind of endurance he could get at. He would be a challenge.

He looked the man up and down, and smiled. "Nice choice. Should be fun..." He turned them slightly, falling into step about ten meters behind their quarry. "What's the plan?"

"Let's see if he has any immediate obvious pattern, and then we'll decide," she smiled, eyes on their prey. "Most likely, I'll end up being the one to lure him away. He's a sailor. How hard can it be?"

He laughed, squeezing her arm lightly. "Perhaps we could talk him into a bit of fun beforehand," he muttered softly.

She smirked, glancing at him with a slightly raised eyebrow. "I forgot you like to play with your food. Again, he is a sailor. It can't be too hard to convince him...."

He looked down at her for a moment, and smirked too. "We don't have to if you prefer not to. It's just my usual order of operations."

She snorted, rolling her eyes a little. "It just took me a moment to recall, that's all. I don't usually do it this way. But you got to see me kill in my element, so now it's my turn to watch you. I'd like to try it your way."

He nodded a little. "You open," he said as they approached the young man. "He's more likely to be open to you. If he doesn't show interest, I'll flirt as well."

She nodded, as they followed the man into a warehouse yard, filled with crates and boxes. "And where are we going to fool around with this young specimen?"

He sighed, considering. "Alleyways are my typical go-to, but they are used much more frequently here than in London." He admired the sailor's arse as he bent to deposit his crates on the ground. "Why don't I go take a look around for something suitable while you say hello?"

"Sounds like a plan to me," she smiled, releasing his arm and taking a few steps towards their mark. "Don't take too long," she added over her shoulder, punctuated with a wink, and then approached the sailor in earnest, unbuttoning the top button of her shirt absently, to make things easier for herself.

The young man looked up as she approached. He had the dark hair and olive skin of his countrymen, his eyes a deep green. "Can I help you, signora?"

"That depends," she smiled, pushing a stray lock of hair that had escaped its confines back into place and coming to a stop a few feet away from him. "Do you think your fellow sailors would
notice you missing for a little while? You caught my eye, and I wanted to get to know you. Get a coffee, maybe?"

His eyes dropped to her open button, then wandered back up with a bit of a smile. "I think they wouldn't notice a thing, doll. Coffee sounds like a dream."

"Great," she beamed, and hitched a thumb back towards the pier. "I thought I saw some sort of stand not that far away. How bad can it be?"

He offered her his arm with a smile. "With your beauty? I won't notice if they give me seawater."

Moran trailed a ways back as they walked. He had found a secluded roof garden with lounges over a house that had obviously remained untouched for months.

Lorna let the man buy her a cup of passable coffee and learned his name was Marco. She told him her real first name, because it wasn't her cover name, and they chatted for a few minutes before she caught sight of Sebastian amongst the crowd, and waved him over.

He walked over when she signaled him, smiling. "Hello, signora! I didn't expect to see you here!" he said, carefully avoiding her name, as he was uncertain of it. Marco smiled politely, eyeing Moran curiously. "A friend of yours, Lorna?"

"Close friend," she grinned, standing from her seat to meet him, drawing him down to kiss his cheeks in greeting. "Join us, please! This is Marco; I think we're going to be fast friends."

He smiled, and sat. Marco looked a bit put out, and he chuckled slightly. "Relax, sailor. I'm not cutting in."

Marco didn't look entirely convinced, but he nodded a little. "And what's your name? Sorry, didn't catch it."

"Bastian," he offered with a toothy grin. "And you're Marco. A pleasure."

"See? Fast friends," Lorna chuckled, sitting back a little and finishing off her coffee. Time to get moving. "Do you fellas want to go for a walk? I'm a little antsy."

"Sounds excellent to me. Come on, I know a place with a view." He stood, but left Marco to offer Lorna a hand up. He didn't want to scare the man off. The sailor did, and settled Lorna's hand on his arm as they headed down a side street.

Lorna kept tight up against Marco as they walked, hand smoothing over his arm, squeezing on his muscle. This would be a fun time.

Marco's ego seemed to bolster back a bit at that, and he straightened, smiling as 'Bastian' lead the way down a few streets. "Up here," he said, stopping in front of the house and unlatching the gate of a set of outside stairs leading up to roof he'd found.

Lorna was silently impressed that he'd managed to find this spot in such a short amount of time, but that might have been partially because he was a sniper. She went up the stairs in front of Marco, and put an extra swing into her hips, and judging by the slight misstep on the stairs behind her, it was effective. She whistled as she reached the top of the stairs, admiring the slightly overgrown garden and the lounge chairs. They were a good step above fucking in an alley. "Well, isn't this
"I'd say so," Moran said with a smirk from where he was leaning against a lattice. "What do you think, sailor? Suit your tastes?" He met Marco's gaze, and smirked just slightly, watching the man struggle to figure out what was going on. "It really is cute to watch them flop around," he said, glancing at Lorna. "Why don't you give him a bit of a jump start?"

"Good idea," she chuckled, reaching over to take Marco's hand, and led him over to one of the lounge chairs, where she gently pushed him to sit, and then she sat sideways in his lap, wrapping an arm around his neck, and raising an eyebrow at him. "Get the idea, yet?"

Marco seemed pleased, but confused, by the turn of events. He wrapped his arms naturally around Lorna's waist, but glanced at Moran.

Moran smirked. "Oh, don't look at me like that," he snorted, walking over and stooping to kiss the back of Lorna's neck, eyes on Marco. "She likes to be shared... You don't have a problem with that, do you?"

The man reddened, but didn't move.

Lorna grinned, shifting a little to kiss Marco, reaching behind her to grab Moran's shirt, pulling him down onto the lounge behind her. She liked being sandwiched sometimes. Marco kissed her back hesitantly for a moment, and then she slid a hand down his chest, and he relaxed a little under her touch.

"He can be taught..." Moran murmured quietly, cheerfully, pressing his lips to Harrison's shoulders and shifting a little closer to her, straddling the lounge, his legs brushing against the Italian's. Marco didn't seem to mind, his attention on kissing Lorna, his body's pent-up desires taking over any reservations.

"Good thing, too," she smirked, drawing back from kissing Marco to cup his chin in her hand, tilting his face back and forth to admire. "Look at how pretty he is," she hummed.

"Do you two do this often?" Marco ventured, raising his eyebrows a little.

"Oh, often enough," Moran lied simply, trailing fingers up the man's thigh. He tensed slightly, but then seemed to relax, trying to adjust to things. He smiled at Lorna.

"Well, signora... What next?"

"What do you think?" She winked, the hand on his chest shifting to the buttons on his shirt, beginning to undo them one-handed while the hand on Moran trailed down his chest and hooked in his belt, keeping him close as she leaned forward and kissed Marco again.

Marco let out a soft, eager noise against her lips as she kissed him, the arms around her waist starting to trail down over her hips. Moran smiled at Lorna's grip in his belt, and leaned forward to give the back of her neck and shoulders a little attention, hands finding the collar of her shirt and pulling it back a little, the buttons in the other man's reach.

Marco seemed to find some initiative as the other man pulled the collar of her shirt aside, his hands going to unbutton her shirt, baring more of her soft skin. She didn't stop kissing him, but lessened the intensity a little so she wouldn't distract him. He unbuttoned her shirt and pushed it off her shoulders. Moran pulled it clear of her trousers and set it aside, his eyes on Harrison's newly exposed back. Their Italian victim worked to unfasten Lorna's brassier, bending to kiss down her sternum.
Lorna pushed up Marco's simple pull-on shirt, and they both paused for a second as they got around to pulling it off over his head, and she made a hum of appreciation once it was gone, eyes on his chest. It would be a shame to ruin something so pretty. She'd better enjoy it while it lasted.

Sebastian made a similar noise from behind her, rolling his hips forward against her just slightly, eager to get this moving along.

Marco seemed to be of the same mind, standing for a moment to rid himself of his trousers before sitting again.

She shifted her hips back against Moran in response, aiming to make him more riled up. She liked him that way. Marco pulled her closer to kiss her hard, his hands going to the buttons of her trousers, roughly undoing them.

Moran growled quietly as she ground backward, and then grinned as Marco's aggression shoved her back into him. He reached forward, then, grabbing Marco's chin for lack of a better handle and meeting the man's gaze with a challenge, before snogging him fiercely, roughly, over Lorna. Marco hesitated for a moment, but seemed to decide that he didn't care as much as he thought he might, and was kissing Moran back.

Sebastian grinned and bit hard, and tasted blood. He leaned back, eyes wide and hungry as they took in Marco with dark blood dripping down his chin. He rested his own chin on Lorna's shoulder. "Good pick," he whispered as he nipped her ear.

Marco looked a little startled to be bleeding, but Lorna leaned back into Moran's arms and shoved her trousers down, and then he seemed to decide that he didn't care as much as he thought he might, because he wasn't looking so confused and shifted to help her take them off. "What can I say, I have a good eye," she murmured, her head resting back on his shoulder as her trousers hit the ground, and Marco didn't bother to stop there, pulling off her pants as well, to which she shifted and pulled him closer with her legs, a hand going to hair to get a grip as she leaned up to kiss him.

Sebastian was feeling drastically overdressed, and left the two to get to know each other better while he stepped back and stripped down as well. He stepped forward again as Marco pulled Lorna onto his lap eagerly.

Lorna made a low hum as she tasted the blood on the sailor's lips, one arm encircling his neck, the other keeping low so her fingers could hook in the waistband of his pants, officially making Marco the most-dressed person on the patio, judging by Sebastian's absence from her back. She hoped he'd come prepared, because she had not been expecting to fuck a stranger, and especially not a sailor, at that.

Moran returned to her back, tapping the condom pack on her shoulder and handing it to her as he started kissing and biting his way down her spine. Marco managed to shift his way out of his pants, eager now that he could see where things were going. Or, so he thought.

She made a grateful sound, grabbing it and managing to rip it open without looking, though she did break the kiss to roll it onto Marco, her heart beating hard in her chest as she finished and he pulled her closer again, grinding up against her, kissing a bloody line down her neck.

Moran groaned happily from where he was, shifting as Marco pulled away to lick and suck the other man's blood off of Lorna's skin. Marco's hands gripped Lorna's ass, brushing against Moran's cock, as the sailor encouraged the grifter up and forward over him. "Please, signora..."

She smirked, but did as he wanted, figuring that if he was going to die soon, he might as well die
satisfied, and sank onto him with a small hiss, her fingers leaving marks in his shoulders at the
stretch. Marco squeezed her ass again, impatient for her to move, but she only rocked a little,
making herself relax, one hand falling from his shoulder to drop back and grab Moran's knee
tightly.

Moran smirked a little despite the fact that he was a bit left out. He slid his hand around Lorna's
waist and down between her legs, brushing his fingers over the small rise of her clit. He ground
against her arse slowly.

Marco was getting impatient, groaning softly and kissing Lorna hungrily, trying to urge her on.

She shivered under Moran's attention, the curve of her spine deepening as she arched a little, and
Marco moved impatiently under her. She relented, rolling her hips down onto him, back into
Moran, her hand shifting behind her to slide along his length, shooting a teasing look over her
shoulder.

Marco let out a happy groan and a few mumbled lines in Italian (Moran couldn't understand them,
but he could gather that they were filthy). The Italian started rolling his hips with eagerness, if
ungracefully. Moran watched him, watched his muscles move, and caught Lorna's gaze with a grin
as she turned to look at him. Then he gasped, hips jutting forward as she touched him.

She smirked at his reaction, though the expression fell off her face when Marco lost patience and
tightened his grip on her hips to lift her and then pull her back down, still murmuring Italian, and
she had to take a gasp of breath before he started into a rough rhythm. When she managed to speak
again, her hand relocated to Moran's thigh, inches from where he wanted it, she was a little
breathless. "What, only one of you is going to talk dirty to me? Thought better of you, 'Bastian."

Moran groaned impatiently as she pulled her hand away. "The Italian seemed like he had a handle
on it," he said with a small gasp. "And you seemed distracted... I'm hurt. You never make noises
like that when... when you're riding my cock." Marco managed a laugh.

"Maybe I would, if you had a mouth as filthy," she laughed, briefly, before the Italian shifted a
little and deepened his thrusts, and she groaned, fingers flexing on Sebastian's thigh before shifting
to brush against him again, her touches light, teasing.

"What's he- mmm- What's he saying that you like so much?" he asked, but swore as she brushed
against him. "Fuck, please, give me something, Lorna, Jesus." Marco laid back against the chair,
rutting his hips up more fiercely, and Moran dug his teeth roughly into Lorna's shoulder, trying to
spur her on.

She gasped and Marco swore, hips stuttering briefly as she tightened around him, and her hand
shifted to fully wrap around Sebastian's length, gracing him with a stroke that was just a little too
light to be completely satisfying. "He's telling me how... How hot I am wrapped around his cock,
how drenched I am..."

"Not really creative, stating the obvious," he gasped against her shoulder. He stifled a whine as she
stroked him, dying for more stimulation. "See me, I'd tell you what you wanted to hear..." He
shifted his lips up near her ear, and spoke in broken whispers, too softly for Marco to hear,
grinding his hips forward against her as she bounced against the Italian beneath her. "I'd tell you
that I saw your heartbeat in your eyes when you murdered that girl, that I know how you felt when
you ripped your knife through her throat... How it sated some creature holed up so deep inside of
you that nothing but blood ever reaches it..." His fingers brushed over her clit again. "I'd tell you
that playing with your food... as you put it... makes it so much better... To fuck someone, to feel
them at the peak of aliveness with you just moments before you drain it all away..."
She moaned, a shiver traveling down her spine, and Marco swore again, teeth bared and clenched as he tried to keep it together. "Jesus, signora, what did he say to you?" He groaned, and she ignored him, her hand tightening on Moran, giving him a few rough pumps, her mind offering up the image of the young man behind her coated in the blood of the one beneath her.

Moran swore in quiet victory as she finally gave him a little more of what he needed, and continued speaking. "Put your hand on his chest," he urged softly, urgently. "Feel his heart thundering with his movements... He is more alive than he will ever be again, right now..."

She did as he asked, her palm flattening on the man's chest, the vibration of his heart fluttering up against her hand, and she was consumed with the desire to see it, to revel in more blood than was smeared on Marco's chin, and she made a keening noise, rocking back towards Moran, seeking his touch. "Do it, Moran, for God's sake, do it and then fuck me, this isn't **enough.**"

He pulled away at her urging, bloodlust overpowering its passionate counterpart, and stood, walking around to put his hands on the groaning, panting, Marco's shoulders. He met Lorna's gaze as she continued to move with the man beneath her. "How do you want it?"

She shook her head, dark hair falling loose from its restraints. "I don't care, just do it."

He smiled, stroking back the oblivious italian's hair almost gently. The man was clearly confused, but too close to his glory to care. It was a weakness Sebastian adored.

He reached down beside the chair to where he'd stowed his knife when he'd undressed, and then he was upright again. Marco paid him no heed until his hand closed over the man's throat. The confusion was back then, which morphed into terror and pain as the knife slid into place a second later, parting the man's skin like butter and severing his vocal cords. Marco tried to scream, but nothing came of it, his rhythmic thrusts against Lorna changing to thrashes and struggling. Moran removed the knife, watching the blood bubble up, his own heart a bass drum in his ears. His fingers were white against the handle of the knife as he started carving a furrow down the sailor's arm. Marco let out a silent hiss of a scream.

Lorna clutched the chair and bore down on the struggling man, trapping him and keeping him from struggling off the lounge, and in the meantime was introduced to a very unsteady rhythm and intensity that had her spine tingling, which was a combination of over-stimulation and watching the blood pour out of the artfully executed hole in the Italian's throat. She scraped her nails hard down his sides, shutting her eyes briefly to rein herself in. She wasn't going to come until Sebastian was buried in her. The longer she waited, the better it would be.

He grabbed the italian's left wrist and sliced the inside of his arm from elbow to palm and down to the bone, all in one quick, clean motion. He moved with the precision of a butcher, forcing his victim's arm up and dragging it down his chest, leaving a smear of dark blood the width of his forearm on the man's tanned skin. Marco was losing strength now, terror still evident in his eyes as he tried to comprehend just what was happening through the pain and panic. Sebastian let out a delighted laugh at the sight of the man's body painted in his blood, and handed the knife to Lorna. "Go ahead," he urged, eager, his bloodied arms wrapping around her. "Feel the difference..."

She laughed, taking the knife and slicing a precise line down the man's chest, like she was conducting an autopsy, although she pressed much harder, until the tip of the blade dragged along his sternum, shuddering under her hand as it tried to find a way through, until she reached the end and it plunged into his stomach. She twisted it then, and felt her pupils expand as he writhed weakly beneath her. Sebastian was right. This was a completely different experience.

Moran straddled the chair again, over the dying man's legs, pressing his chest to Lorna's back, his
chin on her shoulder. He reached out a hand to drag through the blood pulsing upward on Marco's chest. His breaths and pulse mingled with those of the woman pressed up against him, until everything was as fevered and erratic and rhythmless as the finale of a fireworks show. The thundering in his ears was just as deafening. Still, he waited, watched, for the man's last moment. He didn't want to be distracted, not in that moment. He needed the perfection of that instant before he succumbed to the roaring frenzy threatening to overwhelm him.

She pulled the knife back out and watched the blood bubble up, more weakly than before, his blood pressure beginning to fail from all the lacerations, and she pressed her palm into it for a moment, letting out a sigh as the hot liquid coated her skin, turning her the same color as Moran. Her eyes drifted to Marco's face, which was beginning to lose some of its pallor, his eyes less focused, and she drove the knife up under his ribs to see his face twist, her heart beating a mad rhythm in her ears.

He watched the last flicker of life leave Marco's eyes. He watched a man become a thing, and it seemed like that life seeped its way into him as it left the Italian. He took a sharp breath, smiling, and his grip tightened on Lorna, pulling her back against him, his hands slick with blood. "Lorna..."

She shifted to pull herself off Marco, now that he had nothing else to give her, and leaned back into Sebastian, bloody hand going to brace on his thigh, nails digging into his skin. "Sebastian?"

"I need you," he growled, shifting his hand from her waist to her upper thigh, pulling her back against him and pushing into her without ceremony, his self-control gone.

She swore, arching back against him, eyes screwing shut, nails scraping across his skin. "Don't hold back."

He didn't need to be told, nails digging into the skin of her thigh as he surged against her, pushing her forward over Marco's body, his thighs slamming against her arse in a way he knew would leave bruises.

She cried out, giving up holding herself up in any capacity and bracing herself on Marco's chest, one hand on the dead man's shoulder, the other clutching the chair to keep herself still, her heart thundering in her ears, her stomach burning with warmth, but still not enough, not hard enough, not painful enough.

He reached out with one hand to get a tight grip on her hair, fingers twisting in her dark curls, pulling her head back and giving himself a little balance as he pounded into her. His other hand grabbed her thigh and pulled it up, twisting her at a bit of an angle that suddenly had him bottoming out with every stroke, a snarling groan leaving him.

She was suddenly only capable of panting for breath and taking what he gave her as he ramped up the intensity, and she gasped his name as he bottomed out, a tangible shiver shooting up her spine, although it was more like a spasm than anything else, bucking back against him, eyes screwing shut, her teeth bared.

His eyes were on her, on the stark contrast of dark blood against light skin, on the desecrated body beneath her, and it fueled the creature inside of him into a full berserker's rage, barely within his capacity to control. The hand at her hip tightened until his fingernails drew blood, dragging red lines down her thigh, and he had to wrestle his mind away from the desire to grab the knife out of the cooling body and carve into her. He didn't have enough control for that knife, and he wasn't stupid enough to risk the temptation. Instead he channeled the stifled bloodlust into his movements, letting out a roar of frustration and pleasure as he curled over her, his teeth finding her back and biting hard. Fuck Jim's rules about marks. There was only so much he could do.
A starburst of color exploded behind her closed eyes as he broke skin, every part of her lost, every ounce of control surrendered to him, because she had the sick fetish of only baring her neck to other predators, of only truly giving in to the people who could truly hurt her. It was one of the few times she felt alive, when she was pinned down and forcefully dominated, with pleasure taking the place of logical fear. She dropped to one elbow as her arms buckled, and reached behind her, over her shoulder, with the other hand to fist her hand in his hair, urging him on further, daring him to push it as far as he had the balls for, barely even conscious of the positively filthy noises that were spilling from her lips.

The noise she made as his nails and teeth drew blood was a deathblow to his restraint, and her hand in his hair lit the funeral pyre. Her hot blood over his tongue tasted like freedom, and all he knew was that he needed more. He was burning, his body ablaze, and the fire just kept building with no hint of release. Finally he couldn't control whatever was inside of him any longer and did the one thing he could think of. He grabbed the knife and pulled back in one fluid motion, pulling out of Lorna and pushing her down hard until she was flat on the body. He pinned her back with his knee, digging the tip of it into the J on her back with a steady hand.

She just barely kept herself from screaming, biting into the meat of her hand to stifle it, so suddenly overwhelmed with the excruciating pain; very suddenly shifting modes from submission to fight or flight, the feeling of a knife digging into her spine, only pounds of pressure between her and death, and a second later her hand had snapped back, twisting his wrist and wrenching the knife from his grip, her torso twisting as much as was possible, slashing at him, intent deadly, instinctual.

He caught her hand- the knife slicing his wrist superficially- and froze, holding the blade in its path to his neck, eyes on hers, his breaths labored, waiting.

"You do not take a knife to me, under any circumstances, not unless Jim has handed it to you himself," she snarled, eyes hard, merciless, fueled by adrenaline, by that moment where she'd thought he was going to drive the knife down and kill her like he did with all his conquests. "What the fuck were you thinking?"

He was panting, his heart pounding, and the world seemed too bright. Her words took longer to process than they should have. "I..." He tried to speak, but it didn't quite work, the fear and shame of what was in him that he had struggled with until he'd met her and Jim back in livid force now. "I wasn't," he said finally, expression closing off as best as he could manage it.

She stared up at him for a long minute, assessing him, her eyes still dark, expression unreadable. She believed he hadn't been thinking - he was panicking now. He hadn't been attempting to kill her, he just had shit self-control. Typical, for someone who had spent a good portion of his life attempting to repress the worst of his cravings. She sighed, imperceptibly, and threw the knife to the side with a clatter. "Stop whatever it is you're doing in your head, for God's sake," she huffed, wiggling until he took his knee off her back, and then she grabbed him by the back of the neck and pulled him down for a rough kiss.

"Don't over think it until we're done, Sebastian, for God's sake," she huffed, wiggling until he took his knee off her back, and then she grabbed him by the back of the neck and pulled him down for a rough kiss.

He kissed her back, fiercely, trying to shake off the thoughts that were threatening to overwhelm him and concentrate on the feeling of her hand gripping his neck, her lips against his. He kept his
teeth to himself.

She shifted fully onto her back, totally ignoring that she was partially on top of a corpse, and nipped his lip, not interested in him suddenly losing all of his nerve. Things had been fantastic until he'd threatened her well-being, and she was eager to get back to that, and let him know with the hand that skated down his chest and wrapped around his cock, a small moan coming from her as she realized he was still wet with her.

She seemed less furious than she had been, but it wasn't really her he was afraid of. Still, her hand at his cock kicked his lust out of its stupor, and he groaned as he re-realized just how badly he needed to be inside of her. He thrust his hips against her hand just a little, eager to burn the feeling of failure out of himself for a few minutes.

She smirked against his lips at his reaction. "There we go," she chuckled, giving him a long stroke.

He closed his eyes, breathing ragged, and let the part of his mind that was panicking shut up for a bit. She wanted to feel good. *That* he could do, and maybe dig himself a little out of the hole he'd found himself in. He rolled his hips a little more enthusiastically this time. "Let me try that again, huh? No knife this time."

"That's the idea," she agreed, the hand on the back of his neck tightening for a moment before releasing and sliding down his chest.

The small show of command was a reminder, though an unneeded one. He wasn't going to push anything too far. He had no confidence in his control at the moment. He shifted over her, closing his eyes and taking in the smell of blood, trying to lose himself just a little in it, *just* enough. He bent down to bite her shoulder encouragingly, to taste the blood on her skin, hips pressing against her hand until he was further between her thighs.

She moaned softly at the feel of his teeth, retrieving her hand from in between them, giving him better access, going to clutch his arse instead.

He didn't hesitate to push into her, picking up where they had left off, one hand bracing on the chair beneath them while the other reached up to regain his grip in her hair.

She groaned, giving herself over to the sensation again, easily switching emotions again, the hunger in her lighting again.

He watched her melt under his hands, but didn't follow her, keeping himself on a short leash, enjoying the pleasure but not letting himself loose any further. He pulled her head back over the deceased Marco's shoulder, just to the edge of discomfort, and started to regain his speed and power.

She hissed at the strain in her neck, but she was too into it to do more than a token tug, just to feel the sting in her scalp, though at this point she was covered in small scrapes, and that was ignoring the bites. She let her eyes shut, just trying to lose herself for a moment, to push herself over the edge.

He reached between them, his thumb brushing just slightly over her clit, trying to help her over. He was approaching his own end, stamina exhausted.

She shouted at the sudden stimulation, not expecting it, and it was enough to catapult her climax, arching violently upwards, head pulling against the grip in her hair, the only sounds escaping her gasps. She tightened and spasmed around him, her body writhing and stained red, and he followed
her a few seconds later, teeth digging into his lip hard to keep himself quiet.

She panted for a breath as they both relaxed for a second, and she blinked, trying to clear up her vision. "Christ..." she mumbled under her breath, still recovering, then pushed at his shoulder a little. "Hey, let me out. Our friend is starting to get cold."

He nodded, relaxing his grip and shifting off of her, standing on slightly weak legs. He considered her, then himself, and sighed. He rubbed his arm, trying to scrub off some of the dried blood and boot black from his hair that was smeared all over them both. "We need to find a hose."

She nodded in agreement. They weren't going anywhere until they were cleaned up a little. "Let's hope this place has running water."

He nodded in agreement, picking up his clothes and then hunting around for a roof access hatch. He found one a moment later and hauled it open, climbing down to clear the room below.

She stayed where she was. There was no need to jump down into who knew what when she had someone else to scout for her.

He spent a few minutes scouting out the small house, then returned to the hatch. "All clear. The shower's working. Shit water pressure though."

"That's fine, I don't need a spa experience, I just need a rinse," she said, picking up the neatly-folded clothes that she had retrieved while he was in the house, and walked over to climb down beside him, wrinkling her nose at the amount of dust.

He led her through to the shower, motioning for her to go in. "I'll keep an eye on things."

She nodded, stepping into the shower and turning it on with a flinch as cold water sputtered from the head, looking down at the ground to shield her eyes. That hurt, really bad, and she swore under her breath, reaching a hand back to clap it over the knife wound on her spine.

He waited outside, listening for any disturbances. He wasn't really expecting anything, but it paid to be careful, and it kept him distracted.

She appeared a few minutes later, dressed now, and gestured with a jerk of her head into the bathroom. "Your turn."

He didn't argue, just went in, rinsed off, and changed in less than five minutes. He returned, looking mostly clean, and put his hat on. "Ready to go?"

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, they're fucked up
"Yes," she nodded, her hair still loose. She hadn't bothered to try and put it back up. They were in Naples, for God's sake. Half the girls walked around with their hair down, anyway.

He slid his rinsed knife into its sheath on the inside of his jacket, and headed down to the ground level. He checked through the windows that the street was clear before they left, and a moment later they were walking away, for all the world a couple on a stroll.

He wondered how long it would take someone to discover the body. If the owners were out of the city, it could be months. Marco would be noticed missing that evening, or at the latest the next morning at roll call, but he would be assumed a deserter before he was thought to be missing.

It didn't matter anyway. They turned a few more streets, and just like that, they were free and clear.

She enjoyed the jaunt in the fresh air on the way back, and she waited a little longer than usual to flag down a cab, though when she did it was mostly because her clothes were beginning to chafe on her scrapes.

He climbed in beside her and rattled off an address a few blocks from the house, sitting back to watch the world go by and focusing on keeping his mind in the zone it was in when he was sniping - silent, unworried, waiting.

She paid for the cabby as they came to a halt and then got out, heading for the door, where she waited for Sebastian. It was best for him to enter buildings first.

He slipped past her without question, and cleared the first floor quickly before moving to the second. He came down less than a minute later. "We're secure."

She nodded and entered, shrugging off her jacket as she did. "How you doing?"

He glanced at her. He wasn't surprised that she had asked, she had repeatedly expressed interest in his well-being. That did not, however, make him any more inclined to answer. "I'm fine. It was a good kill. You?"

"Not what I meant," she said simply, folding her jacket over her arm and crouching to take off her shoes. "Something happened in your head. You're not good at keeping that to yourself around grifters."

He removed his own jacket and hat, retrieving his knife from the former before hanging them up. "I don't imagine anyone is too good at hiding things around grifters. That's your job, isn't it?"

"It is, which is why your attempt at deflecting is particularly weak. What happened, Moran?" She asked, standing back up barefoot, her shoes dangling from two fingers.

His nostrils flared just slightly in annoyance, but he met her gaze. "I lost control," he said, his voice expressionless. "I apologize. It won't happen again."

She sighed. "What happened in your head, Moran? I know what occurred in the corporeal world."

"Can you be more specific?" he asked, careful not to let irritation into his tone. He wanted to lick his wounds in peace, not have them examined, but he'd just taken a knife to his superior, so he didn't have much high ground. "I'm sure a lot went on in my head at the time."
"I could tell something started chewing you up when I shut you down," she rolled her eyes, losing patience with his lack of emotional awareness.

He tensed slightly as she rolled her eyes, eyes tightening in annoyance. "As I said," he reiterated, voice careful, "I lost control. That isn't a pleasant experience. I had assumed I was better equipped. It appears I was mistaken. I wasn't going to kill you, if that's what you're asking."

"No, I know you weren't going to kill me; I knew the second the first moment of surprise passed," she waved off, "That doesn't concern me. But I want to know the level of your mental stability, as insensitive as that may sound. What you did isn't a cause for shame. That's a feeling you need to expunge from yourself completely."

That brought him up short, and he considered her carefully, before asking- in the same, mine-sweeping tone- "And why would that be, exactly?"

She snorted. "Isn't it obvious? Moran, you can't be consumed with shame about everything you do in this business."

He straightened a little at that. "I don't," he shot back almost fiercely. "I'm proud of what I've done. Of the advancements I've made, the control that I've managed to find, when I should have just been some kid with a dishonorable discharge drinking himself to death in some hole. I made myself possible, because I could control it."

She sighed. Now he was getting defensive. "Calm down. You're making this bigger than it is. I'm saying you can't be ashamed at a lack of control. A lapse, really. You're very highly controlled. Don't let things get to you so easily."

He closed his eyes, taking a slow breath and then reopening them. "To be fair, ma'am, I hadn't made a big deal about it until you brought it up."

She laughed. "Fair. But you need to be able to discuss these things without blowing up. Or rather, find a better way to get these things out of you. You're in a unique position of being able to do almost anything you want to blow off steam."

He watched her quietly, working his jaw muscles a bit as he considered. "It is in my power to ask you to mind your own business on this subject? Or not at this time?" he asked, without malice, genuinely curious.

"It's in your power to ask. Whether or not I'll respect that is up to my discretion. You can always ask me for something, or just a question, and I won't be angry with you. If you put up a fight, then I might be angry," she shrugged.

He nodded again, chafing at the collar she was artfully locking into place, but unable to find a way to slip it. "I feel as though I've handled this issue on my own fairly well up to the present. I don't see your interference as particularly necessary. Of course, you're allowed to disagree."

"You're obviously not as good at it as you thought you were," she pointed out, but shrugged again. "But I will let it go for now."

He bit back a snappy retort about exceptional circumstances, and just nodded stiffly. "If that's all, then."

"Yes, that's all," she agreed, waving her hand. Go cool off.

He headed for his room without responding, closing it tightly behind him, and taking a slow
breath, before walking over to the bed. He pulled the bedclothes off of it, and picked up the feather mattress, propping it against the wall. He took a few more slow breaths, and then closed his fists and started boxing the mattress, losing himself in the rhythm of his fists. Christ, the woman was infuriating.

Lorna headed into the kitchen to make herself lunch, unaffected by the conversation. She'd dealt with hot-headed boys before, and she would again.

Eventually he tired himself out, and put the mattress back, remaking the bed with old military habits and laying down on top of the blankets to think. He hated the cool, snide calm with which the woman treated him, like he was some naïve child without a modicum of experience of self-control. He was the third in command in this fucking network. And every time he felt like they were finally getting somewhere, along came another patronizing head pat.

I should have just fucking killed her, he thought, mostly joking. He got up, then, heading for the bathroom. He needed a proper shower.

She ate lunch while reading the newspaper, wondering absently what she was going to tell Jim about the marks when she saw him again. Some of these would scar, although not noticeably enough for people besides Jim to see.

He cleaned up, and shaved, changing into clean clothes and tossing the dirty ones in his hamper. It was getting full. He'd need to find someone to do their laundry soon. He considered the bedroom, then decided he wasn't interested in staying in tonight. He grabbed his shoulder holster and his jacket, heading for the door, and the stairs. "I'm going out," he said, grabbing his hat. "Do you need anything?"

She looked up from her book, appraising his clothes and the gun under his jacket. "No," she said simply, and returned her gaze to the book. "Don't wear yourself out."

He just nodded, putting his hat on and heading out the door into the afternoon heat. It was actually a fairly mild day for the city, but nothing compared to the pleasant coolness of London, and he wished that he could shed his jacket. His gun meant it stayed in place, however. He headed east, away from the waterfront and deeper into the city, eager to find a cool place and a cold drink.

It was about an hour later that luck decided that Moran had been having too easy of a go at things recently.

"Alexander?" Came a voice from behind him.

He stiffened slightly from his post by the outdoor bar in a small alley, deep in the labyrinth that was Naples. How had the man found him, here of all places?

He briefly considered ignoring the voice, or making a run for it, but either of those would ruin his cover.

Shit. Shit, shit, shit...

He took a breath, setting his limoncello aside and turning slowly, not bothering to look any less stricken. He was supposed to be sick and he very clearly wasn't. Shame would buy him time to think.
"Galeazzo... hello..."

Ciano looked like he was unsure of how to feel, seeing his supposedly sick 'friend' out and about when he was supposed to be home, sick in bed. "What are you doing, here?" he asked, confused, and with just the slightest hint of suspicion in his heart, "I thought you were very ill."

He was scrambling, and mentally thanking the military for his outward calm. What did he need? Lust wouldn't cut it here. He needed the man's sympathy, or perhaps guilt? Christ, where was Harrison when you needed her?

"I'm sorry," he sighed, as a buffer. He reached up to rub at his eyes.

"I'm sorry," he repeated a moment later, dropping his hand. "I just... look, sit for a drink?" He gestured to the bar, trying to look like he felt somewhat helpless. It wasn't difficult.

Ciano frowned worriedly at him for a moment, considering, then nodded a little, taking a few steps to the bar. "What's going on, Alexander?"

He sat on one of the bar stools and ordered another limoncello for the man next to him, still playing for time. Then he spun, reluctantly, to face the politician. "I didn't want to lie to you, Galeazzo. I shouldn't have. I'm sorry. I just... I didn't know what to do." Oh, yes, good line, he decided, just a touch pleased with himself in the midst of the panic. The man was older. More experienced. Highlighting his own youth and ignorance were good routes. At least he hoped.

He shook his head, confused. "Do about what? I don't understand what's wrong, Alex, you have to tell me if I'm going to be able to assist in any way."

He sighed, rubbing at his eyes again. Stop that. You look nervous. I am nervous.

"I'm just... I'm worried about my marriage," he said quietly. "My wife hasn't seemed herself, and I think she's jealous of the time I spend with you." It wasn't the best start, but it was something, at least. "But I didn't want to hurt you by just cutting things off, so I thought if I just... I don't know..." He shrugged again, looking pained, and took a sip of his drink.

Galeazzo was silent for a moment, considering that, and took a sip of his drink. He wanted to ask the other man to leave her, to stay with him, but they both knew better than to scorn a woman who was privy to their secret lifestyle. "I thought that she had had arrangements like this before," he finally said, eyebrows furrowed. "What's changed for her?"

He looked at his drink. Of course she has, idiot. That was the whole point of all this. She set you two up. He rubbed his thumb over the cool glass. "I didn't care before. It was just sex. Lasted a couple weeks and then it was over. But you..." He shrugged. Careful...

The romantic in him preened, but the logical part of him liked to believe he was a shrewd politician. And that part of him also liked to believe he knew women very well - he was certainly very good at pretending he was interested. This didn't smack completely of jealousy to him. Elena had seemed the opposite of the jealous type. "I was under the impression she was also interested in pursuing other... People. I don't understand. Please, is there any reason you could think of that she would be so envious?"

"I don't know," he said, letting a little of his desperation and frustration into his voice. Let Ciano think they were because of Elena. "But she's distant. She won't let me sleep in the bed, and she gets... cold, whenever I say I'm going to see you. I don't know why, I just... I need to fix it. I tried
Ciano fell silent, dropping into his problem-solving mode. He wasn't a minister for no reason. His own wife, while tolerant of his preferences, still expected certain things from him. And he was the son in law of Mussolini. He had to provide. "Does Elena want children, Alexander?"

He looked up, sensing a tunnel out of the hole he'd dug himself into. "I... I don't know."

Galeazzo sighed, ducking his head a little to rub his eyes. Young men were so blind sometimes. "When's the last time..." He sighed again, obviously uncomfortable. "Actually were... ahem... In bed... With each other."

He hesitated, trying to look like he was remembering while he attempted to think what the correct answer would be. He decided on 'vague'. "I don't know... It's been a while..." He rubbed the back of his neck.

He muttered something in Italian under his breath. Something about Mary. The part of him that had been asking for him to ask Alexander to stay with him was squashed. He wasn't a housebreaker. "Go back to her, Alex."

He hesitated still, internally whooping in victory, and downed his drink. He couldn't look too eager. "Galeazzo... I'm sorry..."

He sighed, waving his hand a little. "I will live, Alex," he said, taking a sip of his drink. "We all have this expected of us."

He nodded just a little, and stood, putting enough money on the table to pay for the drinks and a few more. "Thank you for your advice... I'd better go talk to her. Have a few on me."

He nodded, not really looking at him. This stung more than he could have predicted it would. But that was real life. Always fucking him over.

He stood there for a moment, carefully going over what he'd said to make sure he hadn't left any loose ends that would fuck him over. Then he left, fading into the crowd and heading back to the house. His pulse chose that moment to skyrocket as adrenaline caught up with him, and he stifled a nervous laugh.

When Sebastian returned hours later, she had already made herself and eaten a simple dinner, and was sipping coffee in the kitchen as the door opened. Not willing to risk just anybody entering the house, she wandered out, mug in her hands, and raised her eyebrows at him a little. "Enjoy yourself?"

He closed the door behind him tightly, pausing for just a moment to revel in the victory of making it home with their cover intact. "I saw Ciano."

Her fingers tightened on the mug of coffee, and her jaw clenched slightly. "What happened?"

He leaned against the door, and gave her a grin. "I told him you were jealous and I didn't know what to do, so I told him I was sick. He's now decided that you want kids and are resenting me for fucking him and not you. He seems resigned." He gave an odd, relieved laugh.

She let out a slow breath, assessing that. "Did he decide that I want kids, or did he decide that I'm pregnant?" She asked, raising her eyebrows a little before taking another big swallow of coffee. She needed the caffeine to process this. "Thank god we're going to fuck him over. That would not..."
last long as an excuse."

"That you want kids. I told him we hadn't been fucking and that I was concerned." He rubbed his eyes. "Just be glad it's at least somewhat workable. I am not a grifter. The fact that he didn't seem suspicious is, in my mind, a fucking miracle."

She grunted. She was almost certain Sebastian had just misread the man - nobody gave up a hot piece of ass for a desire for children. But it didn't matter enough for her to pursue it. "Unfortunate you managed to run into him, but as long as he's not too suspicious, it shouldn't affect us."

He nodded just a little, pushing his hand through his hair. "Right. Well, that's settled, then."

"Indeed," she muttered, finishing off her coffee and returning to the kitchen. She wanted this job to be over.

He followed after her, walking over to the pot to pour himself a mug as well. "When is our window with Mussolini?"

"Tomorrow, or the day after, depending on traveling conditions," she said, washing her mug in the sink.

He nodded just slightly, taking a long sip of hot, bitter caffeine. "That suits me just fine. The sooner we're done with this, the better."

"We're on the same page, there," she said, sighing. "I don't like it when Jim sends me away this long. Especially with his new bodyguard."

"Believe me, I'll be as glad to be out of your hair as you are to be rid of me," he promised, heading for the hall with his coffee.

"Not what I meant. I meant Jim is rid of you right now, and I'm uncomfortable with that," she corrected, turning and leaning back against the sink.

He nodded. "The thought has occurred to me, trust me." He glanced back at her. "But for the moment, he's made you my priority."

"For reasons which are beyond me," she mumbled, frowning to herself. She was done with Italy. Part of her missed being around Jim, who never made a mistake, who she never had to be in control of.

"Trust me, I have less of an idea than you do, as per usual." He finished his coffee and sighed, walking back through the room to rinse his mug out. "Do you need anything else?"

"No," she shook her head, flicking her wrist a little. "Unless something comes up, you have the night off."

He didn't argue, just headed for his room. He would be glad when this whole thing was over and he had a bit of freedom back, and he knew he wasn't the only one.

Lorna rubbed her eyes and decided to take a shower. Damn, she hoped Mussolini showed up tomorrow.

He didn't leave his bedroom that night. He needed space and silence for a while. He worked out as best he could in the space, burning off energy, and eventually fell asleep reading.
He woke before the sun, rolling out of bed to shower. He hoped fate was merciful and that Mussolini arrived today. The friction between him and Harrison was increasing, and he was tired of having to show his throat.

She slept late for once, briefly waking up at dawn and deciding that she wanted the extra shuteye, and she didn't actually get out of bed until an hour before noon. She shuffled to the shower, groggy with sleep, and swore violently as the hot spray landed on her neck, suddenly very much awake. And pissed because of it. She was not an easy riser, even though she did by habit get up early. The only thing allowed to wake her up that abruptly was caffeine.

She went downstairs a little while later, damp curls loose around her face, and made a beeline for the fridge. Something non-frustrating to make for brunch would be for the best.

He was in the kitchen, reading through the english paper when she came down, and decided off of her expression to remain quiet until she got coffee. Instead, he took the the page with the article of interest and slid it across the table for her to notice when she came over.

*Mussolini Returns From International Talks.*

She came over with a roughly cobbled together breakfast of different leftovers and the all-important coffee, and swallowed it down a little too fast when she saw the paper, burning her mouth with a grimace. "Sweet fucking Christ, a stroke of luck. Thank god."

He nodded in agreement, looking up from the article he was reading. "Agreed. There's a dance in his honor tonight. I think that might be our chance for first contact, if we can manage to avoid Ciano."

"We'll go a little later in the night. Ciano will go early so he can put in his appearances and go home - the later it gets, the less likely it is we'll come across him," she said, sitting down at the table and beginning to eat.

He nodded in agreement. "Good. I really don't want to have to deal with him again."

She chuckled. "Well, you did a good job with him, especially for not having an espionage background. A good enough job that Jim might overlook the marks on me."

He stiffened slightly at that, and nodded just a little. "Hopefully," he admitted softly. "I did try to stick to existing marks."

She sighed at that, eyes tightening a little. "That just means he's going to reopen them again so that they're his. Easier for you, maybe."

He glanced over at her quickly, and then returned his gaze to the paper. "That wasn't my intention. I apologize."

"I know. Just keep it in mind next time, hm?" She smiled, then cleared her throat. That was a moment of weakness that she hadn't really meant to show to him. At least she could bet on him ignoring it.

He nodded, glancing back at her for just a moment. That was something he didn't do- he didn't let others get fucked because of him if he didn't intend it. He wasn't sure there was a way to get her
out of it, but if there was, he intended to.

"What's the plan with Mussolini tonight?"

"We approach him and tell him we have some information we wanted him to know. He's a fascist, he's paranoid, he'll be happy to hear us out," she shrugged, "You won't need to do a lot of lying."

He nods. "I'll leave most of the talking to you, anyway. I feel as though that might work out better for both of us."

"Usually does," she smirked, teasing, then returned her attention to her brunch.

He smiled just a little, and fell silent. "If we bring Ciano down, Mussolini is only going to have a firmer hold," he said eventually, looking up.

"That's obvious," she pointed out, taking a sip of coffee. "So why did you say it?"

He was silent for a bit, picking up a wayward fork and rolling it through his fingers. "I don't know. Forget I said it."

She didn't react for a moment, chewing up a mouthful of leftovers. When she swallowed, she took a sip of coffee, then cleared her throat. "I don't agree with Mussolini's politics. In a perfect world, we wouldn't need to fuck over Ciano like this, and we wouldn't need to throw our support behind Mussolini. Personally I despise Nazis, and those who associate with them, because they suck the fun out of everything. If this bothers you, you're not the only one. But there's nothing we can do but follow our orders, here. Disobeying and supporting Ciano's shitty bid for power will just get us killed, and will change nothing."

He nodded slightly, deciding that he should just get used to her being able to read him. "Thank you. I appreciate the clarification."

She nodded, shrugging a little, stabbing a tomato with her fork. "You're welcome. I understand a moral compass, even if there's often no place for one. I don't know if even I, killer that I am, could thoughtlessly sign away the life of an entire country, given the chance. Just makes the world smaller. Less to play in."

He nodded and stood. "What time do you want to leave for the party?"

She pulled the article over to check for the time. "It starts around 5:00, so I'd say earliest we should get there is 6:00."

He nodded a little. "Alright. That gives us a few hours. Any preparation you'd like me to do?"

"Nothing in particular, no. Don't come armed. We will be patted down, I will confidently assume," she sighed.

He sighed, too, uncomfortable with that. "Of course. I'll keep that in mind."

"Damn, what ever happened to the days where everyone was so much less suspicious? I was born too late. Should have been able to enjoy the 20's," she muttered.

He grinned a little at that. "The war being what it is, and your complaint is the pat-downs?"

She shrugged, smiling a little. "You could argue that the war is a symptom of a wider problem. Largely, distrust and fear."
"Or you could argue the reverse," he pointed out. "It's all fucked, anyway. I suppose while we're wishing, let's just wish it all better. Until then, though, I'll be reading."

She snorted a little, deciding that while she had more to say on the subject it was useless to get into it, and let the conversation drop. "Speaking of reading, I'm going to go spend the time until we leave doing just that," she said, gathering up her plate and cup and going to the sink to wash them.

He nodded, heading for his room before the conversation could continue. He was a short fuse at the moment and he knew it, and he wasn't looking to get into any fights.

She was slightly amused that he made such a quick exit, but otherwise had no other feelings, and then did what she said she was going to do.

Half an hour before they needed to arrive at the party, Lorna showed up in his doorway, dressed in a red dress, hair carefully coiffed, neck adorned with practically a blanket of diamonds. It was the most expensive thing she had brought on the trip, but she wasn't worried about losing it. She had plenty of precious stones at home.

He opened the door a moment later. He was in his tux, working on tying the rip-away bowtie. "Alright," he said, abandoning the tie for the moment and grabbing his hat off of the shelf. "Shall we?"

She nodded, leading the way down the stairs. "From what I hear, Mussolini is a loose cannon. Very unpredictable with his favor. I hope this is a good night for him."

He nodded just a little, returning his attention to the tie. "Would it be better to approach him separately? In case for some strange reason he doesn't take a liking to you?"

She considered for a moment. "That isn't a bad idea. He might not take too well to a woman speaking to him. You should talk to him first. If it goes well, introduce me."

"Oh." He had been thinking more along the lines of him hanging back as a last-second backup, but apparently she had other ideas. He nodded. "Okay, boss. Sounds good."

"Alright, we both ready?" She asked, hand on the door. "The car is waiting outside."

He nodded, waiting for her to open the door and then stepping out just behind her, offering her his arm.

She took it and let him open the door to the car so she could get in. They spent the ride in silence, though it wasn't necessarily uncomfortable.

He spent most of the ride trying to figure out how exactly to introduce himself to the dictator of Italy. He relaxed slightly when he realized that Mussolini, for all his power, was equivalent to some foppish general. And he had dealt with a few of those during his time with the military.

When they pulled up outside the villa, Lorna turned to face Moran. "Any last minute questions?"

He shrugged. "Any advice?" he asked after a moment, deciding that he might as well see what she thought.

"Be careful," she sighed, shaking her head. "He's a dictator. He can do whatever the hell he wants
He tried his best not to feel patronized. "Anything else?" he asked, biting back the '-that isn't blatantly obvious?"

"No, you're capable, I'm just nervous about this one," she said with a small shake of her head, and gestured outside the car. "Let's get this over with."

He nodded, climbing out and holding the door for her, offering her a hand. They walked in together, her on his arm, and he reflected for a moment how oddly easy it was to get into places if you looked like you belonged there.

She looked around as they mingled into the crowd, and was not surprised at the number of armed guards lining the walls. The leader of Italy was contained within them. That was worth a few loaded guns, probably. "I assume you know what he looks like," she murmured to Sebastian, scanning the room.

"I read the paper," he retorted, scanning the crowd. "Assuming his pictures do him justice...."

"That's the thing about pictures. Much harder to flatter with than painted portraits," she snorted, lifting up onto her toes a little to try and get a better eye on things. Damn her height.

"Found him. Three o'clock," he said calmly, touching her shoulder and shifting direction slightly. His pulse was up. He wasn't looking forward to the impetus for the conversation being on him.

"Excellent. Are you ready?" She asked quietly, not moving yet, waiting for his all-clear. He needed to be the one to do this, but rushing him wouldn't help.

He nodded slightly, straightening to his full height and taking a breath. "Yes. Let's go." He didn't wait for a response, walking through the crowd toward their target. He didn't attempt a smile, it wasn't his best expression. Instead he went for the calm respect of the military, nodding his head as he approached in a respectful bow. "Signore Leader. It's an honor to meet you."

Mussolini looked away from the man at his side who he had been talking to and gave his attention to Moran, his eyebrow raised. "And who might you be? If you're one of Hitler's, please, your message can wait for tomorrow, I am sure. Tonight is for celebration."

"Not one of Hitler's, no," he said, shaking his head. "Unfortunately I cannot claim that honor, or the honor of being one of your own illustrious soldiers. My name is Alexander Morstan. I'm a defector from England. I thought your country sounded a bit more interesting."

Mussolini snorted at the mention of Britain. "Who can blame you? Britain. What a joke. How can I help a deserter like you, signore Morstan?"

He chuckled, a soft noise of agreement. "I have some information for you, Signore Leader. Not party talk, but I wanted to make the acquaintance. Ah, forgive me, I'm being terribly rude. Please meet my wife, Elena."

Benito actually smiled a little at her, dipping his head. "Pleasure to meet you, Elena," he greeted, then his attention was back on Moran. "If you have information for me, come by my office in the city headquarters tomorrow night. Bring your wife, if she knows anything."

He smiles, bowing just slightly again. "Thank you. We'll be there. Until then, have a pleasant evening."
"You as well," he nodded, then turned back to the party behind him, and Lorna slid her hand into Sebastian's arm, leaning in close as they walked away.

"We'll stay and socialize for a bit, then we can leave. Mussolini knows we're only here for him, but no one else knows that. Best to keep our heads down."

He nods in agreement, taking a slow breath and pushing his heart rate back down. "Sounds like a good idea to me."

She nodded, leading him over to a waiter carrying glasses of champagne and taking two, handing one off to him. "You did well."

He took a small sip, wishing for a cigarette instead, but that could wait. "Thank you."

She sipped her champagne in silence for a minute, reflecting on the short conversation with Mussolini. Analyzing.

"What do you think we should expect tomorrow?" he asked quietly.

"I'm uncertain," she murmured, eyes on a painting on the wall probably dating back to the 16th century. "He's a dictator. He's unpredictable. He'll either give us medals or lock us up to use as examples."

"Let's hope for the former," he muttered into the champagne flute, eyes on the milling crowd.

"Yes, let's," she sighed, finishing off her champagne a few minutes later and putting down her glass on a table to her side. "Alright, we've made ourselves visible for long enough. Let's get out of here."

He nodded, offering her his arm and heading for the exit, keeping an eye on the crowd in case anyone tried to follow them.

They made it home without any obvious tails, and went to bed without too many words exchanged. The next day passed slowly. With an annoying amount of tension. The blame didn't lie with either of them - they were meeting a fucking dictator after dinner. Lorna shifted uncomfortably in the car as they pulled up, clearing her throat. "Ready?"

He adjusted his break-away tie for the fiftieth time. "Ready," he agreed, taking a breath and then getting out, standing and offering her a hand.

She took it and got out, taking the turning movement of getting out of the car to scan the entrance to the building. Wow, everyone was so armed. Somebody could sneeze wrong and end up with a bullet in their brain around here.

He pulled her against his side, speaking quietly. "Stay close." He headed for the door, arm around her waist.

They were let in by a small security squad, who immediately separated them, patting them down.

She shot a glance at him, wondering what his strategy was when he was guarding Jim, and ignored the guard who lingered just a second too long on the curvier bits of her. A minute later and they were in the waiting room. It was musty.
He kept careful track of where they were brought, creating a mental map of what he could see and infer, in case they needed to escape. The mansion was enormous. It would be easy to get lost.

They waited fifteen minutes before a tiny old woman in an entirely brown outfit appeared, and looked at them sourly. "Are you the Morstans?" she asked, in a voice that sounded like it had been entirely made of cigarettes.

"Yes," Lorna smiled timidly.

"Come with me."

Moran straightened, offering Lorna his arm and waiting for her to take it before they followed after the mousy woman, who was trotting along ahead of them with an odd short step that suggested her high-heels were a touch too small.

The woman led them through several different halls, her steps purposeful, if short, and then opened a seemingly random door, and ushered them in, shutting it firmly behind them. Mussolini was seated at an enormous desk in the large room, and he smiled slightly as he saw them, putting the pen in his hand back into its inkwell. "You're the Morstans, yes? Come sit, tell me what you have to say."

He walked forward, pulling Lorna's chair out for her and waiting for her to sit, before taking the seat beside her. "You're a busy man, I won't waste your time. We've discovered some things regarding your son-in-law that we thought should be brought to your attention."

Mussolini's eyebrow rose. "My son-in-law? Galeazzo? What is this about?"

Moran straightened in his chair, holding the man's gaze without fear. This was military. He understood this.

"We have evidence to prove that he's been conspiring against you, sir, for several months. He's planning a takeover."

"What is the evidence?" He asked, frowning as he folded his hands together in front of him on the table.

"My wife and I have spent considerable time with him," he said, reaching out to take her hand. "He trusts us. He tried to recruit me."

He leaned back, considering with furrowed eyebrows. "This can't be. He is married to my daughter."

"He is," Moran agrees, nodding. "Which brings us to the second part of this discussion." He glanced at Lorna as if for support, but in actuality he was checking her expression, giving her a chance to rein him back. This was her field, not his.

Lorna cleared her throat, a very realistic looking blush coming to her cheeks, and she looked down, squeezing Sebastian's hand. "He's.... Um... Signore, we caught him... With the butler."

To his credit, the dictator kept his expression neutral. When he spoke, his voice had an edge. "Be very careful how you proceed, signora... This is a dangerous accusation you are making."

She cleared her throat, ducking her head a little, looking intensely uncomfortable. "Yes, I know," she said, smiling painfully. "I wish it wasn't true so I didn't have to report it."
He considered both of them for a long moment. "You are certain of what you saw? There are no other explanations?"

Lorna’s cheeks reddened again, and she looked away, apparently embarrassed. "I... Ahem.. saw more of the signore than a lady should see of a man who isn't her husband."

Mussolini’s eyes narrowed at that, and he stared them down warily, contemplating- Moran was sure- how to handle this situation. "I will need to investigate this matter personally."

"Of course, signore," she nodded, hands fidgeting in her lap. "Please, don't hesitate to let us know if we can be of service to you."

He nodded. "I will. Of course, there is the small matter of the two of you."

Moran’s muscles tensed, instincts sensing the turn immediately. He made to rise. "We shouldn't take any more-

"Sit," the dictator said calmly, "Or I will have you shot."
She felt the first real pang of fear hit her then, and she took a deep breath, hands in fists on her lap. "Have we done something wrong, signore?"

"You? No, my dear. If you are telling the truth, you have merely the unfortunate luck to be possessing a dangerous truth about my son-in-law. Excellent blackmail, on two fronts. Treason is one thing, but it is quite another for him to grow his crops in a foreign field. No, you have done nothing wrong yet, if you are telling the truth. You are simply a liability. But if you are lying ... well, then, that is an entirely different ballgame, as the Americans say." He reached out and pressed an intercom button, saying something in Italian too quickly for Moran to follow.

Lorna, however, was fluent enough to catch it. "Send in armed guards, please. I want these two escorted to the cell block off-site. If they fight you, shoot them."

She reached over to grasp Moran's wrist firmly, looking over at him, and shook her head, just a little. Don't put up a struggle.

He glanced at her, saw the alert concern and warning in her eyes, and could make his guess as to what the man had said. He didn't bother fighting the tiny, white-knuckled grip on his wrist, just put his hand over hers in a way that he imagined might appear to be a husband comforting his wife, and squeezed his understanding.

When the guards entered he kept his movement limp and relaxed, eyes never leaving the dictator across from them. "We were trying to help you, Signore Leader. Is this how you treat all of your allies?"

Mussolini shrugged, looking mostly unaffected by the idea of throwing them into a dungeon. "I can't trust non-Italians, let alone those with secrets that would damage my reputation. My enemies would be quick to use you, if they got their hands on you. I must see to it that that doesn't happen. Take them away, guards."

It took all of his willpower not to fight as they pulled his hands behind his back and locked them into shackles. Immediately his heartrate picked up slightly, and he had to take a second with his eyes closed before he could force it back down. He stood when they pulled him, glancing over at Harrison. She appeared frightened, but looked as though she were putting up a brave effort to hold it together. He wondered how much of the fear was false.

They were pulled out of the room without another word from the dictator, and shoved roughly down carpeted hallways which gradually reduced in luxury. The guards remained silent and Moran didn't bother to test that, his eyes scanning their surroundings, looking for escape.

The guards walked them through a few more increasingly-plain hallways, through a kitchen, and then outdoors, into a dusty courtyard. About fifty feet from the main building were several outbuildings, of much poorer quality than the one they were leaving. They were low to the ground, obviously built down into it. Lorna didn't like the look of them, but there wasn't anything to be done to stop them from going there.

The guards were none-too-gentle, but Moran just moved with their shoves and jostling. He was larger than them both by a good few inches, and could absorb the physicality without much effort. The effort was keeping himself in check as they were walked through iron doors now, many of them, down concrete hallways and stairways and deeper into what was clearly an ancient prison.
with modern additions slapped in haphazardly here and there. It was damp, and cold. The shackles on his wrists bit into his skin.

They reached their intended cell after a few minutes, and the guards pushed them into the small, damp room without ceremony, though hard enough that she tripped and landed on her knees. Then they left, without speaking, after locking the door behind them with a key that looked positively ancient. She waited for the sound of their footsteps retreating over the damp stone before she spoke. "God damn it."

He didn't respond, walking over to the cell door and examining it for flaws. It, at least, seemed very new. He slammed his shoulder against it experimentally, but it didn't even squeak, and he got a bruised shoulder for the trouble.

He looked around the room. There was one thin sleeping mat in the corner, and a bucket in the other, and that was about it. He sat awkwardly on the floor, a bit of a struggle without the use of his hands.

She stayed on her knees for the moment, cursing under her breath. Jim was going to be so pissed. Not that this was her fault - he had been the one to make the call on betraying Ciano. And now, of course, he would have to figure out that they were imprisoned. She was going to have to restrain herself from giving him an earful when they got out.

He let the silence stand for a while between them. There were other sounds. Dripping, settling, the scurry of vermin, and- so distantly that it was no more than a faint echo- someone wailing.

The cell was dim, lit only by the light of an archaic gas lamp on the wall of the hallway outside. Harrison's sharp features were all the more pronounced than ever in the shadow, and he watched her lips drop swears into her collarbone for a few minutes before he spoke. "Alright. What do we do?"

She sighed, lifting her face to look at him. "If you don't see any structural weaknesses - and I suspect you won't - look around the cell, get me an inventory. And after that, well. We endure until we think of an escape plan or Jim comes for us. Have you ever been held captive, before?"

He was quiet for a moment, but then shook his head, shifting until he could jump up to his feet. "No." He started walking around the room, kicking anything he found to the center. A long sliver of wood, an inch scrap of copper wire, the sleeping mat, the bucket, a small handful of straw... Then he started feeling along the wall with his back to it so that his hands could reach, looking for anything loose.

"Alright, well, sign away your dignity now," she sighed, shifting over to pick up the sliver of wood, which turned out to be too bendy to be fashioned into a weapon, and dropped it, disappointed. "We're going to see the worst of each other in here. It will be unpleasant."

He didn't respond, continuing his careful circuit around the room, before finally giving up and sitting down again, against the wall this time, arms still pinned behind him.

He cleared his throat after a moment, trying to shift his arms. The cuffs left a knot of tension in his gut that made him distinctly uncomfortable and on edge.

She shifted over to sit against the wall, dragging the sleeping mat with her and tucking it beneath her before her butt hit the damp ground. The longer she could delay getting dirty, the better. Who knew when their next shower would be. She was only mildly uncomfortable with the cuffs on her wrists. She was accustomed to restraints. She didn't break the silence for a long time, but when she
did, her voice was soft. "I think it goes without saying, not mentioning the network..."

He raised a slow eyebrow. "They do run over these sort of things once or twice in the army," he shot back sarcastically.

She shrugged, unoffended by his sarcasm. "I figured. Just reminding you that anything they do to you here, Boss can do a lot worse. I can do a lot worse."

"Thanks for the pep talk," he said with a smirk, shifting to see if he could bring his arms around to the front under himself. The cuffs had his wrists too tightly together, however. The best he'd ever been able to do it with was six inches of chain, and these held his wrists almost side-by-side.

She chuckled a little. "You seem like the type who doesn't like pep talks. Are they too gooey for you?" She smirked, raising her eyebrows at him.

He twisted a bit, trying to see if he could wedge a hand up out of the cuffs. He raised an eyebrow at her. "To be fair, you don't really seem type to give them, so we break even."

She chuckled, shifting experimentally in her cuffs. She was much smaller than Moran, and the manacles seemed to come in a standard size. She shifted again, and then, with some uncomfortable wiggling and pain in her joints, managed to pull her arms in front of her, and huffed as she sat back again, hands now in her lap, legs finding a new resting place. "Thank God for my flexible shoulders," she muttered.

He glanced at her enviously, then relaxed. He would just need to start stretching out. Eventually he'd be able to get clear.

It was the 'eventually' that put him on edge.

For the moment he relaxed a bit. Conserving energy was going to be key. Who knew how much food they'd be getting?

"And your tiny body."

She snorted, nodding. "Yes, that too."

She fell silent, again, contemplating on what might happen to them in here. It wasn't completely clear what Mussolini might want from them, other than keeping them out of the way to ensure their silence. She supposed she should be grateful that he hadn't just executed them to save himself the trouble. So what were they alive for, then? Would questions be asked of them? If so, she needed to come up with things to say. Nobody ever believed you when you told them you didn't know.

He was considering many of the same questions, eyeing every inch of the cell, thinking. "We aren't dead, which seems like a good starting point."

"I was thinking the same thing," she murmured, adjusting the cuffs a little to rest the weight on her legs instead of her wrists. "Which means they're going to want something from us. We'll need to get our story straight."

He nodded. "And what story is that, exactly?" He would let her take the lead on this. His experience was not extensive enough for this.

"They're going to ask questions about their plans, and we don't know the actual answers. No one takes no for an answer," she sighed, shaking her head a little to flick a stray lock of hair out of her face.
He shifts a bit. "Look, I know you lie well, but it's not my specialty. I have no doubt I can lie, but I may not able to lie well, not under torture."

Lorna grimaced a little. "Nobody will notice a bad liar when they're torturing you. It just looks like fear and desperation."

He glanced at her, and nodded just a little. "Fine, then." He shifted again, tested the cuffs again, just to see if maybe he hadn't tried hard enough to bring them forward the first time. No such luck. He closed his eyes, head resting back against the cool stone of the cell, focusing on keeping his breathing and heart rate tightly controlled.

"They'll take you first. The privilege of being a man. Tell them whatever they want to hear, and when you get thrown back in here, tell me what it was. That way you don't have to remember a lie before it even starts."

He nodded just a little, not responding beyond that. He hated this feeling. Helplessness. Just waiting for the inevitable.

"Do I have permission to escape if I see my chance?"

"Yes, of course," she replied, her tone only slightly implying that was obvious. "Just don't flee back to England without me unless you have permission from Jim. And you won't have permission. So call for help and get me out."

"No shit," he muttered, sighing and shifting again, twisting his wrists before he forced himself to stay still.

Meanwhile, Mussolini had not waited long to summon his step son. Why would he? The feelings of his daughter meant nothing compared to the shame it would bring to his family - to the weakness it would show. It took all of five minutes to get Galeazzo to roll over on the Morstans. More of them? How many were hiding around him in the woodwork? An example needed to be made of those who chose a lifestyle of sodomy - if he wanted to keep the support of the Vatican, he needed to uphold its core beliefs. He'd had his own children baptized, after all, despite his lack of faith.

He called in one of his men once Ciano had finished speaking, his crying silent. He could respect that. Italian men were emotional, and hot-headed, and he could appreciate silent restraint. "Have signore Ciano escorted back to his villa. He's to have an armed guard at all times. If he speaks to anybody on this list," he picked up a paper off his desk and brandished it to the man, "Arrest both of them and bring them to me." His eyes focused hard on his step-son. "If you attempt to betray my trust again, I will have you killed, understood? The only reason I leave you alive now is for consideration to my daughter. I will spare her the shame of a publicly traitorous husband. For now. Now get out of my sight." He dismissed them both with a wave of his hand, and as they left, he whistled, and another guard took the first's place. "The Morstans... they have.. homosexual tendencies. The Church must not see me treat them kindly - when you of faith confess your sins to your priest next, tell him what you have done to them, and make it worth confessing about. Dismissed."
Moran didn't sleep well at all.

The cell was part of the problem. The cold, damp stone made for a poor bed, and the cot was barely big enough for Harrison, let alone both of them.

The main issue, however, was the cuffs. They twisted his arms at an awkward angle behind him, and kept him from sitting back, or lying down on his back or side. Every moment they were on him they felt like they grew tighter and tighter. His heart rate was elevated, his breathing uneven despite his best efforts. He couldn't move, he couldn't defend himself nearly as well as usual. He felt sick and shaky, and he wanted nothing more than to be out of the damned cuffs before he lost control.

Lorna slept for probably an hour, combined. She could feel the stress coming off Moran in waves, and it was keeping her up. If he lost it, it would be much harder to put him back together again. That meant she needed to intervene, find some way to calm him down. He didn't trust her outside this cell, but he damn well needed to in it. "Sebastian," she said softly, in the pitch black room. Somewhere, she could hear the patter of rat feet scurrying along damp stone. "Talk to me."

"What do you want?" he asked after a moment, his voice as level as he could make it (which came out as more of a monotone.)

"Conversation," she replied, voice quiet, almost gentle. "I can practically smell your stress. So talk to me. Find a distraction."

He bit back the part of him that wanted to tell her to fuck directly off, and took a breath. "I'm fine. How do we get out of here, do you think?"

He wasn't fine, from what she could read, but it was better that he spoke instead of staying plugged up like a pot about to boil over. "I think we're going to have to keep our eyes open for opportunities, or, failing that, wait for Jim to notice I haven't checked in in a while. At the very least, take comfort in the fact that you probably won't be forced into the cell again with handcuffs on. Just pretend to behave, and don't be afraid to get graphic about your reasons and the bucket in the corner."

"Right," he said a bit roughly, though that did ease a bit of tension that had been coiling his shoulders like uncooperative snakes. "How frequently does the boss expect you to check in?"

"He expects me to call with any developments. He doesn't want to hear a report every day about how nothing's happening." She sighed. "It could be a week before he notices. His priority is not our safety."

He nodded in understanding, though that was useless in the darkness that had persisted since the gas lamp guttered out. "Fine."

She was going to have a word with Jim when she got back about the current state of procedures. There was a war on, for God's sake. Anything could happen. She shut her eyes against the darkness again, curling up to reduce loss of heat.

"You've been tortured before." His voice echoed out of the darkness, not a question. "What happened?"

"Clarify the question," she said flatly, almost as monotone as his before. It wasn't a topic she would shy away from, but they were inherently bad memories.
"Why were you tortured? By who? To what extent? How did you escape?" The questions rolled off his tongue. *Tell me how we survive this.*

She let out a long breath. "I was taken hostage by the Mob. Specifically one family, the Costas. They had a problem with the man I worked for, Armetti. He'd just inherited the family business, so to speak, and there was bad blood between the families. They wanted territory they'd lost years ago in exchange for my safe return. Or, they did, when they thought I was just his fiancee. When they found out I killed for him, too, they wanted information," she said, jaw tightening a little as she recalled it.

*Hands bound in front of her with rough rope, stained pink from the chafing. Crying as two men two times the size of her or more grabbed her under the arms and dragged her, struggling, to the washbin in the corner of the dank basement. She doesn't bother to listen to the question they have to ask, just shakes her head, still trying to push back against their grip, but it's no use. A hand grabs a fistful of her hair and shoves her head into the water, and she holds her breath as long as she can before her struggling lungs force her to inhale.*

*They restart her heart twice before giving up on the tactic, and move to good old fashioned beatings. Brass knuckles, socks filled with coins, a plank of wood which fractures a rib. She's in agony by the time the least careful of the bunch fumbles with something in his hands and doesn't notice that he's sent his switchblade flying out of his pocket and into her reach.*

*She kills everyone in the house - women included - with only a few new bruises to show for it, and makes a call from their phone, so soaked in blood that she can feel it seeping down her scalp and under her battered clothes. Vince comes with four cars, drags her into his arms, and almost gets stabbed as pain from her rib shoots through her.*

"They did the typical stuff. Sticking my head into a bucket of water, for instance. They had to breathe life back into me twice before they gave up on that. Afterwards, it was just beatings. Anything hard, or with an edge to it would work. They gave me deep muscle bruises and several superficial bone fractures, along with cracking one of my ribs. One of them fucked up, dropped a weapon in front of me. A little knife. I killed everyone, and then called for a ride home on their telephone. I think it's the event that caught Jim's attention."

The word fiancee caught his interest, but now wasn't the time. He listened to the rest of the story quietly, heard the details in the pauses, the way the nonchalance bulged as it struggled to hold back memories of wounds and pain and blood. "Sounds messy."

She snorted. "I was positively covered in blood," she confirmed. "Probably only a tenth of it my own."

He shivered a little at that, despite the circumstances, the image her words set in his head utterly thrilling. "That would be something to see."

She smirked at the undercurrent in his voice. She was looking forward to telling Jim all about the depths of that fetish of his. "Who knows, if you're really lucky you'll see it soon."

"I look forward to that," he tossed back, just a hint of levity in his voice. He stretched as best he could, cuff chain clanking as it struck stone. "Just keep it to other people's blood."

"I didn't think you'd care for the distinction," she snorted, raising her eyebrows in the darkness.

"You're under my protection," he retorted, shifting. "That doesn't change just because we're imprisoned."
She made a note of that. It remained to see if he would stick to that once bad things began happening to him, but for now, she was pleased. It meant he would take care of the Boss just as well, if not better. "I only meant with your fetish," she teased. "But I appreciate the sincerity."

"It's not a fetish," he retorted, shifting. "Just... a preference." He could hear that she was pleased, however, and relaxed a little.

She had to laugh at him calling it a preference. "Mmhm, just like I have a preference for being dominated and bitten and choked," she chuckled, rolling her eyes to herself.

"Good to know," he retorted smoothly, closing his eyes and taking a slow breath.

She hummed in response, letting silence descend on them. She hoped he was slightly calmer, slightly closer to sleep. Rest was important right now.

He was quiet for a while, though he wasn't sure how long. It was hard to keep track in the darkness. He had fallen into a sort of half-doze, when he was woken by steps pounding down the hallway, and the dim light of an approaching torch.

Lorna tensed, sitting up in the darkness, suddenly very awake. Not this cell, not this cell.... It was a foolish hope. She hadn't glimpsed any other people down here. That didn't mean there wasn't any, but, well... The light of the torch reached the cell's door, and the clang of the key in the lock touched her ears.

He shifted as best he could to his feet, suddenly cursing himself for letting his ass fall asleep. He shook out his legs, just on the edge of the circle of light, waiting... But the muzzles of two semi-automatics slid through the bars, and he rethought his plans. "Step into the light," came the harsh, Italian command. He did so, slowly, watching Harrison out of the corner of his eye.

She stepped forward a second after he did, glad that he knew enough Italian to catch simple commands. It would make things easier for him. The door opened, and Lorna reached over to squeeze Moran's arm, trying to remind him of what she'd said earlier. Behave. The man holding the flashlight pointed at Moran. "You. Come with us."

He felt the touch, heard the reminder behind it. He stepped forward slowly, and was roughly grabbed by two men, one on each arm, who roughed him out into the hall. He took a breath, closing his eyes for just a moment. He was a soldier. He could do this.

Lorna stepped back, and watched as they manhandled him out of sight, listening to the sounds of three pairs of feet on the floor before they faded out of earshot. Then she sank back down onto the mat, curling up on her side. There was nothing to do but wait for him to come back, now, so she might as well try to rest before it was her turn.
It was almost seven hours later that they dragged him back.

He was conscious, stumbling occasionally between them in a slapdash but honor-bound attempt at walking on his own. His clothes were torn, and were on him with a hasty sloppiness that, in combination with his sluggishness, suggested they had been put back by someone else. His head was down, and there were bloodstains in his short-cropped hair, but not enough to indicate a head wound. His wrists were free, but cut deeply by something other than the cuffs that had been on him initially.

One of the guards dropped his half of Moran to open the door, and the young man tilted dangerously before realizing he was on his own on that side and managing to slap a bare foot into place to keep himself from going over.

Lorna snapped out of an unsatisfying doze at the sound of feet against stone, sitting up before she quite knew what was going on. It was light enough now - from the gas lights they obviously didn't bother keeping on during the night - that she could see them outside the bars of the door, and she tensed as she saw Moran. She wasn't sure how long he had been gone, but he looked terrible. Not entirely that battered, but... off. Wrong. She tensed further once they got the door open and pushed him inside, doing her best to get to her feet in haste, and just managed to keep him from spilling onto the stone floor by bracing him. The guards said nothing to her, just shut the door, locked it, and turned and left. She heard them begin to joke amongst themselves before they faded out of her range of hearing again, and she lowered Sebastian to sit on the mat, crouching in front of him, brows furrowed together. "What happened to you?"

He winced as she helped him sit, leaning back against the wall and closing his eyes. He was trembling just slightly, his breaths slow. It was a few moments before he opened his eyes, and even then he didn't look at her. His gaze was distant, listless, for just a moment, but then he seemed to rein himself in and it firmed up. He swallowed dryly. "They knew about Ciano. About me and Ciano."

She sat back on her haunches, letting out a slow breath, raising a hand to rub her eyes. "Jesus..." She murmured, voice laced with sympathy. And fear, for herself. But she pushed that down for now. She lifted her face to look at him again, raising her hands slightly to hover at his hair for a second before dropping. "Why is there blood in your hair? Is it yours?"

He looked up briefly, as if trying to see what she was talking about, and then shrugged a little bit. "I don't know. Maybe," he said, in a voice that was a bit lifeless. He glanced at one of his wrists, which was smeared with blood from where restraints had cut him. "My hands were tied near my head. Could've hit..."

"God..." She breathed, her heart wrenching in her chest for him. He was barely old enough for her to even consider looking at him, let alone for something like this to happen to him. "Were you drugged, or are you just exhausted?"

"Tired. Went on for a while." He pressed a hand against the wall, sitting up slowly, eyes still not quite looking at her. "M'okay. Wha'd'you need?"
She shook her head, keeping herself from touching him, though she wanted to pull him to her chest and bury her face in his hair. "No, I don't need anything. What do you need? Can I do anything?" She asked, voice soft.

He was relieved when she said she didn't need him, and slumped back again, slowly. He felt dazed. He wasn't thinking much beyond what he felt, which was cold, and sore, and in pain. His chest was too hot, but that was alright. It sort of balanced out the cold a bit. He shivered slightly. He wanted to sleep. Harrison said something and he tried to focus, but mostly he was tired. He closed his eyes.

She didn't make him answer, just pressed his shoulder gently to guide him back into lying down, head away from the door, and shifted to sit at his feet, doing her best to provide some sort of barrier between the door and him. He would have enough trouble getting easy rest in a place like this already, and now it was even worse. Her eyes stung, and she wiped them once before they could well up properly, waiting for the lump in her throat to fade away. She needed to figure a way out before she was taken.

It's alright, Seb. Scoot over. Daddy just wants to cuddle.

He awoke suddenly, limbs swinging hard to get someone- anyone- off of him. His hand contacted the stone wall with force, and that woke him up in earnest, the pain radiating up his arm and waking other, as-yet dormant ailments.

He hurt. His whole body was sore, his wrists stung and burned, and there was a sharp, penetrating ache below his waist that made him sick to his stomach. Above all of that, however, was a mounting burning over his heart. He pressed a hand there and had to bite into his lip to keep the sound muffled. He curled up a bit tighter on the mat, taking slow, shaky breaths until the pain dulled.

She looked over at him as he hit the stone, her throat constricting sympathetically as she looked at him. Her voice came out in a soft rasp as she spoke. "Would you rather I did or didn't touch you?"

He didn't answer for a few minutes, just focusing on breathing, but he could still feel hands on him, and he needed something to keep him grounded. "Just... be careful," he returned, his own voice hoarse.

She nodded a little, and got up to scoot over to his head, and carefully started carding her fingers through his hair, touching him more tenderly than she'd ever touched anyone. She couldn't say why, exactly, she was capable of this much sympathy with him, but it was extremely strong and impossible to ignore.

He was tense for a few minutes, but eventually was able to trust the repetitive nature of the motion enough to relax a little and trust that the touch was safe. He focused on it as best he could, then, eyes closed, but eventually the pain at his chest was too difficult to ignore. "Do we have any water?"

"Yeah," she nodded, shifting away from him for a moment. "I fell asleep at one point, and somebody dropped by a small pitcher. I've had a little, but thought you might end up needing it more. Here," she put it down in front of him as she sat back again.

He sat up slowly, and picked up the small pitcher, taking a few small sips despite the part of him
that wanted to drink the whole thing. There was condensation on the outside of the container, and after he put it down he slid cool, damp fingers under his shirt, pressing them gently against his chest. He flinched just a little, eyes screwing up, but the moisture helped ease the pain a bit. "Thank you."

She nodded, sitting back against the wall, watching him. "I'm sorry," she said quietly, after a moment.

He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, and shook his head. "Nothing you could do."

"I know," she sighed, shrugging a little. "Still sorry." She dreaded them coming back. By all turns of logic it would be her turn, and she didn't want to know what they would do to her.

He picked up the water, took one more sip, and passed it her way. He was completely exhausted, despite having slept. "Any idea how long I was out?"

She shrugged again. "A couple hours, at the very least. I think we're well into daytime, now," she said, then picked up the pitcher to take a couple sips of water, then set it aside. It was important they conserved it. One of her legs jittered nervously, anticipation of the worst kind riding high in her chest. Her ears were straining for the sound of distant footsteps, fearing their arrival.

He watched her nervousness, and quietly considered the situation, gut sinking as his sluggish brain pieced together her concerns. It was another few minutes before he got up the nerve to say what he needed to. "I'll clock them, boss. Keep the focus on me." His voice wasn't nearly so sturdy as he'd been hoping for.

"No, don't draw unnecessary attention to yourself. It won't work, anyways. If Ciano rolled on you, he rolled on me, too, or at least what I told him," she shook her head immediately, almost surprised at herself. "It's nothing I won't survive. I need you to keep your strength up as best you can - I don't think any escape of ours will be very subtle, and I can't carry you out. You continue to behave. Look for a tactical advantage." She let out a slow, controlled breath. "This isn't the Mafia, this is the army. I can't take them down with a switchblade. We're going to need one of those automatic guns, and I don't know how to use those, let alone know if I would even be able to keep on my feet. So keep your strength, and look for a way to bail us out. I will try to keep their attention as much as possible. Good, or bad."

He was surprised at her response. It wasn't what he'd been expecting at all. He nodded just slightly, however, following her logic. He reached out after a moment, putting a hand on her rapidly tapping leg. He didn't know what to say. Odds were it would be her. There was little arguing that point.

She appreciated the gesture. Her throat tightened, and she looked away, putting her hand atop his for just a second of acknowledgment.

Maybe an hour later footsteps echoed down the hallway, and she tensed nervously.

He heard it, too, and glanced at her as the guards approached their cell. They came into sight, and his heart rate accelerated rapidly. His whole body seemed to recoil at once, pressing him tight against the wall, even as he fought with himself to stay calm. The best he could do was stay breathing and stay silent.

*Get a hold of yourself, colonel!*
He took a few shallow breaths, and some part of his mind processed the order to stand. He complied, very stiffly, wincing, and felt more than saw Harrison do the same beside him. His hand touched her shoulder gently, the same as she had done for him, and felt his gut tighten with a sense of traitorous relief as they pointed to her.

She nodded, breaths uneven, and toed off her shoes as she glimpsed Sebastian's bare feet. She didn't want to lose any clothing, particularly something that would keep warmth in her feet. She stepped into the doorway, eyes down, though she couldn't help but see the leers on their faces from the corners of her eyes.

"Questo è più bello dell'ultimo," one of them joked, and received a roll of his eyes and an elbow jab from the other, and Lorna's stomach churned. This one's prettier than the last.

"Vai a scopare tua madre, figlio di puttana," she spat back, and earned herself a punch to the mouth for her trouble, and then a hand gripped the back of her neck and forced her to move, and proceeded to drag her down the hall.

He took a half step forward when they hit her, his instincts warring between intervening and following orders. Eventually orders won out, and he watched as they dragged her away, before eventually sitting on the mat. He was shivering, and curled up into a ball for warmth as he was left in the darkness, doing his best not to think about what they would do to her. His brand burned.

She was gone just as long as he had been. Seven hours later, two soldiers different from the ones who had taken her escorted her back to the cell. Escort was a strong word. They had her between them, supporting her weight with their own bodies.

She was too out of it to pay much attention to the way they slid their hands over her as they stopped outside the cell, one of them breaking away to open the door. During those hours, she'd acquired a split lip, a bruise the size of a grapefruit forming under her eye, deep lacerations on her inner arms, and several burning scrapes down her sides and back. Her clothes hadn't survived as well as Moran's had - her blouse was torn down the back, and her pants were missing entirely. It was a surprise her trousers had made it through without a scratch.

The guard got the door unlocked and the soldier supporting her shifted his shoulder away from her, grabbing her by the jaw with one hand and pressing an open-mouthed, rough mockery of a kiss to her slack lips. The soldier by the door had a bloody crescent on his lower lip, and looked far stormier than his friend, who broke off laughing after a excruciatingly long moment.

Orders didn't win out, this time. Both of the guards were too caught up in what they were doing to notice his quiet approach in the shadows, at least until the haymaker connected with the temple of the one who had kissed Harrison. It was weaker than his usual punch, which would have rendered the man unconscious, but it was enough to hurt, a fact which was made clear by the furious roar that followed. The soldier dropped Harrison and punched Moran right back, missing his first swing but landing his second on the younger man's ear. Moran was gearing up to respond when he was converted to peace rather suddenly by the muzzle of a gun in his face. He stepped back very slowly, hands rising to sit on the back of his head, eyes lowering. Harrison was kicked through the cell door, and it slammed shut to a chorus of furious Italian muttering.

"That was stupid," she said softly, on her hands and knees on the floor. She shifted back onto her
knees and examined her skinned palms with dull eyes. It was just another pain, and lesser than the rest of her ailments. "Thanks, though." The shift change had brought them in halfway through her session, and they'd had different preferences from the first two. She only fought the first time they did something to her. The second time, she was usually swimming from the blow.

He knelt down next to her, looking her over in the dim light from the receding torch. A few moments later, though, it was too dark to see. "They roughed you up," he said, rather needlessly. "How badly?"

She shrugged a little, her staring down at her hands until the light faded, and she shut her eyes, finally allowing the tears to well up and spill over, streaking down her cheeks. "I imagine about how much they roughed you up, maybe a little different. I fought some." She couldn't bring herself to move. Moving was agonizing.

He nodded a little in the darkness. He could hear the strain in her voice, but didn't judge her for it. His own collar was damp from less than an hour ago. "Should I touch you, or no?"

"I..." She wasn't sure. Four different sets of hands had touched her, and the idea of them touching her again made her feel sick and clammy. But she'd just watched him deck one of them. You can't afford to swear off touch. "...Carefully."

He nodded a little, understanding the feeling completely. "I'm going to touch your shoulder," he warned quietly, reaching out in the dimness and resting his hand there gently. He let his thumb rub back and forth gently, rhythmically, predictably. "If they branded you, the water helps," he said quietly.

"They branded you?" She breathed, twitching slightly as tears dripped onto her skinned palms. "They... they didn't do that to me. Just... other things."

Part of him was relieved, but the rest was focused on what 'other things' meant. "I don't need details, but is there anything that... that needs attention?" His hand shook just slightly on her shoulder, but his thumb remained steady.

She shook her head a little, a couple locks of hair that had escaped her curls brushing over his hand. "No. Nothing that can be done. Just... is going to really hurt for a while," she laughed weakly, which dissolved into a sob, and she clapped her hand over her mouth as her shoulders started shuddering.

He didn't have the faintest idea of what to do. He was terrified, too, there in the darkness, but touch was an uncertain thing for both of them. Eventually he did the only thing he could think of, and started singing, very softly. An Irish hymn he'd learned for school one year. It was sad, but soothing, echoing around the stone walls of the cell.

Eventually she became too exhausted to even cry in silence, and just listened to him, the occasional tear dripping from her chin. He was a beautiful singer. She hadn't expected that. Eventually she got the will to move, a hand gently wrapping around his wrist for a second before letting go, a silent request for him to stay with her, and she slumped against the wall.

He sat back next to her then, eventually falling silent to conserve water and energy. He left his hand on her shoulder, gently, and sat as a barrier between her and the door, like she had been for him. There didn't seem to be much else he could do now but wait. He had always liked waiting, in the army. It meant he was in control, early. Waiting for a superior. For a target. A signal. Now, though, he hated it.
At some point someone must have realized that they required some amount of care, because footsteps echoed down the hall again, and Lorna kept her eyes locked on the door in the dark as a guard with a mousey woman appeared. The woman had a tray of food (including a fresh pitcher of water), and the guard had a bucket. He ordered them to behave in Italian before he unlocked the door and the woman walked fearlessly in, surprisingly enough, and set down the tray of food on the floor before she walked to the corner and picked up their bucket, and walked back out. The guard tossed their new bucket in carelessly, and then locked the door.

He watched the two with wary eyes, muscled coiled like springs, waiting to bolt forward at an instant's notice. The two moved on quickly, however, and after a moment he stood, gritting his teeth as his body- mainly his abdomen and arse- protested angrily. He walked stiffly over and picked up the tray, examining it quietly. Bread, and some sort of greyish pasta dish that was sporting mold in a few places. He wrinkled his nose, but walked over to set the tray in front of Harrison before working his way gingerly into a seated position again, breath catching in his chest a few times as the movement prompted new pain.

She could relate to the noises he was making; just sitting still, she could feel the sharp pain at her core. She didn't look at the food in front of her, just set about eating her portion of it. It was better not to know, sometimes. She'd had practice with this, at least, thanks to her time in New York. Absently, she wondered what Armetti would think of her, imprisoned in the country of his family. That made her close her eyes, sending out a silent thanks to whatever had gone wrong with her pregnancy that had made her sterile. At least she was free from one fear. She coughed a little as she finished her food, and quickly reached for the pitcher to wash the taste from her mouth, then sighed, leaning her head back against the wall, closing her eyes. "You should eat. I need you to keep up your strength. It should be your turn, if they come again, but I'll do my best to have them take me instead. I'd prefer if both of us weren't hobbled with pain."

He inhaled the food as quickly as he could get it down. He'd eaten worse than this in the field. The water was a necessary chaser, and he took it gratefully, swishing it around to try and clear away the moldy fuzz lingering on his tongue. He glanced at her as she said that though, and shook his head."No. I'm willing to concede not intervening on your behalf, but Jim ordered me to protect you. That's the bottom line."

"Yes, it is the bottom line - namely, getting me the hell out of this medieval pigsty, understand?" She replied sharply, eyes opening to meet his intensely. "If Jim has a problem with the interpretation of his orders being taken in broad enough terms to see the bigger picture of escaping, he's an absolute idiot, and I'll be pleased to take responsibility for overriding his orders."

"That doesn't work if they kill you," he shot back. "I refuse to just... let you take the brunt of the hell."

"I doubt they'll let me take all of it. They will get back to you, eventually. But the less, the better," she snapped, then took in a purposeful breath, shutting her eyes, and then let it back out slowly. "They branded you, Moran. Which means they're going to be a lot more purposefully cruel to you, considering I experienced no such thing. A few cuts won't kill me. If I scar, it's not the end of the world. We're in a war, for god's sake. Who knows how many times London has been bombed since we left? One more cut-up girl will not raise anyone's eyebrows."

He didn't have much of an answer for that, so instead he fell silent, face and eyes expressionless, an underlying, unvented fury burning hot. He felt like a coward, and it grated on him. He wasn't a coward. He took his hits when he earned them, and dealt back twice as good as he got. Letting
Harrison take the brunt of the... treatment... went against what little moral code he had, in an infuriating way.

She let them fall back into silence. It was easier than driving the point home for no reason. It already bothered him. She didn't need to make him more upset.

He spoke up after a while. "Let me take this next one if it comes to me. I need to get out of the cell, gain more detail."

She opened her eyes to look in his direction for a moment, sighing softly. It was a valid argument, and she couldn't ignore it without one of her own. But she didn't have her own. "Alright. I'll try to see if there's any discernible patrol pattern once you're gone."

He nodded a little, and fell silent again. Waiting. Planning.

Chapter End Notes

Sia - Jesus Wept
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7YY0Bv9UUU&t=0s&index=22&list=PLSCvi5dTA1ahDvIwz8x5mRI4kKDxqhd4S

The Italian translates roughly to
"This one is prettier than the last one," and "Go fuck your mother, you son of a bitch"
He didn't know, later on, which was worse. Those first few days, or the weeks that followed. The utter terror and agony of those first long hours of torture, or the duller fear and brokenness that it faded into. He learned what to accept and what to fight. Learned how to make his life easier. Learned how to let his spirit be broken so that his body could survive another day.

They took Lorna more than him. Selfishly on their part, he knew. They preferred her form. And she made them want it. She didn't tell him, but he heard the soldiers talking once or twice about the things she did- the things she could do- to keep any man as happy as you please. That turned his stomach more than the food.

She'd learned how to make her life easier. She'd had to. Fighting them during the worst of it only made her hurt worse, and the happier they were, the less brutal they were. They didn't expect her to be happy, or for her to fake enjoying herself, but as long as she didn't resist, as long as she participated, they didn't push so hard. And it hurt less, when she kept herself from tensing up all over. Still, she had to fight back sometimes, to keep them from taking Moran for all their more violent tortures. The lacerations on her forearms weren't healing well, if at all, and she'd ripped her trousers to shreds to bandage them. They were constantly drenched against her skin, blood slowly seeping from the wounds. She knew that if things continued this way, it wouldn't be long before she croaked, but there wasn't anything she could do except wait for Jim to come for them, or for Moran to get his perfect opportunity.

By the dawn of the second week, she spent her nights pressed into Moran's warmth, her body failing to make heat like it was supposed to, and she knew that the bone-deep weariness dragging at her wasn't just from the poor nights of sleep. She was slowly running out of blood. And their captors didn't care a bit whether or not she died.

He knew she was running out of time.

Something was wrong. He had shredded his shirt for bandages when her trousers had run out, but still the cuts kept breaking open, kept oozing life into the cloth, no matter how tightly bound. And whenever they took her, it came back worse.

He wasn't doing well, either. The brand on his chest had festered. As a result, he'd had the luck of developing a mild fever, and the use of his left arm was limited by how far he could move without aggravating the wound. Still, he was almost grateful for the fever. It was more heat he could lend to Harrison. She was his priority.

He woke up slowly, groggily, in what he assumed was the morning. Harrison was curled up in his lap- a thin, bony ball, huddling for warmth. He wrapped his arms around her snuggly, trying to provide a little more heat to her failing system.

She hadn't fallen asleep that night, not really. She didn't do anything close to sleeping, these days. Either she dozed, or she was unconscious, and neither of them were particularly satisfying. At least when she was unconscious her mind was off, incapable of playing out scenarios in her head. She pressed further into him as she felt his breathing change - she'd made the habit of stealing his
warmth after the third or fourth night, and neither of them had bothered to comment on it. It didn't seem worth it. At the most, it was a balm that there was somebody she could touch and still feel safe.

This morning, she was shivering - just a slight tremor throughout her body. She wasn't even sure whether or not he could feel it. She pressed her arms tighter against her chest, not even registering the fresh bloom of pain at the pressure. "I don't think I can do this for much longer, Moran," she whispered, half hoping he was still too asleep to hear her admission of weakness. Defeat.

He didn't know whether he had heard it at first, either. Whether the words had been real, or some uncertain muttering of his fever-addled brain. He shifted a little, the breath-stopping pain that followed a sign that yes, he was awake, and he gently nudged her. "Hey. No talking like that." His voice was hoarse. "You'll be fine. Just need to sleep a bit more, night-owl."

She gave a bitter, weak laugh, not really directed at him, more at herself. "I would if I could, believe me. I haven't slept normally since shortly before I was bleeding to death all the damn time," she muttered, pressing her arms against her harder for a second. It was a weak attempt to staunch the slow seepage, which, from all the times she'd done the exact same thing, had already soaked through her shirt multiple times.

"Let me see," he said quietly, reaching out with his good hand to gently move her arm. They had started using bits of his trousers, now, and the dark fabric was already soaked through from the night before. "You need to stop doing that. The bleeding thing. Very unhelpful." He set her arm back against her chest, and tried to shift her to a position where her head wasn't against the angry burn of the brand.

"I'd love to," she sighed, adjusting to the new position with a small shift and then relaxing again. He had his own injuries to take care of, she knew. She felt so goddamn weak. Even after she'd given birth, she hadn't been this listless, this close to death, and it hadn't been a forgiving process for her. "How are you holding up?"

"Fine," he said firmly. "Worry about you." He was going to change the topic, but it was done for him. The sound of boots came into hearing range, trudging down the hall, and his gut clenched. Still, he shifted her out of his lap carefully. "Rest up," he said quietly.

She couldn't bring herself to argue. She just couldn't take much more abuse, not if she wanted to make it out of here alive. So she just reached out for a second, and squeezed his hand in hers, in silent solidarity. The guards reached the door and banged on the bars, as if they didn't already have their attention. "You. With us."

He looked up, and it took him a moment to focus in the bright light, feverish eyes slow to respond. But then he saw what he'd been waiting for for six days, now.

One of the guards was his height.

He stood, then, walking slowly toward the bars like he always did, but the usual pain was drowned out by adrenaline coursing through him, shoring up his body, giving him strength. He reached a hand up to his chest as he approached the bars and they opened the door, and pressed his fingers down on the infected wound there. The pain and nausea that resulted was exactly what he needed, and without any particular warning, he vomited all over the floor and shoes of the shorter guard.

The next few moments seemed to pass in slow motion. The guards recoiled, and then the short one came back at him, furious about the mess on his shoes. Moran feinted away, the guard misstepped, and the precious automatic rifle was suddenly grappled between the two of them. He slid his finger
in over the guard's, yanked up, and fired a shot through the forehead of the soldier that was his size. Then he twisted harshly, wrenching the gun free. The guard struggled for another moment, and he felt something sting his side, but then he managed to aim the gun over his shoulder and fire. It left his ear ringing and his jaw burned, but there was a satisfying noise as the man dropped dead behind him.

He stood there for just a moment, his breaths coming quickly. His side hurt more than usual, and he looked down to see the point of a knife sticking out of his abdomen about two inches above his hip, blood seeping across his skin. He closed his eyes for just a moment, then decided there wasn't time to deal with it right now. They had, at most, five minutes before the by-now-alert guards figured out where the shots had come from. He knelt down and started stripping the soldier that was his size.

Lorna jolted as the action exploded in the doorway, and curled up in a ball of fear and pain, and didn't move until the sounds of both guards had faded to the sound of just Moran. She let out a long breath and opened her eyes to see him divesting one of the guards of his clothes, but her eyes landed on the blade in his side, and they widened. She sat up. "What's the plan, here, Moran?"

He pulled on the army jacket, pausing for just a moment to avoid vomiting again as it yanked on the handle of the blade sticking out of his back, and then adjusted the coat to sit over it. Still, the knife was an advantage in what was to come, at least for now. He started pulling on the trousers. "We're getting out. I need to act dead for a few minutes, but then we're going." He took all of the ammo both guards had, and started accessorizing. Hat, knife, belt. Nothing to be done for his scraggly beard, but the uniform would buy them time. He felt around the pockets of his stolen coat until he found the cell keys, and then headed back into the cell. He stooped to pick up Harrison, surprisingly steady, and thanked whatever gods were watching for adrenaline. Then he headed down the hall a few cells.

She did her best to help, tucking herself up tight and trying to make herself easier to hold, her heart beating fast. That was very bad for her. Her wounds were seeping a little more, and she didn't appreciate it. She shut her eyes and tried very hard to pretend that this all wasn't happening. Anything to limit how fast she bled out.

He could feel her heart hammering away from where she was curled up against him, and when he spoke his voice was as calm as he could make it. "Take deep breaths, boss. We're getting out. All you need to do for now is sit quietly." He set her down and fumbled for the keys, opening an empty cell door and lifting her again with a slight grunt of pain, carrying her back to the darkest corner of the cell. "Stay here, stay quiet," he said softly, then left again. A few moments later he returned with the body of the guard in his arms, struggling and stumbling a little before he set the man down, shoving him into the dark as well and pausing to grip at his side, panting. "Okay. Don't move. Stay calm. I'll be back." He left the cell again, then, and shut the door, but didn't lock it, just in case. Then he made his way back the hundred yards or so to where the other guard's body was, and lay face down where the soldier had been, the knife in his back clearly visible. His breathing and heart rate slowed, and then it was just a matter of waiting.

He really was beginning to hate waiting.

She sat perfectly still in the dark, taking long, slow breaths, doing her best to fool herself into staying calm. No need for fight or flight, just relax....

The group of three soldiers assigned to search the tunnels came stomping down a few minutes later, and started shouting among themselves in rapid-fire Italian as they discovered the bodies of the guards.
Moran lay still, only his training as a sniper keeping his heart rate and breathing barely noticeable. His eyes were shut, but he listened as best he could to the blur of Italian, catching words here and there. *Escape* and *traitors* and a lot of expletives. It seemed to go on forever, though he knew it could only be less than a minute, and then the soldiers parted ways, running off to spread the word.

It was harder getting up off of the stone than he thought it should be. His left arm shook slightly with even just his weight, and the sharp pain of the knife was growing more and more persuasive. He managed to get to his feet, and headed back to where he had left Lorna, never stopping. If they stopped, they died.

One pair of footsteps ran past her stall, loud and heavy, and she knew it wasn't Moran. Judging by the shouting that had come down the hall, they'd found the corpse of the other guard. A minute later, a pair of softer footsteps reached her ears, and she let out a breath of relief. So he was still moving. The knife sticking it through him would start to slow him down, soon, if it hadn't already started. There wasn't going to be much she could do for him, out here, and she didn't have much experience tending field wounds. She'd never had to do it herself. Maybe that was a drawback to having a fairly easy crime career.

He found her where he had left her, and bent to pick her up. "If we see anyone, start fighting me as best you can," he said quietly as he reentered the hallway, most of his focus on keeping his steps from wavering. Pain radiated up his left side, but he could ignore that for the most part. "Kick, claw my face, anything you need to do to sell it. Try not to fuck up my eyes."

"Why? I look half dead, and I don't usually put up a fight during the escort," she murmured, glancing up at him. She was concerned. She could see the strain in his posture.

"Because supposedly you've escaped," he said quietly, turning a corner and heading for where he had once seen the south exit. It was the furthest away, but also had to be the furthest from Mussolini's quarters. "And if I say I've recaptured you but that I'm still on the loose, they might not look too hard at me and keep going."

"You're right, I'm just exhausted," she sighed, nodding a little, keeping an eye open for any other people. Things weren't making a lot of sense to her anymore. They just had to get out, and find a safe house, and then maybe she could get some proper stitches and stop bleeding to death. She didn't know if she'd be conscious by the time they arrived.

"I know. Just hang in here with me, yeah? Could use someone to talk to." He needed her conscious. Needed her working with him, needed her alive. He swore as he heard footsteps coming down the corridor, and looked around for a moment before stooping to set Lorna in a corner. "Stay here." He said quietly.

"Yeah, yeah, sure," she murmured, leaning back against the wall and closing her eyes until he needed her again.

He crouched next to her, shifting the gun into his hands, and considered his options. It sounded like five, maybe six men. He could take down three, for certain, before they started firing back, four maybe, but once they returned fire, that would be the end of it. Talking his way out of it would end as soon as they heard his abysmal attempt at Italian, or his Irish accent. He could distract them, and leave Lorna to make her way out, but she could barely sit up, much less walk or run. He shifted the gun in his hands. He had the element of surprise. Maybe he could take five. If it was six... But he was out of time to decide. He shifted further into the shadows, readied the gun...

Something held his fire, though. Some deep instinct gave him little option, stilling his finger on the trigger, and to his surprise, the soldiers ran past without stopping. Not a one glanced into their
shadowy corner.

He breathed a quiet sigh of relief, turned, and picked Harrison up again. He took a breath, grit his teeth, and started jogging for the south exit.

The jogging was fun for neither of them. It kept her awake, but she didn't really see that as a mercy, with the way her wounds jostled, and she fisted a hand into his uniform shirt, screwed her eyes shut, and decided to ride it out to the best of her ability.

Every step he took seemed to saw the knife through the flesh of his side, and god knew what else. Still, he didn't have much of a choice, and ran as quickly as he was able without his feet pounding on the stone.

They got to the door inside of eight minutes. He had to stop twice and jam Harrison into a corner to let guards pass, but everyone was distracted, and no one was looking for a man in uniform. The guards at the door were the first he shot, and when he rammed his gun into the head of the radio operator, the man turned pale and followed his instructions in broken Italian to transmit a warning that the prisoners had been seen by the west gate. He shot the man immediately afterward, with no regrets. The blood spattered warm in his face, but for once, he was too distracted to notice.

He picked up Lorna one more time, arms shaking with exhaustion, and barreled out the south exit. It was night. Thank the gods, it was night. For a moment, the fresh, outdoor air brought him to a stop. It had been... god... How long? How long had they been in there...?

But then he was moving again, running for a van whose outline he could just see in the darkness. He opened the passenger door and hefted Lorna into the passenger seat. He had to stop for just a moment, then, leaning against the van and taking two, three, four breaths....

He bit his tongue hard and got himself moving again, shutting the passenger door and circling around to climb into the driver's side, taking the knife from his belt and leaning under the steering wheel to hotwire the car.

She'd fallen in and out of consciousness during the escape, and came to again once she was deposited in the passenger seat, letting a small groan. "Where.... Do you know where the nearest safe house is? Not sure... not sure I can really help out, right now...."

"That's my job," he said as wires sparked and the engine choked to life. He shifted into gear and revved the engine, heading for the road. They hit a bump and he clenched his teeth as the knife hit the seat and was shoved a little harder through him. "We'll go as far as we can and then ditch the car. Just focus on staying awake. Talk to me."

"Talk about what?" she muttered, keeping her eyes open with major difficulty, watching out the window. "I need... some kind of topic."

"Food," he said, his own voice a bit strained as he took a corner hard and headed west. "What's the first thing you're going to eat when we get out of here?"

"Coffee," she chuckled, "Then maybe a decent steak. Bloody as they'll make it. What about you?"

He groaned slightly, only about half in hunger. "That sounds fucking wonderful," he agreed, shaking his head slightly as a road sign blurred and squinting a little to compensate, the vortex effect of the headlights on the buildings not mixing well with his fever. He braked a bit suddenly, just barely making a turn onto a road heading out of the city. "Steak and potatoes. Proper, seasoned potatoes, with cheese, and a whole fucking rasher of bacon..."
She laughed, harder than she had in awhile, but it was still weak. "God, you're so Irish. I always had a penchant for that... that accent, you know. My mother thought it was... mm, beneath me. Silly."

"If this accent is beneath you, you're bound to be having a good time," he said with a wink, grinning before returning his attention to the road. He felt high on life. For the first time since he'd been... taken... he found himself believing that they both might make it out of this.

She smirked, shrugging a little, and then winced as it pulled in uncomfortable spots. "I do, with you and Jim," she chuckled, eyes drifting shut again, of their own accord. She was just so exhausted.

He glanced over at her as she fell silent. "Hey. Eyes open there, soldier. Come on. Another minute, that's all. Need you to make sure I'm driving straight." He was only half joking. He pressed the accelerator a little harder as they started to clear the city, moving into the suburban areas at the outskirts. He needed to find another car...

She reluctantly opened her eyes again, and they drifted over to him. She was pale, and almost gaunt. "Hell of a first mission for you," she said quietly, all curled up in a ball on the passenger seat. "You've done well."

"Not if you die on me, I haven't," he snorted, turning another corner and then slowing the van. A black car was parked on the street, barely visible except for the chromed bumper. "This is us," he muttered, climbing out of the driver's side and walking around to get her. "It's not far from here."

"Good," she muttered, finally feeling something akin to relief. Maybe she would make it. Though with this much blood lost, she was worried it was too late. God, dying at 22. What a disappointment. If she died, Moran would, too. She took a deep breath, trying to keep herself awake. He didn't deserve to die because her damn blood couldn't stay clotted.

He transferred them to the black car in under two minutes, and they were on the road again. He kept her talking as best he could, but he knew she was slipping. He was, too. He was exhausted, and sitting in the car was not enough to keep the adrenaline he needed pumping. Finally, though, he saw the goddamned tree he was looking for, and pulled a turn down the next identical suburban street, and a mile later, there was the safehouse.

He got out of the car to open the garage door, and almost fell over, slamming a hand on the car to keep himself upright as his knee buckled. He straightened slowly, shuffling forward and hauling the garage door open. He got into the car again and drove it in, before shutting the door behind them again. He closed his eyes, trying to catch his breath, but then he forced himself to get out, walk around and pick up Harrison. He knocked on the door from the house to the garage, sat on the step, and closed his eyes.

The door opened very quickly, revealing a man in a simple shirt and rather worn trousers, a cigar in his mouth. He looked rather startled to see them for a moment, Moran, with a knife stabbed through him, and Harrison, soaked in blood and curled up in his lap. She forced herself to open her eyes, squinting up at him. "Signore Santucci? Lorna Harrison. Assistance would be excellent."
Moran remembered only moments of the next few hours. He remembered *vividly* the knife being removed, remembered screaming around the towel he was biting into as the serration snagged muscle and tissue. He remembered, too, someone cleaning the brand on his chest, but only for a few minutes. Then they started cutting it open to clean it, and he fell into blessed blackness.

Lorna remembered too much of the next few hours. The cleaning of the lacerations on her arms took a long time, and the stitches took even longer. She didn't know how many there were. She doubted the people stitching her up kept track, either. A heavyset woman with dark hair and tanned skin seemed to be her primary caregiver, because after she'd been stitched up, the men were shooed from the room, and the motherly woman asked her a series of questions that she seemed to already know the answer to. When Lorna started crying, she pet her forehead and told her everything would be alright, and talked her into a more thorough exam, and to help where she could. There wasn't much to be done but to clean her up and give her painkillers, so the woman (Lucia, she finally found out) drew her up a bath and helped her wash off the dirt and grime of captivity. She was given a fresh set of clothes (too big, but that was inconsequential) and a couple of painkillers, and was tucked into bed, a glass of water on the nightstand, and eventually she drifted off under the haze of drugs.

He slept fitfully, and for a long time. He had small patches of memory. A cool cloth on his head that felt frigid and unbearable in the chills of a fever. Someone helping him drink something that was not water. Soft sheets, and a bed that felt like a cloud. And always, in the back of his mind, Harrison. Where was she? She was supposed to be next to him. Had they taken her? She was his charge. He needed to know...

When he woke fully for the first time, it was either morning or evening. The sun was just below the horizon, the sky still tinted orange, but he couldn't orient himself enough to know if it was rising or setting. He sat up slowly, but paused after a moment, panting for breath, his side and chest searing. He moved again after a minute and managed to get himself upright, looking around. He was in a bedroom, on the second floor of a building. The safehouse. This had to be it. He had a vague memory of getting here.

He started go take stock. He ached everywhere, fever evidently still lingering, though he wasn't as chilled. His side and chest were the worst pain, though his abdomen and other areas weren't far behind. He was still capable of moving, he decided. He had moved through worse, with less energy. Harrison wasn't in this room, and he needed to find her and determine the state of their
situation. He gathered himself, and stood, a hand finding the wall for support. After a moment he headed for the door, bare feet padding softly on the wooden floor, the soft cotton of the pajamas he was in swishing slightly as he walked.

Lucia, the woman who had been watching over Harrison since they'd both arrived a little more than 24 hours ago, was mopping the hallway outside his door, a bandanna holding back her hair from her face as she cleaned up the blood from the floor. No one else had had a chance, while they were taking care of their charges. They were only a household of four, and she was the only woman - the men had been busy either watching Moran or working out transportation details with the London base, and she'd been too busy watching Harrison until now. She looked up as the door opened, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand. "Moran," she greeted, in only slightly accented English. "You shouldn't be up yet. What do you need? I'll bring it to you, once I've got a moment to spare."

He eyed her a bit suspiciously, but after a moment said "The woman I was brought in with. I need to see her." He leaned against the doorway as subtly as he could.

She simply nodded, bracing the mop against the wall and motioning for him to follow her as she headed off down the hall, past three doorways, before she carefully opened one, peeking in before turning to him. "She's sleeping. Should be a chair in the corner, and some cushions. If she wakes up while you're in there, try to get her to drink some more water. And you - no unnecessary sitting up. Lean. Relax. Got it?"

He nodded a little, not bothering to argue with the order. She seemed the type of woman who wouldn't back down from a drill sergeant. He walked slowly in and did as she suggested, adjusting himself in the chair until the pain was minimized. Then he looked at Harrison. She was clean, startlingly so, and he realized that he had been cleaned up a bit as well, the scruffy beard light and fluffy to the touch. She was also thin, and pale, with deep bruises across her face and what he could see of her neck. She looked exhausted, even while sleeping. But she also looked alive. He settled in for now, eyes drifting shut as he eased off back to sleep.

She didn't know what time it was when she woke up, but the room was lit by a sole lamp that somebody had bothered to turn on, revealing Moran passed out in a chair to her side, and on the nightstand, a glass of water and a tray of food. She stared at it, mouth watering. Bread, a couple of apples, what looked like some sort of salami.... She shifted a little, letting out a huff of breath at the various pains, and managed to snag the tray and pull it into her lap without knocking anything over. She inhaled the bread before she got a better look at Moran. He was alive. That was promising.

He was dozing lightly, and stirred awake shortly after she started moving. He opened his eyes slowly, and saw her taking a bite out of an apple. He smiled a little. "Not waiting on that steak, then?" he asked, voice groggy with sleep.

She chuckled quietly, resting the apple on her lap. "Will you wait for it?"

He laughed tiredly, and shook his head, reaching out with a bit of a wince to snag a piece of salami. "No. I suppose not."

She nodded a little, and finished off the apple over the course of the next ten minutes before she spoke again, content to be in silence with him. "How are you doing? You can answer, this time. I'm probably going to make it."

He shrugged a little. "Tired and sore, but fine otherwise. You're the big concern at the moment. How are you?"
"Chewing is exhausting, right now," she snorted, rolling her eyes a little at herself. She held up her arms, which were bandaged in layered strips of white linen up to her elbows. "I look kind of like an Egyptian mummy, except newly bandaged. And I'm still cold as fuck, even under all these blankets. Really, I feel quite abysmal. But I'm alive."

"But you're alive," he agreed, the words a balm to the fear that had been twisting his gut for a week now. If only other fears and pains were so easily dealt with. The words described him fairly well too, he thought, without the need for much detail. *But I'm alive.* Harrison had kept him going through the thick of everything, but now he had ceased to be her responsibility. He was a soldier. He could get through anything. He could get through this.

She went back to eating after a minute, just considering him. He was an adult, and he'd shown he was more than capable at taking care of both himself and her, but she felt responsible for him, in some way. He was too young to have had this happen to him. Everything they had done to her, they had done to him, too, and she wished that if she had to go through it anyway, she'd rather have kept it from happening to him. She liked him. And he hated grifting, which meant that he wasn't a threat. He had promise, serious potential, and he was rather a kindred spirit, in a way that Jim wasn't. *Jim*....

She closed her eyes, sighing softly. Maybe in a different life, where they'd both been low in the ranks and neither of them knew Moriarty's name, maybe then she could have let herself feel something for this young soldier, but as it stood, she didn't have the luxury. Jim barely could abide them fucking for the fun of it - rather, *her* fucking for the fun of it - let alone allow her to develop something like a relationship with someone else.

But for right now, she was cold, and tired, and despite herself she still had a tension sitting between her ears that made them strain for the sound of boots against damp stone. She placed her free hand, the one closest to him, palm up on the side of the bed, a silent, shy invitation. It would be better in the long run if he didn't notice, if he ignored it, but for this moment, she wanted to feel his warm comfort, and she was too weak to deny herself.

He saw the hand extend out of the corner of his eye, and looked up, reaching out to take it without thought. Or at least, not beyond using his right hand over his left, though it made a more awkward angle, since his left arm still hurt to move.

It wasn't complicated, to him. They had spent the past two weeks huddled against each other for warmth. For sanity. It was survival, in the barest sense of the word. The warmth of her palm against his was a comfort. They had survived, though that was all that could be said. They certainly hadn't won. No matter what he said, he wasn't fine, not even close.

But they had survived. They needed to keep surviving. So he took her hand, without even questioning if he should. There was a simplicity to just living to live. Living to keep living. No rules or complicated questions, just breathing, and warmth.

She felt abject relief that she did her best to ignore, and continued to hold his hand as she finished eating with her free hand. While they were away from Jim, she could be selfish, and take advantage of the feeling of safety he now gave her. Because now, even the gentle touch of Lucia ignited the slightest strain of anxiety in her.

He watched her eat quietly. He hadn't eaten yet, but he was past the point of actually being hungry. He was too tired to be. Instead he just focused on her hand in his, and on what he was going to say to Moriarty about the condition she was in compared to him.

She sipped her water for a few minutes, then looked over at him. His brows were furrowed just the
slightest. "What are you worrying about? Jim?"

He gave a weak snort of a laugh. "The thought had crossed my mind. Don't worry about it." He
rubbed a rough thumb over her knuckles absently, not really cognizant of the motion.

Her chest did something funny at the simple action, and before she stuffed it in the back drawer of
her mind, she tried to figure out what the fuck had just happened. How many men had done that
exact same movement of their fingers over hers? She'd considered herself to be all but immune to
little things like this, almost completely desensitized. So why now? Was it simply because they'd
just come out of a life-threatening experience together? Yes, that's it. That's all. Stop overthinking
it.

"I'm not worried," she shook her head, "But that doesn't mean I shouldn't think about it. He's going
to try to put all the blame on you. He's a fool, every once in awhile. I'll intervene."

He shook his head, eyes a bit absent. "You shouldn't. I can take whatever he dishes out, but the two
of you working together is best for the network, and for the two of you. The fact that you got in
there- and were treated like you were in there- was a failure of my duties. I'll take the hit."

"That's noble of you, Moran, but unnecessary," she sighed. "He can do far worse to you than he can
do to me. At some level, he will be concerned about not scarring me, and I've already survived
Jim's punishment in the past." She took a deep breath, already imagining the things he would say to
her. Would he accuse her of favoritism, with the way she had been shielding Moran?

He shrugged, but didn't reply. He wouldn't put blame on her. If she chose to take it, that was her
problem. "If you say so, boss."

"I do say so," she smirked, squeezing his hand slightly, teasing.

He smiled just a little in response, shifting his chair until he could lean back again. Leaning
forward put unwelcome pressure on his side. He took a slow breath. Everything that had happened
still felt distant, somehow. Unreal.

He realized suddenly that he would never be able to be shirtless in the summer again, or in a gym.
That if he tried to fuck a woman she would balk if he undressed. The fucking brand on his chest
was a banner for anyone who wanted to see it. Fag. Queen. Nancy. Sexual invert. Whatever you
wanted to call it, that triangle was embossed on his chest for forever.

His grip on Harrison's hand had tightened, and he released it, moving to stand and forgetting that
he really couldn't until he was already half way. He braced a hand on the back of the chair, face
going white as he closed his eyes, but then he was breathing again, and straightened slowly.
"Gonna take a walk," he said quietly, heading for the door at a careful pace. Fuck sitting still. He
needed to move.

She let him go, but her eyes tightened in concern. They both had things they needed to process,
maybe on their own. She might have had it worse, physically, but at some level she had been
prepared for the trauma. Had been since her kidnapping in New York, where she had feared the
worst. But him? What man ever imagined sexual assault happening to him? Not to mention being
branded. She shuddered to think of it. Some part of her wondered if he would carve it off himself.  

The thought did occur to him, as he lay on his bed in his room. He had tried pacing the hallway,
but the woman had threatened to lock him in his room if he didn't lay down, and though he was
sure she had been joking, the comment had sent ice to his gut and he had gone to lay down as
ordered.
He didn't want this thing on his chest. This mark that all of a sudden defined his life, there to remind him, vividly, of what they had done to him.

He pulled off his shirt and unwrapped the bandage without much difficulty, looking at the thing in disgust. It was livid and red, tendrils of red infection creeping out across his skin. The brand itself was a swollen ridge- a crude, inverted triangle, the shape raised and snarled, as if someone had forced braided rope beneath his skin.

He pressed at it, probed it, felt bile rising in his gut and stopped. He wondered how hard it would be to cut out. How deep the scar ran. Would it be better to have a sunken crater in his chest? He didn't know.

He lay back, leaving the bandage off for now, too exhausted to replace it. He stared at the ceiling, and rehearsed quietly what he was going to tell Moriarty.

She didn't know how much the whole thing haunted her until she fell properly asleep for the first time, and was plagued with her first nightmares. Dreams of hot, rotten breath, of hard hands on the back of her neck, of fists connecting with her sides and blades slicing into her arms. When one of the men woke her up with the intention of getting some more water into her, she left him on the floor clutching his bloody nose and she sat hyperventilating on the bed, her fingers digging into her scalp. She only broke into tears once Lucia burst into the room and scolded the man out of the room. But even after the care from the night before, being touched after the nightmares was too much, and she recoiled when the woman tried to reach out a soothing hand for her hair.

She was left alone after that, and stayed frozen on the bed, trying to get a grip on herself. How was she supposed to continue working, like this?

He heard the commotion, and woke to the raised voices. He staggered to his feet, ignoring his lack of shirt or chest bandages, and made his way to Lorna's room as quickly as he could. Which was not quickly at all, really. By the time he got there (having bypassed and ignored the Italian woman trying to get him to rest and leave Lorna alone) the room was empty except for a small, shaking figure on the bed. He made his way over, clearing his throat so that she knew he was there, and sat slowly beside her. He glanced around for a moment, grabbing a spare blanket to sling around his shoulders, covering the wound on his chest before he reached out, touching her shoulder gently, letting her know he was there if she wanted him.

She recognized the sound of him clearing his throat, and when he sat next to her she didn't flinch away, just turned and leaned against him, her eyes wet and red. "I had a nightmare," she said hoarsely, looking down at her bandaged arms braced against her drawn up knees.

He nodded just a little, wrapping an arm around her and rubbing her arm soothingly. "I figured." His voice was soft. "You're okay."

She was ashamed that he was seeing her like this, now that they were out of danger. It was weak. She knew better than to show an Achilles heel like this. But god, she couldn't be in control all the time, of everyone. That was Jim's specialty.

He knew she was struggling, but he didn't comment, just did his best to ease the tension in her muscles, and the shaking of her body. "Focus on breathing," he said softly, reiterating his sniper training. "Everything else follows that."

She nodded, doing as he said. If anybody knew how to cope with this kind of stress, it was a special ops soldier. It took awhile, but eventually, it began working. "Thank you," she said softly, when she was capable.
He nodded just a little, still rubbing her arm. "I won't tell anyone. Don't worry about that."

She hadn't wanted to question him aloud on his discretion, but she appreciated that he had it in mind anyway. She chuckled a little, through a sniffle. "Boy, you're going to have a few favors to call in for that."

He shrugged. "Part of my job," he said quietly. "I don't just protect you physically."

"I think there are bodyguards who would frown on you for that line of thinking," she murmured, shutting her eyes and trying to stop herself from feeling anything. It wasn't fair, with the way he was taking care of her. Wouldn't anyone else have been consumed by their own damn needs? If he was really this good of a bodyguard, she needed to convince Jim to give him a raise. "I didn't think it would concern you. Now that we're free."

He raised an eyebrow at that. "You're my charge. You and Jim. Your physical health and reputation are my responsibility. Your mental health impacts both of those factors." He shrugged slightly. He knew what he was paid for.

She hadn't known that he... Was also technically her bodyguard? She frowned. "Just.. just for this mission, yes?"

He shook his head. "Not according to my contract, no," he said, leaning back carefully against the headboard. "You're my secondary charge. Your health, safety, and reputation are priority, excepting only situations where protecting them would put Moriarty at risk."

She was silent a few minutes, digesting that. She hadn't ever seen the contract for herself - until recently Jim had been fairly confident in his ability to take care of himself - and she'd just assumed that the boss was Moran's only responsibility. She was flattered and confused that he'd included her. "I'm mystified, honestly. He didn't tell me."

He shrugged. "Not my place to say why, but that's the way it is." He honestly didn't know why. Jim had never discussed it with him, it was just laid out in his contract.

She made a sound of affirmation, falling silent as she absorbed that. If Jim had done this, it was going to make her taking the blame for her own condition much worse.

He could almost hear the wheels turning. "I'll tell him what you told me. It was better for me to be able to get you out. He can call me an idiot and punish me a bit, and it'll be over with."

She sighed, shaking her head. "It's not like we can keep the truth from him. Or, maybe I can, but you're certainly not capable of it. He's a reader. He'll see that you aren't telling him something."

He sighed, but didn't have a response to that. "Fine," he said finally, tiredly.

She fell silent, her eyes closed, leaning back against the good part of his chest. She was still exhausted - she hadn't woken up voluntarily. Maybe she could get a nap in while he was still here.

He felt her drifting off, and didn't try to stop her, closing his own eyes. Maybe he could sleep, a bit, too.

Jim had received the news that Moran and Harrison had ended up at the safe house almost immediately, but securing a plane in the middle of wartime for personal use was difficult, to say the
least, and so it took almost 48 hours for him to be flying across the channel and down to Italy, steaming the entire way.

They had no warning.

He woke to a sweet Irish lilt in his ear, gentle and deadly. "Oh Sebby... wake uuuup..."

His sleep-addled mind thought it was his father, and he cringed, his whole body tensing, waiting for touches he didn't understand, couldn't escape-

Then he woke fully, and the fear didn't fade, just changed. He opened his eyes slowly, forcing himself to breath. "Hello, sir..."

Lorna rolled over in her sleep, inadvertently pressing up against Sebastian, nestled into his side. Jim watched with sharp eyes until her movement stilled, and they shifted back to Moran. "You have a lotttt of explaining to do, Sebby darling," he drawled, voice still soft, avoiding waking Lorna - for the moment. He would get to her.

He nodded just a little, keeping the fear internal, expression calm. "I'm aware, sir," he said quietly. "I look forward to your questions."

Jim sank into the chair by the bed, his head unmoving from where it hovered over Moran, eyes intent. Dangerous. "Let's start out with how you got captured, shall we? Oh, and why dear Lucia downstairs tells me the woman you're in bed with almost died."

He didn't have room to sit up without knocking into Jim, so he remained lying down, which felt incredibly vulnerable and sent his heart rate up a bit. Still, he took a moment to gather himself and compose an answer. "We betrayed Ciano to Mussolini, as you ordered, sir," he said as calmly as he could. "But the dictator had us detained so that we couldn't spread the information. He then got the impression from Ciano that we were..." he trailed off, and when he spoke again, there was tension. "That we were homosexual, sir. And that was taken out against us rather aggressively. I decided it would be better to be in a condition to break out than to shield Harrison from absolutely everything and not be able to make an escape attempt if I saw it. I took as much as I could with that in mind." He stared, not at Jim, but at the ceiling as he spoke, a soldier to his officer.

Jim was deadly silent for a few minutes, which was entirely on purpose. Silence built tension, suspense - fear. And fear was it's own kind of punishment. He could see Moran was lying about something, but there were several options as to what, and whether or not it was an outright lie or a sin of omission. He wouldn't pursue that angle, yet. Cross-examining Harrison would have the answers he needed, undoubtedly. For now, he would just put the fear of god into him. "Moran," he said softly, carefully. "Listen to me when I say that if this happens again, you will wish you had died in there. I can find another bodyguard. But a grifter like Harrison, who's also well-versed in hits and assassinations? Unlikely. And, speaking of which, do you care to explain what you're doing cuddling with her like a half-drowned puppy?"

"I understand completely, sir," he said, eyes still on a stain he had found on the ceiling, unwavering. "As for sharing a bed, sir, she sleeps better. She has felt unsafe after some of what was done to her. I am attempting to help her heal as quickly as possible."

He mock-pouted. "Awww, do you feel guilty? Why is that? Maybe it's because you should have been the one, Moran," he hissed, eyes flicking away from him again as Lorna groaned, her eyes cracking open. She saw him and swore, rolling away from Sebastian and dragging a hand down her face.
"Hi, Jim."

He didn't have a chance to respond before Harrison woke, and took the opportunity not to answer. His intestines felt like they were full of shards of glass, more so than even had become usual the past few weeks. He sat up when Harrison rolled away, eyes still dead ahead. He knew he had failed. He could see all the times Harrison had been taken away. All the times he should have stopped, stepped in, intervened. All of the damage that should have been his. So he just sat quietly and let the dice fall where they would.

"Moran. Go away. My plane leaves in twenty minutes. If you aren't on it, you stay here," Jim said softly, eyes on Lorna now, half curious, half mad.

She moved into the warm spot Moran left behind, pulling up the covers to her neck, hiding her bandaged arms even though she knew he had a full catalog of her injuries, from his own inference and Lucia's list. She met his dark brown eyes, looking tired. Some part of her was worried, afraid, even, but for the most part she was too much of a shell at the moment to be afraid of punishment. She'd deadened herself a little inside.

He waited until Moran's slow, unsteady gait had faded, eyes never leaving Lorna.

"Tell me what he won't," he said, just enough of an edge in his voice to warn her not to try anything.

"I ordered him to let me take the brunt of it, sir," she said plainly, wisely choosing not to sugarcoat it. The straight facts were her best bet, along with very clear 'this is an opinion' statements. "I don't have the knowledge to operate a semi-automatic machine gun, and that's what they were wielding, nor am I capable of lifting Moran, even at my best and him at his worst. I thought it was in the best interest of our escape. If I'd known they would bring out knives like they did, maybe I would have chosen differently."

"You should have chosen differently anyway," he snarled quietly, eyes flashing for a moment before they soured into something playful. "When daddy buys you a toy, Lorna, he expects you to use it. That boy is for breaking. That's what he is there for. He dies before you get a scratch, and daddy will buy you a new one."

She flushed slightly, though she wasn't sure why - there were a lot of emotions to unpack there - but furrowed her brow a little, shaking her head. "Jim, we combed through half the available stock finding him, and he only passed your test because he took an unorthodox approach and shot you so that you couldn't shoot yourself. And then would have taken me anyway, boss! They took him because they wanted to fuck up a fag - they took me because they wanted a fuck. This was going to happen to me no matter what. I just tried to keep him together enough to bail me out."

"Then we comb through the other half!" he roared, standing suddenly. "You do not defy me like this, Harrison. I thought my name in your back taught you better. I own you. And this little crush you have needs to end." He calmed again, then, smiling and sitting down. "Besides. If you're telling me he couldn't have made his little punk ass look more appealing than your thighs if you both tried, you aren't trying hard enough. As for carrying Moran out, here is where you are missing something..." He leaned forward, fingers claws on the chair arms, hissing through his teeth. "Leave. Him. Behind."

He stood suddenly, and headed for the door. "Plane. Now. If you can't walk, that's your own fault."

She swallowed and took a deep breath as he left, the door slamming behind him. Christ, she was
going to get it once they were back in London. It wasn't something she was looking forward to, not with this new fear of being touched. She got up after a minute, gritting her teeth as it pulled various wounds, and she followed him out.

Jim walked down through the house,nodding at Lucia, who simply nodded back. He had known the woman since he was a child, and tolerated a little less bowing and scraping from her. A little.

The plane was in the field out back, which was just large enough for a skilled pilot to make the landing. It was still a risky venture, not normally one he would have embarked on, but circumstances had dictated otherwise.

Moran was waiting quietly at the foot of the steps to the plane, leaning just barely on the rail, though the soldier straightened to a parade rest as he approached. He slowed his walk, then, taking his time, making Moran hold the position, amused by the slight pallor that was the only indication the man was in pain. He was tempted to tell him to fly in the cargo hold, but he wasn't certain that the boy would survive in his current state. If he had been, there would have been no question. As it was, he walked past and up to the plane with only a lazy, "Help your sweetheart up the stairs."

It took her a few minutes to make it outside, and she walked as best as she was able, and as fast, and made it to Moran at the steps of the plane with only a light sheen of sweat on her forehead, and her face only a few shades paler. She spared him a small, tight smile, though her eyes were occupied with the stairs. Christ.

He didn't comment, just walked over, waited for her to see him, and slid his right arm around her waist, bending and scooping her up carefully. She wasn't heavy enough to slow him down much, and he worked his way up the stairs slowly but steadily, setting her down at the top without comment. Following orders.

"Thanks," she said quietly once she found her feet, glancing up at his face to try and get a handle on his mood before she walked further into the plane and took a seat as far from Jim as possible, deciding it was for the best to give him his space. She didn't think it would last particularly long - Jim wasn't one to stew in silence.
Betrayal

Chapter Notes

TW for graphic description of sexual assault
basically its a real fucked up chapter to go with a real fucked up story

It didn't last ten seconds. "Hiding in a corner isn't going to save you, Lorna dear," Jim drawled from where he was pouring himself a glass of scotch. "I can berate you from across the plane or you can come over here." He glanced at Moran as he entered, and his eyes narrowed slightly. "You can guard the door, Mr. Moran," he said a bit dryly. The soldier didn't comment in the futility of the assignment, just closed the airplane door and stood by it, eyes straight ahead.

Lorna let out a silent breath and then stood, walking over and taking the chair across from Jim. She didn't think he would take it well if she pointed out that he'd only be hurting his own voice by berating her across the plane. "I thought you might want some space, sir," was what she said instead, shrugging a little.

"Oh, no no nooo, Lorna, love," he said, leaning back and sipping his drink. "I want to be nice and cozy. Did you really think you were going to wander off that easily? There's three hours between here and London, and I intend to use them." His eyes glinted.

She swallowed, her gut twisting. She couldn't tell whether or not it was completely fear of him, or just leftover fear from weeks of abuse. "And how are you going to do that, sir?" she asked, deciding that she couldn't not know. Her imagination would make it unimaginably worse if she didn't.

"What, and spoil the fun?" he asked, eyes stormy over his glass as the plane's engine started up. "So tell me, dear. How did you keep their attention away from your little boyfriend over there?"

She sighed, looking away, out the window, wishing she had a drink. "Well, first I pissed them off," she said, voice steady. She didn't bite his bait on calling Moran her boyfriend. "I ordered him to behave, be meek, so they wouldn't expect trouble from him. When it became too dangerous for me to fight, I went the other direction. Let them do what they wanted, most of the time. By that point they were... hooked, on me, I suppose."

"So he agreed to this little plan of yours, did he?" he asked, leaning forward and reaching for her wrist, turning her hand over to examine the bandages.

She kept her arm relaxed, but the rest of her tensed, readying itself for a fight it wasn't capable of performing. "He didn't agree so much as was brow-beaten into accepting it," she replied dryly, still looking out the window as they began to move forward across the field.

He watched her reaction to his touch, and he dropped her hand, disgusted. "They broke you. What use are you to me now? A whore who can't fuck, a second who is clearly horrendous at strategy, and a grifter who has gone soft for the bodyguard. I should have him toss you out that door. You think he would argue with me?"

Her eyes snapped back to him, anger flashing. "Careful, Jim," she warned, her voice soft, smooth -
the voice she used to lure in her prey before she stabbed them through the throat. "You didn't hire this whore because I had a head for strategy or because I could fuck, you hired me because I have a body count higher than yours, and much more spectacular," she raised her eyebrows at him, her face almost pleasant, except for the edge of danger to her voice and behind her eyes. "That bodyguard you think I've gone soft for - the one I kept alive so YOU would be safe, because I wasn't FUCKING TOLD I'm in his bloody fucking contract - well, you've left him on the other side of the goddamned plane, wounded and probably barely standing. I use people how I need to, James, and if you think for one fucking second that I can't make a living without you, you are sorely mistaken. Everything you do to me, I let you do. Threaten me for recovering from torture again, and I will carve off your initials with the knife I stabbed you with."

He chuckled, unphased by her display. "Good. You have a little bite left in you. But mind your tone, Lorna. I don't have your body count because I don't get my hands dirty. But the number of deaths that can be traced back to me? Beyond counting, even for me. And they continue after I die. Kill me if you like, I don't care. But don't make the mistake of thinking I can't punish you for it. You think your little vacation here was rattling?" His expression twisted and darkened. "I will strip away every shred of identity you have. I will tear you down to the insect you could be, and when all you have left is the hope that maybe you'll die soon, I'll take that, too. I can be a lot nastier from six feet underground, darling. Just you try me."

She flat out laughed, and reached out to smack the glass of scotch out of his hand, sending it flying across the plane to shatter against the wall. "You think I won't kill myself once I kill you, just to spite you, you fucking asshole?" she snarled, hand slamming down onto the table between them. "Call it a vacation again, James, please, I'd love to take you with me next time I go. Even if you kill me before I kill you, where are you going to find another me? Who else is going to put up with, if not enjoy the fucked up things you do to them? You know it won't be the same with anybody else. You're only twisting your panties up in a knot about me going soft over the fucking bodyguard because you can barely 'abide' my fucking other people, let alone regularly. Kiss my ass, James."

Jim moved like a viper- still one moment, and attacking the next. His hand whipped out and grabbed Lorna's arm, fingers digging savagely into the wounds there as he crossed the remaining space between them. His arm snarled around her neck, pulling her head into a lock against his side. The knife came out of nowhere, but, then, so did Moran. The boy's hand latched around Jim's wrist, holding the point of the knife in a deadlock a few inches above Lorna's back.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" Jim hissed, and before the room had a moment to settle he stopped resisting Moran's hand for a moment, letting his knife be pushed away, while he turned with his other side and slammed his fist into the boy's face, throwing Lorna away from him, ignoring her gasps of pain and winding up another blow, this time for Sebastian's stomach, fury pouring out of every inch of him.

The blow sent him reeling. The fact that it did was perhaps the most disorienting part. He was used to being a fairly unconcerned brick, taking a few hits, and then subduing his opponent however he needed to. Now, though, if he was a brick, he was a crumbling one, and the hit threw him off balance, sending him staggering back a step as his vision blurred for just a moment. He refocused, in time to deflect, but not block, the blow to his gut, moving with it as best he could. Still, it connected, and the wound in his side screamed with jagged pain as it was awoken. He gasped for air, raising his arms to defend himself and resisting the urge to fight back. He couldn't hit the boss.

Jim really cut loose on Moran, hitting with fists and then knees and then feet, not pulling any of it, just relishing the feeling of losing control and beating somebody to a pulp. "You do not interrupt me," he snapped, after a blow, "Do you GET IT?" Another hit. "YOU don't make decisions
concerning your precious damsel, I DO."

The blows were sharp and quick, and he knew the reader was targeting wounds. He blocked as much as he could, but he was slower than usual and Jim was in peak furious form. Then he tripped backward over something and lost the height advantage, eventually just trying to protect what hurt most. He almost blacked out when he missed a blow which connected with his chest, and by the time he was focused again it was just in time to receive a blow to the ear that sent him sprawling sideways.

"Contract," was all he managed to respond to Jim's rant. His mouth tasted like blood, and he pushed himself upright again.

Jim laughed, and kicked him in the chest before spinning around, still laughing, and dragged Lorna up from where she'd been sitting on the floor, tucking her under his arm, pressing her tight against his side. "Oh, oh oh oh, Moran, that's your reason? The contract I wrote? I believe that it says, hmmm, something about protecting her at my cost.... Oh, yes, right - YOU DON'T. Didn't you hear what our little chickadee was saying? Ooooh, she's got such a mouth on her, doesn't she?" The arm around Lorna's shoulder shifted so his hand could cup her jaw, tilting her head up so he could kiss her forehead, a mocking smirk on his face, though fury was still blazing through his eyes. She was stock still in his grasp, fear overriding her anger - when his fury became like this, it was wise to sober up.

He did black out, then, for just a second, as Jim's leather shoe drilled into his chest, consciousness flickering back on as Jim was hauling Lorna up. He took slow breaths, listening to what the man was saying, and then pushed himself slowly to his knees, and from there to his feet, though it was a moment before he could stand straight. "I wouldn't've let her do anything t'you, either, boss," he said, speech a bit bleary but eyes focused. "Way I was thinking, doesn't cost you anything t' leave her be until you cool down a little." The world was spinning and tilting slowly, but he put a hand on a seat and focused on staying upright.

"That's not how it works, little cub. The both of you are my property, and I will do what I damn fucking please," he said, voice drifting back into deceptively-soft, his thumb tracing Harrison's jawline. "The contract doesn't protect her from me. If I decide to off her, you will watch, and nothing else." His hand slid back to wrap around her throat, keeping her tight against him, his lips lowered to her ear. "Her life rests in my hands, like a fragile little bird, contract, or no contract."

He watched tiredly, but still shook his head, doggedly, determined. "If you decide to kill her, yes. I'll watch. But if you get angry enough to practically leap a table, then I'm going to intervene until you cool down. Then if you still want to, go ahead. Those're my terms. Take 'em or no."

He raised his eyebrows, looking amused. "And what, exactly, happens if I refuse those terms?" he laughed, brushing his thumb against Lorna's jugular.

He shrugged, not looking particularly concerned. More apathetic and exhausted. Which aligned nicely with how he felt. "That's up to you, boss. So far, I get the shit kicked out of me. But that's how I'm acting, so do what you like." He wiped a drip of blood working its way down from his lip.

"Very cute, Moran, really," he smirked, and his hand around Lorna's neck loosened, sliding down to rest against her collar, still holding her there for the moment. "Well, darling, you heard the man. I suppose it's not completely unreasonable. You can apologize to daddy properly when we get home," he hummed, though it was clear he was still irritated, and gave her another mocking kiss on the forehead before releasing her abruptly and moving to the other side of the plane, leaving a palpable sense of brewing thunder behind him.
Moran considered the situation quietly, eyeing a seat longingly for just a moment before closing his eyes, taking a breath, and making his way slowly back to the plane door, standing beside it again.

Lorna sank into the nearest seat, her head falling into her hands, and focused on taking deep breaths. Well, now whatever punishment that was waiting for her would be both premeditated and based on irritation, if not anger. Christ.

Sebastian watched both Moriarty and Harrison, forcing himself to keep emotions out of anything. Forcing himself not to care what would happen to Harrison now. He had done his duty. That was all he could do.

His body was a newly charted world of pain. Pulsing, sharp aches radiated out from his side, and his chest burned and seemed to be trying to rip away from the rest of his skin. His head was pounding, and every once in awhile his vision shifted slightly. He took a slow breath. Two and a half hours to go. He just had to wait.

He was really starting to hate waiting.

She had to wonder about Sebastian, but she also had to stuff down any concern she had. She couldn't pay him the attention she owed him, not now that Jim was so furious about it. All that was left to do was wait until they landed, and crawl into bed to sleep for the foreseeable future.

Mercifully, Jim remained in his own world for the remainder of the flight. By the time the plane began to descend, Moran was trembling just slightly with an exhaustion-fueled chill. All he wanted in the world was lie down, covered in blankets, and stay there for a very long time.

They landed, and Jim didn't wait for them, just got off without speaking, brushing past Moran and leaving them to fend for themselves. She got up after a few minutes, and headed after him. Home. Finally.

Moran followed on Harrison's heels, taking a slow breath of bitter London air. It seemed like an eternity ago that he had enjoyed the warmth of Italy. Lately it had been distant, the memory repugnant, a taunt in a rank, cold cell. The smells of home put the cell a little further away, and he felt his eyes sting just slightly. They had made it. He headed slowly for the waiting car, utterly drained.

Once they were all in the car, it set off, all of them silent. Lorna avoided looking at either of them, just looking outside and trying to quell the fear in her chest.

Moran just focused on staying awake, his eyelids drooping and head nodding for most of the ride, though he eventually kept himself awake with a finger pressed against the wound in his side.

Jim watched both of them unabashedly, never saying a word, his expression unreadable.

The car drove them to the side entrance; a stone house with a tin bomb shelter in the back that opened onto a complete underground hallway, sloping down for about a hundred meters before reaching any kind of door, where several armed guards awaited in the shadows. Jim disappeared down the corridor immediately, leaving the other two to limp after him into the damp dark.

He walked along the entrance he had never seen before, but he doubted he would remember much of it tomorrow. Just enough of his focus was on it to keep him from tripping or stumbling over himself. When they finally reached the entrance, the guards let them through without question, and he was grateful for small mercies. An elevator car was waiting, and he and Harrison stepped
inside, an attendant closing the grate and pressing the appropriate button.

She leaned against the wall, eyes shutting. "Thank you. For the airplane."

He glanced up at her, and it took him a moment to register the words through his haze. "Just my job," he said quietly, after a bit.

She sighed, rubbing her eyes with one hand. "Still. Sorry he laid into you for it."

He shrugged a little, then made a mental note not to shrug for a few weeks. "To be expected. But thank you."

She nodded, and the attendant stopped the lift at the infirmary floor, and she led the way out. They had done all they could for her at the safe house, but they hadn't exactly been trained surgeons.

He glanced around tiredly, and shook his head a little. "I just want to sleep..."

"No way," she shook her head, beckoning him with a flick of her hand. "You're getting checked out, first. Then you can sleep."

He grimaced slightly, and considered arguing, before finally shuffling after her rather dismally.

A nurse in white caught sight of them immediately, and bustled over to begin fussing over them, guiding them both with her down the hall before depositing Moran in one room and bringing Lorna to another, where she got on the bed without any argument and waited while the nurse got together instruments to test her with. Lorna didn't think they had any male nurses, but she hoped they didn't, for both her's and Moran's sake. He would not do well with one, just like her.

He was tense about the very same thing, and relaxed just a little when a woman entered the room. He undressed as best he could when he was instructed, but refused point blank to remove his cotton undershirt, much to the consternation of the nurse, who was fairly interested in dealing with the bandaging underneath. He glared daggers at her, which didn't work, and eventually just sat with his arms crossed like a petulant child, holding his shirt in place until she stormed off, fuming. He was fine with that, as it left him to lay in the bed and finally sleep.

But the nurse was far too insistent to leave that alone, so a few minutes later, Lorna walked in the door, bandage supplies in her hands. "I've been asked to step in," she said dryly, shutting the door behind her with her foot and walking over to the side of his bed. "Budge over, let me sit while I do this. Please, take off your shirt."

He cracked an eye open tiredly, and groaned in annoyance. "Snitch," he muttered under his breath, sitting up slowly, with a few winces. "Go get cleaned up and sleep. She can come fight with me again if she wants. Going to you was a low blow."

She sighed, giving him a look. "She didn't force me. You need to be cleaned up, Sebastian. It's nothing I haven't dealt with. And I assumed you'd rather I did it than a strange nurse?" She arched an eyebrow.

He considered that for a few moments, but then eventually nodded once, pulling his shirt over his head carefully. He needed a bath, he knew, but the washing down at the house had done a little bit. The bandages had pulled where Jim had kicked him, and were a little loose, but he started unwrapping the ones for his side carefully.

She let him unwrap without getting in the way, her eyes blank on him as he revealed the wound on his side, and wordlessly she leaned forward and started cleaning it carefully with antiseptic, silent
for a few minutes as she worked, trying to keep it quick without sacrificing quality. "I'm going to have to clean the brand, too," she said softly, setting aside the antiseptic and picking up the gauze.

He shook his head just a little, taking a moment to get his breath back. "I'll do it," he said quietly, when he was sure of his voice. "Just leave everything."

She was silent for a moment, wrapping up his side, considering the situation. "Alright," she said gently,fastening the gauze in place and sitting upright again, eyes examining his face. "Listen, Sebastian," she said after a moment, voice quiet,"I know that you must feel like this is some kind of... Dead end, for you. The brand. I haven't seen it, but I can take a guess as to what it might be. The women in this industry don't care about scars, no matter the meaning behind them. We're in wartime, after all, and even the average public have seen some horrible things. Things that didn't make sense, that were senseless, that were hard to look at. If you must, you can always say you were a prisoner of war. No one will question you." She smiled a little at him, her hands tucked together in her lap. Careful not to touch him without reason. "When you can face it, please let one of the nurses or doctors take care of it properly. They're forbidden from spreading anything, and they see too much to judge, either way." She stood, moving the supplies to the small table next to the bed. "I'll leave you be, now."

Her words struck far too close to home, and he wanted to cover his ears. Instead, he just stared straight ahead, nodding a little where necessary, and waited for her to leave. When she did, he remained still for a while, before the tears snuck past. Just a couple, over a nose wrinkled tightly with holding them in. He took one hitched breath, and reached up to scrub them away, before turning to face away from the door just in case, and starting to carefully unwrap his chest.

Lorna got the go ahead from her nurse to go back to her quarters on the condition that she return the next day to make sure she was healing alright, so she left the infirmary and took the lift down to her floor, and stumbled into her flat, flicking lights on as she went. She only stopped to change into her own clothes before she got into bed, exhaustion knocking her out like a light in minutes.

He gave her twenty-four hours, because he was in an oddly generous mood.

At the twenty-four-hour, one-minute mark, he depressed the intercom button. "Lorna, dear.... Come to my office. We should chat."

She only pressed the button back to get out "Yes, sir," before she took a shuddering breath and got off the sofa to get dressed, putting on an old blouse and a skirt she didn't particularly care about. She was likely going to leave bloody. Five minutes later, she knocked on his door.

He was lounged back at his desk, and smirked as she knocked with slightly more hesitance than usual. "Come in, love," he called casually.

She shut her eyes for a moment, taking in a breath, and then opened them and walked in, shutting the door behind her and halting in front of his desk, hands clasped in front of her. "How can I help you, sir?"

"I don't know, love," he sighed. "How can you help me? I believe we discussed the fact that you owed me an apology. Do you remember that?" His eyes were mirthful.

She cleared her throat a little. It was concerning that he was using the same nickname in a row like
"Yes, I do, sir," she said, one thumb tapping her hand nervously. "How would you like me to make it up to you, sir?"

"I'm glad you asked!" he said cheerfully, standing up. "You had extended me a little invite to that vacation of yours, do you remember that?" He rounded the desk, slowly. "Now, unfortunately I can't take the days right now, but I was thinking, why don't we have our own little staycation, right... here..." He was in front of her now, and reached out to brush his thumb across her cheek, sneering.

Her stomach twisted unpleasantly, and she closed her eyes for a second, taking a steadying breath before opening them to meet his. "I doubt you have the same thing in mind as I did, sir."

"I admit, I think I put my own twist on things," he smirks, "But vacation is about spontaneity! Now, unfortunately our wet blanket of a bodyguard put a stop to things yesterday before they could get fun, but what do you think, love?" His hand shifted suddenly to grip her throat. "For old time's sake?"

"Anything you say, boss," she got out, though it almost physically hurt to say. As much as she was unwilling to let him throw her life away for nothing, she still had to respect his authority otherwise. No matter what it was.

"I was hoping you'd say that," he whispered, giving her a toothy grin. He turned a half-step, shoving her toward the desk. "Bend over."

She did, bending over the desk, hands supporting her upper body at about a ninety-degree angle. Her cheeks felt hot, and her limbs a little shaky. "Like this, sir?"

"I think that will do," he agreed, walking up behind her, his hips brushing against her arse and thighs as he slid a hand up her spine, pushing her shirt out of the way. "Mmm... You have some bruises, there, love," he whispered. "Must have had a fun time..." His fingers finally found his initials, tracing over them carefully.

Her face grew hotter, extremely conflicted emotions churning in her chest, and she swallowed, closing her eyes. On the one hand, this was Jim. Familiar, generally safe, knowledgeable about her tastes and distastes. On the other hand, he was about to inflict pain upon her, and even the feeling of him behind her was a shockingly strong reminder of her time in captivity, and it made her flighty and a little nauseous. "No, sir, not really," she whispered, breath shuddering.

"Pity," he whispered, his free hand finding a bruise over her kidney and pressing it experimentally, watching her muscles tense along her back in response. "I would have liked to see that. See you at their mercy, doing your best to entice them and keep that poor, defenseless boy out of their clutches...." His voice was low now, quiet, and he dropped the hand at the bruise, reaching into his pocket for his knife, flicking it open, the sharp snick of metal on metal oddly loud in the small office.

Her breath stopped for just a second as she heard the knife, resisting the urge to look back, try to see it for herself. "I didn't think that was your sort of thing, sir," she said, trying to keep her voice calm and failing.

"Mmm... I dabble," he said absently, touching the dull side of the knife to her back and tracing down her spine, before flipping it and starting to cut away her skirt. "If it happened anyway, I would have liked to watch... Kill them afterward, of course, but watch. Watch you struggle when they grabbed you, watch you bite them, fight them..." He pushed the freed fabric of her skirt away, cutting into her knickers as well, though he let out a low whistle at the bruising on her thighs.
"You've got a Van Gogh back here, don't you?"

She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to block out the too-prevalent memories, trying to ignore the cool air on her sore skin. "Nice to know you care so much about my well being, sir," she managed to say. He wouldn't want her to be silent. It wouldn't be as fun for him.

"Of course I do," he chuckled. "You're my property." He tossed her knickers aside, as well, and slid his hand over rainbow-colored arse, then down between her thighs for just a moment, eyes hawkish.

Her breath hitched, fingers pressing hard against the desk, knuckles whitening. Her body both craved a soft touch and feared the attention, the pain, torn between shrinking away and arching into it, and she remained locked in place, focusing on her breathing. She knew he'd want her to speak back, but she couldn't, not with so little to go on, not with the lump in her throat. She just wished he would get to whatever he was going to do to her.

He chuckled at the war he could almost see raging in her mind, the tension twitching in her hips and shoulder blades. "I think you forget that sometimes," he murmured. "That I own you..." he shifted, then, one hand moving upward to sink claw-like nails into her shoulder, pushing her down against the desk suddenly, roughly. The other hand was just behind, the point of the knife pressing against the start of the J hard, almost breaking skin. "I'm going to remind you, Lorna. And then I'm going to fuck you. You belong to me. Don't you ever forget that again."

"Yes, sir," she whispered, just the hint of an edge to her voice, her eyes prickling, all her focus on the knife digging into her back, because it had to be, because she couldn't face the dread of being forced to get over this so soon. She pressed her forehead against the surface of the desk, willing herself not to cry out of frustration.

He pushed down, then, the knife breaking skin after a moment's effort. He knew the value of a sharp knife, but he also knew the value of a dull one, and he preferred the latter. He took a moment to admire the blood welling up, and then he started sawing down.

She wasn't ashamed that she only last a few seconds before she was muffling a scream into her arm, agony radiating down her spine and up into her skull, lighting her whole body on fire.

Her body was an instrument, and her screams were music. He closed his eyes- the movements of his hands so practiced in his mind, he knew those letters- and listened to the way her voice changed as he altered his movements, sped up, slowed down. Listened to the whimpered gasps between screams, to the moments her voice cut out entirely. They were a movement, a concerto for one, a piece as vivid as it was impulsive.

She bore the pain without fighting back, though she desperately wanted to, to yank the dull knife out of his hand and turn it against him. God it hurt.

It took him about five minutes all told, taking his time, but it seemed like a glorious eternity. By the time he was done, blood was pouring down her back in rivulets, and she was shaking, breath entering her body in short, sharp sobs between groans of pain. He tossed the knife aside, then, and stepped back just far enough to loosen his trousers and pants. Then he stepped back up to her, bloody hands sliding over her arse, her pain an aphrodisiac. He pushed into her without warning, or care.

She gasped, fingernails digging into the wood of his desk, her whole form shaking. "Jesus, Jim," she hissed, her fight or flight instinct beginning to overwhelm her. She could only control herself for a little while longer, and then she was going to snap like a twig. "I swear to god, if you fucking
tear me and then complain because I'm a grifter who can't fucking FUCK, I am going to scalp you," she snarled, nearly vibrating with anger.

He reached out a hand to press on the initials, his hips still for the time being. "Careful, Lorna... Do I need to make these deeper? Or have you learned your lesson?" He emphasized the last word with a slight buck of his hips.

She grit her teeth as he pressed into the initials. "I've learned the lesson, boss, but for Christ's sake, give me a goddamn second," she snapped, pressing her forehead against the desk, the cool wood a sharp contrast to her hot skin. The urge to fight him was overwhelming. The urge to run.

He pressed his fingers down harder. "Ask nicely, Lorna," he growled, a dangerous edge to his voice.

She cried out at the sheer strength of the pain, rendered speechless for a moment, gasping for air. "Please, Jim, god, please," she sobbed, a tense, shuddering wreck.

He eased up after another moment's pressure, smoothing his hand over her back. "That's better," he crooned gently, smiling. "That's all I want, Lorna, darling... Just a little respect..." He rolled his hips again, more slowly this time.

She fell silent again, eyes screwed shut, just trying to breathe, throat closed up. She didn't see herself enjoying this, so all she could do was hope he didn't expect active participation, and just try to survive through it while her heart tried to leave her chest.

He smiled at her silence, rolling his hips again, and letting out a groan of content. "I have missed you," he murmured, pleased, as he started to move more firmly against her.

She wanted to break down into a crying mess at that, a ringing in her ears starting, drowning out the sound of her heartbeat. This was his idea of missing her? Carving open the letters over her spine and fucking her with no regard as to whether or not she was physically equipped to handle it, let alone emotionally ready?

He didn't bother taking his time, pent up in more ways than one. Once he started moving, he let himself go, letting out the occasional grunt of pleasure as he took her.

She waited for it to be over, the desk beneath her wet with blood and tears. She tried not to think about anything.

He didn't take long at all, curling over her with a cry as he buried himself deep inside of her and came. His hips stuttered against hers a few times, and he caught his breath, then pulled away, adjusting his trousers and buttoning them back up. "Well done, love," he purred, patting her arse and then walking around his desk to sit down, picking up a folder he'd been reading through. "You're dismissed."

She pushed herself up off his desk and left without another word, mostly devoid of clothes, and soaked with blood, sweat, and tears. She lasted until the elevator doors closed before she broke down, and she made it into her floor before she sank to her knees and just cried, knowing that she'd be undisturbed, and being unable to bring herself to get up and go into her dark apartment.

Moran wasn't sleeping well. He only managed to get an hour, maybe two, at most, before he'd wake suddenly out of a nightmare, still feeling the harsh grip, the feeling of being violated.

So now he was drinking coffee, trying to keep himself awake a little longer, keep away from the nightmares a little longer until they weren't so fresh.
He heard the lift ding, and knew it had to be Harrison, but he didn't hear her door open, or close. A moment later he heard a muffled thud, and rose as quickly as he could, setting his coffee aside and limping out to his door, opening it.

He just stared for a moment, but then he had crossed the floor quickly, kneeling in front of her as best he could, attention on her. "Harrison..."
She flinched as the door opened - she thought Moran would still be confined to the infirmary - but otherwise didn't react, tears pouring down her cheeks, landing on the damp bandages of her arms, where they rested on her knees. "I'll be fine, Moran," she whispered, voice hoarse, hitching halfway through. "Go back inside your flat."

He shook his head just a little. "Let me help you get cleaned up," he suggested quietly. "That's a bitch of a place to reach on your own."

She didn't have the will left in her to argue. "Alright," she said quietly, and after a moment she pulled herself together and stood, wincing, and turned to lead the way into her flat, shedding the rest of her ruined clothes as she went and heading for the shower.

He followed, shutting the door and heading for the bathroom with her, looking under the sink and finding some medical supplies. Gauze, tape, antiseptic...

Deep down, he was furious. Furious that anyone- even Jim- could do something like this. But on the surface, he was calm, quiet, collected.

She walked into the shower and turned it on, disregarding the temperature, and stood swearing and yelling under the stream until the water turned dark red to only a light pink, and then she got out again. She wasn't surprised that she was still crying. She sat on the toilet. "Clean me up, and then you should go. Anything more.... You don't want to risk paying the price."

He walked over and put a towel around her, avoiding her shoulders. Then he pressed gauze to the initials carefully, working to stop the bleeding. He remembered vividly the pain of his own, nearly identical injury, and couldn't imagine dealing with it now. Not with everything else. He wanted to offer to stay, but this was because she had sheltered him. Jim could do worse if he thought they hadn't gotten the memo. It would be better for both of them if he backed off now. Some part of him almost missed the simplicity of the cell. Holding each other for warmth, no questions asked. It didn't feel like they had escaped, now, not really. They'd just been separated.

He cleaned the wound as gently as he could while still being thorough, giving her a break every once in awhile to catch her breath.

She appreciated the consideration for the level of pain she was going through. She wished she could show her appreciation - God, she wished he could stay - but she couldn't afford it. Neither of
She was wrapped up in her own thoughts as he tended to her, trying to wrap her head around what had just happened. Some part of her had considered Jim to be above this, to have some level of respect for her, but this proved otherwise. She felt hollow, empty inside. If he touched her again she couldn't guarantee she wouldn't finally snap, and take his hand off.

He finally pressed a clean piece of gauze to her back, pushing her shoulders forward a little as he taped it so that movement wouldn't dislodge it. "Alright," he said softly. "That should hold for now. Let me know if you need anything." He stood carefully. His vision swam for just a moment, but then he steadied himself against the wall with a subtle touch. "Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all. Thank you, Moran. You're dismissed," she said quietly, shutting her eyes to block out a replay of not even an hour ago.

He nodded just a little, hesitating half a beat before heading out the door and out of her apartment, crossing the hall to his own flat. He had a lot to review from the past month, and Jim had sent him a curt note this morning informing him that he was working.

She sat on the toilet long enough for her body to start aching in new ways before she got up and went to bed, a new wave of crying hitting her every once in awhile. Before she passed out out of sheer exhaustion, she promised herself that if he ever tried to touch her again, she would make him sorely regret ever doing it in the first place.

Moran spent the next few days burying himself in his work. There were folders upon folders of reports to read through and sign off on, backlogs of security requests that required his (or Jim's) approval that the boss hadn't deemed important enough to deal with, and the slightly less tedious task of resuming his physical presence around the building. He delayed the last, however, at least for the time being. He needed to present an undaunted physical presence, but his appearance in the mirror wasn't quite up to snuff. Dark circles under red eyes in a pale face was not the impression he wanted to be leaving.

Luckily, Jim soon presented him with other tasks that made it easier to ignore the lingering doubts as to his sudden necessitated hermitage. Germany was putting pressure on Greece, and Jim was interested in preserving his smuggling operations there. This left Moran reading through situation updates and creating prospectives for the area, along with highlighting key German weaknesses and peculiarities that would allow their operations to continue regardless of the outcome.

Sleep was seldom an option, not with the games his subconscious liked to play in his dreams, so he lived off of coffee and decent food, and just enough painkillers to cut the burning agony that he was growing used to in his chest and side.

Jim left Harrison alone, for the time being. He didn't need her, and if he pushed her too much farther, she would be useless for at least a month. Sebastian, on the other hand, he needed, so he continued to send work and request updates, while he worked in solitude in his office, reading reports and writing letters to be sent by telegram, or by phone call. Down in the bunker, with no sense of the passage of time except for dates on reports, he probably went at least three days in one stretch without sleeping.

His connection in and out of the country (with relations to Greece, that is) was the Greek ambassador in parliament, but the man was hard to get a hold of. Slippery, and good at avoiding his
messengers. That wouldn't do. He needed the man in order to have up to date information on the war front. He needed a path into Buckingham, and there was one man qualified over the rest to see to it. He sent Moran the mission when he had a spare moment, then went to bed for the second time in six days.

He got the mission in the early hours of the morning, up working after a series of night terrors.

For a moment, he just stared at the wax-sealed manila envelope, his exhaustion- and pain-clouded mind not quite putting together what was happening.

He stood a few moments later, leaving the packet unopened on the couch, and shuffled into the kitchen to make a fresh pot of coffee. He had no idea how many that was today. It had all blurred together.

He did most of the business one-handed, his left arm held carefully against his body. His chest was agony, and moving his arm just made it worse. He doused it in alcohol and changed the dressing day and night. Mostly he was just waiting for the inflammation to pass. For his body to fight it off.

He returned to the living room a few minutes later, the coffee pot in hand, feeling a bit more awake. He sat, pulling a few thick blankets around himself to ward off the chill (his room was always cold these days, it seemed). He refilled his mug, took a sip, and opened the sealed packet, a bit awkwardly with one hand. The few pages inside included a mission summary, two maps, and a list of the latest intel regarding the palace, and he started reading through it quietly, occasionally marking something on the page with a pen.

Eventually he sat back, and took a slow breath. He would need to go out tonight. There was no delaying that. He was utterly exhausted, loathe to do anything, but he was a soldier and knew better than to bend the knee to a little pain and a few nights' missed sleep. He stood, slowly, steadying himself on the couch, and went to prepare.

Lorna was struggling in her own way. It was difficult for her to sleep an hour straight without being jolted from her sleep by nightmares that now included Jim, and she spent most of her time trying to cope, sitting on the sofa with a bottle of gin, her radio always on. Silence was unbearable. But people were just as bad, and she couldn't let any of them see her like this.

It took him a while to get ready. He washed his chest with vodka, biting into his rolled up shirt to keep himself from screaming. He examined with curious dismay the red, tendril-like markings running up his chest and neck, down his arm, and down his torso. He had been waiting for them to fade, but instead they had only seemed to spread. He wrapped it all in fresh bandages.

The daily weather report had called for rain, and a lot of it, so he wore a long oilskin trench coat and a matching hat. They were a dark brown, just the right color to get lost completely in a rainy London night, just one man among the shadows, drawing no attention.

He made his way out of the bunker as quietly as possible, and stepped out onto the street. He was already shivering, despite a few wool sweaters he had managed to get over his bad arm, and the heavy coat. The rain was practically a wall as he stepped into it from under the overhang, and started his slow walk to Buckingham Palace.
Despite the coat, he was mostly soaked before he got even halfway there, shivering violently, which only made his chest shriek in angry, painful protest. He was nauseous, and it was difficult to keep his bearings in the downpour. Eventually he resorted to walking with an outstretched hand trailing along the buildings, helping to keep himself upright.

The world was blurred, and cold, and he was utterly exhausted, each step a fight against pain and misery. He kept his focus on one movement at a time. *Step, step, move hand. Step, step, move hand again.* He looked up occasionally, to confirm that surely this time he must be almost there, but found himself only a block or two farther than the last time he'd checked.

His heart was stuttering awfully, breaths short, body shaking, when he finally had to stop for a break, leaning against a wall in an alley that was a bit more sheltered than the street. He closed his eyes, trying to catch his breath, trying to regroup...

No one was there to see as he slowly slumped to the ground, just one more wet lump amidst the trash bags and bins, and didn't move again.

He would have been left there to die in the cold, wet alley if the woman on her way home from taking care of a couple of children hadn't taken that shortcut, and hadn't tripped over him in the dark. She skinned her palms on the pavement, muttering extremely mild swears under her breath, and turned, crouched, to see what she'd tripped over. A year or two prior, she might have screamed in surprise at finding a pale, seemingly dead man on the street, but the wartime had been hard for all, and instead she shifted over to try and find a pulse on his limp wrist. It took her a second to find the right spot, and another to confirm that the weak little push against her fingers meant that he was still alive, if only barely. She got up, gathering up her skirt in a hurry, and jogged out of the alleyway, making a beeline to the street corner a block down, where there was a police box available for use.

Within half an hour, the paramedics had loaded his still form onto a stretcher and taken him away in an ambulance, and she returned to the journey home, soaked to the bone and freezing, but relieved that she had done her part to save a man's life. Trying their best was all anyone could do, these days.

Jim was agitated. Moran had been reported as leaving at about 4:30 that morning, and now, more than sixteen hours later, there was still no sign. He should have been back by ten, eleven at the very latest. Or at least sent a message, checked in.

He shifted a little in his chair, before finally taking a breath and reaching out for the button he had avoided all week.

"Harrison. My office."

Lorna's stomach curled with dread as her scratchy intercom spoke over the news bulletin on the radio, and she closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. She waited a few moments, to get herself under control, and then stood and got dressed. Five minutes later, she knocked on his door, her palms sweaty, heart beating unsteadily.

"Come in," he called, sitting behind his desk, looking at the decorative map of London on his wall, thinking. He didn't look up as she entered. "Moran has been missing for at least ten hours."

She was relieved he wasn't looking at her, because she certainly couldn't bring herself to look
directly at him. She kept her eyes on the wall. "Missing? Was he sent out or did he disappear from the bunker?" she asked, her voice emotionless.

"Sent out to case Buckingham Palace for an operation later this week," he said, standing up and looking over the route. "It was raining heavily. Get people on it. I want him found."

"Yes, sir. Am I dismissed?" she asked, desperate for him to let her go, to leave his presence. Anywhere was better than here.

"Yes," he said, waving her out. "Go. Keep me updated."

She left and immediately sent out a notice to the intel, grifting, and hits department, all setting them on a search for Moran, both on the ground and by phone, checking morgues, hospitals, and bars. It was three hours before they found somebody matching his description at a hospital a few blocks from Buckingham. As soon as she found out, she called Jim's office.

He picked up the phone on the first ring. Few people had his direct number, and he was only expecting one call. "You found him?"

"Found someone matching his description at a hospital near Buckingham, sir," she said, already dressed and ready for the outdoors. "Sounds like they found him passed out on the street - he hasn't regained consciousness since they found him. He's listed under John Doe."

"Good. Find out what happened and get him back before he wakes up. God knows what he'd say if they medicate him." He hung up before she had a chance to respond, done with the conversation.

She was glad he'd hung up first, putting the phone back on the hook and leaving her apartment, and then the bunker, catching a cab outside and asking for the hospital. She was there in twenty minutes, and she wasted no time asking the woman at the front desk about the John Doe they had brought in. Of course hospitals were always eager to identify people. It was wartime. Who knew how many unclaimed souls had died in this building. She put on the role of a scared sister, and they led her right to his room, giving her his prognosis. Blood poisoning. Of all the fool things....

She asked for a minute alone with him, and when the nurse left, she picked up the clipboard at the foot of his bed and flipped through it, looking for information about him. She ripped out the pages that did, folded them up tight, and slid them into her bra. Better not to leave anything behind, even if he wasn't here under his real name. She doubted they had copies of his file yet. She sat down in the chair by his bed for five minutes, just in case the nurse forgot something and came back, but once the room was clear, she stepped back out in the hallway, eyes doing a quick sweep before she saw an employees-only door. Definitely a smaller room, judging by the doors neighboring it, so likely not for doctors, and too big to be a supply closet - some kind of lounge or locker room for the nurses, then. She quickly crossed to it while the coast was clear, and slipped inside silently, pleased to see it was clear. Locker room. Just what she'd hoped for.

The lockers were cheap, and it didn't take much leverage to pop them open - she could have picked them, but she was running on a tight schedule, and the longer she was inside, the higher a chance of somebody catching her. The third locker was the jackpot. Two minutes later, she was crossing the hall again in a nurse's dress and hat, her clothes in the trash can except for her large overcoat, which she had folded up. Now, to figure out whether or not he could get into the wheelchair in the corner on his own, or if she would need to lie to another nurse to get help in moving him. She moved to the bed, carefully taking out his IV, and then grabbed his shoulder, not particularly gently.

"Sebastian, if you're capable of waking up and getting into this wheelchair, it would make my life
magnitudes easier."

At first there was no response, then his eyes opened, very slowly.

His vision was blurred, and he was so fucking cold... Someone was standing over him, but it took him a few tries to focus, and even longer to place who it was she was looking at. Finally he managed a very confused, raspy "...Lorna...?" What the hell was she doing here? Where was here? He wasn't... He wasn't...

He started drifting off again, but someone shook him and he refocused. "What...?"

"Wheelchair. Get in it. Roll yourself on into it, then you can conk out again," she said insistently, pointedly nudging the wheelchair next to her so it hit the bed. "I don't want to bring somebody in to help move you."

He stared at the chair for a long moment, before finally piecing together what she wanted him to do, and shifting as best he could in that direction. His limbs were slow to respond, but eventually, with her directing his movements, he was able to flop himself somewhat awkwardly into the chair. He was short of breath by the time he got there, and closed his eyes. The throbbing pain in his chest was a lullaby that sent him back to sleep.

She placed the folded up overcoat in his lap and then wheeled him out of the room, for all appearances a nurse taking her patient for a breath of fresh air. She got in and out of the lift without incident, and once on the ground floor, stashed Moran in a room she'd pegged as empty earlier. Then she trotted down the hall to the front of the hospital, letting the anxiety she felt show on her face, and came to a sudden halt at the desk, slapping her hands down on the wood. "Ma'am!" She yelled at the startled woman, putting on a significantly lower class accent. "Ma'am, there's a man in the morgue demanding to get at the bodies! He won't leave!" she said tearfully, and the older woman looked absolutely taken aback, startled by her sudden appearance and the abrupt loud noises.

"A man in the morgue, you say?" She frowned, standing up, putting down the crossword puzzle she had been working on and straightening out her dress. "I'll handle this, don't you worry, dear," she said resolutely, and turned on her heel, headed down the second hall leading back into the hospital. Lorna inwardly cheered herself for correctly pegging the woman as a mother hen. The trick with getting people to ignore your face was to make up a situation so absurd they had no time to look at you properly.

Two minutes later, she rolled Sebastian out of the hospital and to a black car waiting on the sidewalk, where the driver got out and assisted her in moving him swiftly and efficiently into the back seat. She left the wheelchair on the sidewalk and got in, and then they were off. She let out a long breath, leaned her head back against the headrest, and closed her eyes.

Sebastian slid in and out of consciousness as she moved him. The world was constantly changing, and he could only piece together enough to know that he didn't know where he was, and that he was cold, and that he hurt.

He came to in a dim place, next, shaking and shivering, uncertain, blinking just a few times in the darkness. This place, he knew. Cold darkness, pain... God, no, he didn't want to be here...

His breathing was already strained, as was his heart rate, but both picked up, panic starting to set in as he forced himself to try to sit up, to take stock. Lorna was next to him. They had to get out...

She flinched a little as he moved suddenly next to her in the back seat, and she put a hand on his...
collarbone to keep him from sitting up too much. "Sebastian, calm down," she said gently, though she didn't feel very gentle at the moment. She still felt hollow. "You're in the car, we're on our way back to the bunker. You were in a public hospital. Do you remember?"

"No," he said softly, his eyes uncertain as he stared around the car, slowly piecing together that he wasn't in the cell. "What... I don't understand..." He looked over at her, and frowned slightly. "What's wrong...?"

"Jesus, you're all kinds of fucked up, aren't you," she sighed, reaching out to put the back of her hand against his forehead. He was burning up. "You have blood poisoning because you didn't let our doctors take care of you, and instead passed out on the street. You have an extremely high fever. You're lucky somebody stumbled across you."

"Oh..." He said softly, nodding just a little, though he hadn't quite followed everything she'd said. He'd gotten 'high fever', though. That would explain why he was so cold. "Where are we going?"

"The bunker," she repeated. "Home. Just try to rest. Get some sleep." She was a little worried for him, just on account of how grey he was, but otherwise, she made sure she felt nothing.

"Okay...." he said softly, closing his eyes. Then he forced them open again, looking at her, frowning just a little. "Didn't answer... What's wrong?"

She looked away from him, out the window, biting the inside of her cheek. He didn't remember that either, then. "Nothing. Don't worry about it right now. Worry about yourself."

He looked at her for a little bit, and sighed, tired of trying to piece things together. It hurt to think. The words "Missed you..." spilled over his tongue, though he wasn't sure why they were so true, and he drifted off to sleep.

She felt her cheeks flush, and she looked over sharply at him, but he was already out. He couldn't have known what Jim had said to her, and especially not in the state he was in. So he meant it. She looked away again, manually shutting down the feeling swirling around her chest. She couldn't get close to him again. Not again.

He slept for the rest of the ride, only waking when the car stopped. People were shifting him, and he was suddenly very awake because someone grabbed under his arm, hand braced on his chest. The pain was breathtaking. He let out a noise that even he couldn't describe, somewhere between a howl and a shriek, his back arching as he clawed at the hand that had grabbed him and tumbled to the ground. He curled up on himself on the floor, shaking, and then he passed out again.

She and the driver got a couple of extra pairs of hands after she got clawed, and she stepped back to watch them put him on the stretcher and walk him down the tunnel through the side entrance. Going in through the train station or the law firm would be too much to ignore. She remained outside for a few minutes longer, face turned up into the misty breeze, then walked down after them, her hands in the pockets of her dress, her nurse's hat forgotten in the car.

Jim was waiting in his office for news, and only relaxed when word came that Moran had been brought in. The man had too much knowledge about the organization to be loose on the streets. He sent word for Harrison to make her way up to his office eventually, and went back to work.

She hung around the infirmary as long as she could, making sure things were set up in a manner that would keep Moran calm whenever he came to, and hovered while they followed her instructions, but then she couldn't delay any longer, and made her way to Jim's office. She took a breath, eyes shut, then opened them, lifted her chin, and knocked.
He looked up as she knocked, sitting back from his desk slightly. "Come in, Harrison."

She stepped in, closing the door behind her, and came to a stop in front of his desk, studiously staring at the wall above his head. "How can I help you, sir?"

He considered her quietly, smirking just a little. "Still giving me the cold shoulder, I see. No matter. Who did what to my bodyguard?"

She felt a slight welling up of anger in the pit of her stomach, but outwardly didn't react except for a tensing of her jaw. "He didn't take care of himself, properly, sir. He was found unconscious in an alley. Blood poisoning."

He frowned, then, leaning forward a little, eyes flinty as they studied her. "What is his condition?"

"Not great. He's running a dangerously high fever, and his recent memory is failing him. He doesn't seem to remember escaping Italy, or anything after. The doctors say that he'll probably make it," she said, robotically, eyes still locked in place above him. She couldn't bear to look at him.

He nodded just a little. "What is the source of the infection?" He could see her discomfort, but he didn't particularly care. She had a job to do.

She cleared her throat a little. "The brand, sir. It was what kept him away from the infirmary."

He nodded just slightly. The details of the brand had been vague, but he had pieced things together. "I'll discipline him later. Keep me updated on his progress. Dismissed."

She left without another word, got into the lift, and wiped away the silent tears that spilled over her cheeks.
Fever-fueled dreams trapped him, muffled his screams, barred him from waking.

He was in his old barracks. They were all joking, but tomorrow they would march out. He knew all of their faces so well, and he knew how they would die. The words died in his throat as he tried to tell them...

He looked down at his boots, and when he looked up his fellows were gone, replaced by rough men in Italian uniforms. They smiled at him, walking forward, and he couldn't back away. Hands reached for him, tore at his clothes, forced him back on the bunk. He couldn't stop them, couldn't scream...

The lights flickered out, and when they came back on, the room had changed. He was home. He was lying in his old bed, listening to footsteps come up the stairs, but still he couldn't move. They grew closer, closer still... His pulse picked up pace, his breath coming in ragged gasps as he waited, stock-still, unable to move. Closer, closer... How many steps were there? The footsteps were deafening now, shaking the room, and still he couldn't do anything but wait. Wait for the hand to touch him...

Someone touched his shoulder, and he bolted up like a coiled spring, hand lashing out to grab the wrist of whoever was touching him, all of his currently-meager strength in the grip. His body was trembling, eyes wild, heart pounding.

Lorna stilled as he grabbed her, looking down at him with furrowed eyebrows. "I'm just here checking on you, Moran. Then you were having a nightmare. Thought it might be a mercy to wake you up," she said quietly, gently pulling her hand back until he let go. "Lie back down, please. You're fucked up enough, and I'm the one who has to keep updating Jim on your status."

He relaxed slowly as he recognized her, and then just as slowly did as she asked, catching his breath for a moment. He was under a pile of blankets, which had been thrown askew at his up-burst. He adjusted them carefully with his good arm. He ran a hand over the fresh bandages on his chest, displeased and uncertain, before returning mostly-lucid eyes to Harrison. "What happened?"

"You passed out on the street during a casing and a civilian found you. You were at a public hospital," she shrugged, still standing by the side of his bed. She couldn't sit down these days unless she had a cigarette or a glass of liquor. She was too tense, otherwise. "You have blood poisoning. Next time I ask you to let the nurses tend to you, listen to me, will you?"

He tensed a little at that, but nodded slightly. His stupid mistake. One he was sure he was going to pay for. "Yes," he said quietly.
She nodded a little, eyes wandering off him to the wall. "You won't have it as bad as I did, I don't think," she said, voice devoid of emotion. "Your transgression wasn't nearly as bad as mine."

He watched her quietly for a moment. "You shouldn't have taken the brunt of that," he finally said, after looking around the room. "Wasn't your failure. It was mine."

She smirked, humorlessly, and shrugged. "Wasn't your orders. It was mine. Either way, Jim's already beaten you. The punishment for this won't be nearly as bad." She hoped.

Orders I had the right to, and should have, ignored. But he didn't say that. He just nodded slightly, eyeing her quietly. "You're as bad as I am."

She looked back down at him, raising her eyebrows a little. "In what way?"

His own eyes were quiet as he studied her face. The dark circles under the eyes, the dull expression, the tense hunch of her shoulders. "When was the last time you really slept?"

She laughed, turning away from him, and her voice broke, her hand going to grab the back of the chair by his bed. "I haven't really slept since before we were captured, Moran. And now the nightmares are worse, and I have to face him every fucking day. There's nothing I can do except drink until it puts me to sleep."

He closed his eyes, taking a slow breath, his lungs still struggling. Eventually he opened his eyes, focusing on the far wall. "They still call it Shell Shock, in the ranks," he said after a while. "The pencil pushers somewhere changed it to 'Combat Stress Reaction', but that's a load of bullshit. It isn't stress. It's shock. It's physical, it's visceral. It's the bloody sucking chest wound of mental shit. And it's gonna bite you as fast as this bit me if you don't take care of it."

She turned around to look at him, her face no longer emotionless. "What the fuck am I supposed to do about this, Moran? It was bad when we just got out - but I could have handled it. Now?" She scoffed, choking back tears, and turned to the wall by her side, and punched it hard enough that there was an audible crack. She withdrew her hand, watched the little droplets of blood roll down the white plaster. "Now I have to relive all of it every time he says my name. Every time he asks me if I'm giving him the cold shoulder. And I can't do anything about it."

He winced just slightly at the punch, trying to decide if the sound had been the wall, or her hand. "I don't know," he admitted quietly. "But it can't be... this. If I can help you, I will."

She finally sank down into the chair, looking listlessly at the bloody hand in her lap. It hurt. She'd probably fractured something, not to mention split her skin open. "You can't help. You can't guarantee that he won't do it again if he thinks we're getting too close," she snorted, lifting her good hand to wipe her eyes, try to clean up any evidence of crying before it escaped. "I'm his bloody property, and he told me not to forget it again. I'm armed all the time, because if he tries to put his hands on me again..." she shook, her head, looking away. "I'll kill one of us before I let it happen again. He abused his power over me to the fullest extent, and that's where my loyalty ends."

His eyes tightened just a little. As Jim's bodyguard, and hers after that, that wasn't a statement he could take lightly. Up until now, it hadn't been his business. Now it very much was. "I'll find a solution," he said quietly. "But it'd be best if we don't discuss it further, for both of your sakes."

"Yes, I agree," she muttered. It wasn't guaranteed he would remember this - his fever was still a problem - but if she didn't have to defend herself, she hoped he remembered.

He fell silent for a while, and as the distraction left, the various aches and pains made themselves
known. He took a slow breath. "Christ I feel like shit..."

She looked back at him, eyes tightening a little. "I'm sorry. You probably haven't been given any
painkillers in a while. I can go get the nurse, if you'd like."

He shrugged a little, taking a slow breath as his chest protested. "How bad is it?"

"You were very close to death," she snorted. "Blood poisoning is not a joke. Not to mention it
slowed down the healing of everything else, because your body was too busy trying to rid itself of
the infection. It's no surprise you hurt."

"Oh, good," he sighed, with just a touch of sarcasm. He reached up to trace his fingers over the
bandages, and shifted just enough to get further under the blankets. He was still cold. "Sorry."

She raised her eyebrows slightly. "For what?"

He sighed, shifting again slightly and wincing, uncomfortable in his current position but unable to
think of one that would be better. "This..." he muttered. "You told me to let them treat me, I didn't,
and I almost died in a gutter. I know when I'm wrong."

She smirked a little, shrugging. "No need to apologize. I think the experience of almost dying is
pence enough."

He sighed, closing his eyes and nodding a little. "If I feel like this for much longer I'll agree with
you. Doubt Jim will, but oh well..."

She sighed, the smile sliding off her face at the mention of Jim. "There's no telling what he'll
think."

He saw her face crumble, and immediately felt bad. "My problem. Not yours."

She shook her head. "No. Everything to do with Jim is my problem. Not much he does doesn't
affect me in some form or fashion."

He sighed. "Well, I'll do my best to keep it from affecting you. You don't need more shit."

She chuckled dryly, putting her hand on the arm of the chair, so it wouldn't drip on her. "Yeah, tell
me about it."

He glanced at her again, and sighed. "Get someone to look at that."

She looked down at her bloody hand and sighed, nodding a little, and stood. "Yeah, I will. You
want me to send in one of the nurses with some pain medication?"

"Please," he said softly, closing his eyes and taking a slow breath.

"Alright. I'll send one in. Rest up, try to get some sleep," she murmured, and then walked out,
closing the door softly behind her.

He watched her go, and closed his eyes, intent on sleeping. His mind, however, had different ideas,
turning over the situation between Lorna and Jim, looking for solutions.

Lorna sent in a nurse to give Moran painkillers, and let another (hovering anxiously) nurse take her
off to check her hand. The doctor was fairly certain she'd cracked a knuckle, and wanted to do x-
rays, but she waved him off, and he reluctantly only cleaned, bandaged, and gave her a brace for
her hand. Then she went back to her apartment, a bottle of her own painkillers in her free hand.
Jim drummed his fingers absently on the desk, the rhythm of some opera he'd heard years ago, wandering his mental halls absently as he waited for Harrison to show up. He'd been amusing himself the last day or so by telling her to come up 'whenever she was free', and imagining the frustrated uncertainty as she weighed tasks versus whatever he might need her for.

Eventually, she found a free moment in the evening, and went to his office, dreading it the whole time. She knocked on the door with her left hand. She didn't know if he'd heard about her other hand yet, and she desperately hoped he wouldn't comment. Her patience was stretched thin as it was.

He called her through, and looked up as she came in, eyes flicking to the brace. He had, in fact, heard about it. It amused him. Punching a wall was rather unlike his second.

"I need a team to go into Buckingham Palace tomorrow, Harrison," he said casually. "What condition is the boy in?"

She stopped in front of his desk in her newly-familiar pose, looking at the wall above him rather than him. "He's still in the infirmary, sir," she said, "He's still feverish, but he's improving. I wouldn't recommend him for field work. Maybe Johnson, or Kelly."

He waved his hand dismissively. "Too delicate an operation. Too confidential. You'll go, and so will I. Pity about the hand, perhaps a muff. Something classy, it is black tie, after all." He leaned back, looking at her. "Do have Johnson case the joint, though, seeing as Moran doesn't seem to have gotten around to it.

She didn't react, but her throat closed up at the idea of going on a mission with Jim. A space where she'd have to pretend they were together, that she was fine with being touched by him, that she enjoyed it. "Yes, sir. When is the event?"

"Seven o'clock tomorrow night. We should be on time. My contact will be looking to avoid me." He leaned back in his chair. "I'll have the briefing sent to your quarters."

She nodded. She needed to send Johnson immediately, then. "Will that be all, sir?"

He considered her for a moment. Considered making her stand there while he worked, with no particular reason other than he wanted her to. But he was also aware of the fragile mental state she was currently in, and decided not to shatter it until his bodyguard had recovered. "Tell Moran that the longer he takes to recover, the more annoyed I will be. Dismissed."

She nodded and then turned and made a swift exit, the back of her neck prickling. As soon as she reached the nearest telephone, she sent Johnson on his way to Buckingham and phoned the infirmary, to pass on Jim's message.

At precisely six-fifteen the following night, Jim met Harrison in the garage, and climbed into the back of the waiting Rolls. He waited until Harrison was in, then signaled the driver to take off, returning his attention to the bowtie around his neck. "Tie this for me, darling, would you?" he asked, flashing her a grin.

She cleared her throat and leaned over to do it without speaking, the task made more difficult both
by her injury and the way her hands were shaking, but she managed to get it done in record time and quickly returned to her side of the seat. She’d dressed in a black dress which hugged her figure for the occasion, with matching black gloves that had necessitated her removing the brace for the night. She would just need to be careful, with only the bandages on underneath to support her.

They took the ride in silence, as he didn’t fancy dying in the back of a car. They pulled up to a street not far from the palace, and the car stopped, the two climbing out. Johnson had found a suitable blind spot in security near a hedge that they would be leveraging to make their entrance. Jim offered Lorna his arm, still smiling. "Shall we?" He just barely held back 'love' from the end of the sentence, the temptation to use the trigger word massive, but he kept it pocketed for later that evening, if he needed it.

She took his arm with a convincing smile, putting on the mask she would need to get through this night in one piece. "It'll be a delight," she smiled, giving a little wave over her shoulder at Johnson. "Mind the car, please. It's possibly worth more than you are."

"Quite definitely worth more than he is," he sighed, smirking as they walked down the street toward their entrance point.

It was slightly less dignified an entrance than he was used to, but he hadn’t been able to pull the right strings to get a ticket to this particular event on such short notice without raising a few brows, and raised brows were not in his interest in this venture. So they slid through the gap in the hedges and joined the milling crowd as if they had been there all along.

She had never relished the job of scanning a crowd for another face as much as she did now. Looking for the Greek ambassador was positively riveting, and she basked in every second of it, studiously ignoring that one of her arms and an entire side of her body was touching someone else. But there was only so long she could look fruitlessly and say nothing. "I'm not seeing him, sir," she said quietly, tapping her gloved finger delicately against the champagne glass in her hand. Her broken hand (her right one) was in Jim's grasp, and she was unhappily trusting him not to twist it the wrong way.

"Mmmm... Unfortunately, I tend to agree." He stroked his thumb over her hand, just barely circumventing her bad knuckle. "Perhaps in one of the antechambers."

"I have no doubts that you know this place better than I do. I know the way out, not where Lord Moran makes his tea," she muttered, just barely keeping herself from twitching as he got too close for comfort to the painful spot. "Thanks for informing me of that, by the way," she added dryly, though it was clear she was being sarcastic.

"I would have told you if it became pertinent," he said with a shrug, heading toward the closest doorway and peering through, before moving on to look through the next one.

"He was a new employee, who was apparently also assigned as my bodyguard," she snorted, looking normal for the both of them so no one would look too closely at Jim's slightly odd behavior as they checked a few more doorways.

"How does his father's political standing affect any of that?" he asked casually, looking in on another room before turning down a small hallway.

She grit her teeth a little. "There are dozens of reasons, the least of which is my accidentally bringing him on a mission that involves his father. You would never allow yourself to be uninformed on one of your employees, Jim. I'm your second. If you get fucked up I have to keep things running while you recover. I can't do that unless you place a little faith into me," she
muttered, though her face stayed pleasant. She wanted to backhand him more than anything, right now.

"I have complete faith in you, Harrison," he soothed, the amused notes in his voice ambiguous. "However I think it would be rather dull, not to mention a waste of time, to spend hours giving you all the boring little details of every employee. I tell you what you need to know. It's as simple as that."

"I'm not asking for every employee, Jim, I'm asking about the man who protects your life, and, oh, surprise, MINE," she hissed, not mollified by his attempt to delegitimize her argument.

"And now you know," he said casually, shrugging as they wandered down a hall away from the crowd, still searching. "I don't see why you're so furious, love..."

Her stomach flipped, and she fell silent as her face paled, suddenly nauseous. It took everything in her power not to yank out of his grasp.

He smirked just slightly as she stiffened and fell silent, pleased with the effect. It was exactly as he'd hoped.

Time seemed to drag on excruciatingly slowly after that, and she didn't know how much actually passed, just that she was desperate to be alone, to get away from him, to be able to feel her emotions in peace without fearing what he might say or do about them.

They were in a small portico of sorts when it happened. Air raid sirens went off, but before they could even consider moving, the world shattered.

He came to- he wasn't sure how long later- to darkness, and dust on his tongue. He shifted a little, and grit his teeth as his head hit a sharp corner of some kind. He swore quietly, shifting his hands and feeling around before trying to sit up, but he was in a small enough space that that proved difficult.

"Feck."

Lorna had woken up before Jim, a few feet away in the cramped space, and had only brushed off a few loose pebbles before she remained very still, eyes above her in the darkness, ears straining every time the rubble shifted. For right now, it seemed their pocket was relatively stable, but she didn't fancy trying to jostle for more room and getting them both crushed in the process. She shifted as she heard Jim swear. With her eyes beginning to adjust, she could just make out his shape. "You're alive, then."

"Glad to hear you so thrilled," he shot back sarcastically, his own eyes beginning to adjust as he strained to see their surroundings. "What's your condition?"

"A superficial head wound, some light scrapes, possibly a fracture in my right arm, like that needs to be worse," she muttered, shaking her head. "Caught rubble on it instead of my head. I imagine I might be of much less use to you if I hadn't."

"Mmm..." he agreed distractedly, tuning her out once she had answered his question, his attention returning to the vague shapes of rubble he was starting to pick out. "Are you free to move, or pinned?"

"Free, sort of. I can move a little, but there's not much room to do that in," she sighed, grimacing as she heard rubble shift overhead.
He nodded a little. "I'm in much the same situation. Although..." He shifted a bit again, and frowned. "My ankle may be trapped. Not pinned, per say... but I can't seem to extricate it from whatever is hooked 'round my leg." He sighed. "This is a bit of a mess."

She snorted. "Yeah," she muttered. This was like some kind of nightmare. Trapped, alone, with Jim Moriarty. She closed her eyes. Rescue could not come soon enough.

He took stock of his own injuries- mild abrasions, most, he believed, though there was an uncomfortable numb sensation on his left thigh, and a warm stickiness when his hand came away. "Johnson should piece together the issue, and bring assistance."

"Yeah, he fucking better," she muttered blackly, resting her head back against the wall? It might as well been the wall. She fell silent, hoping he would follow suit.

He smirked a little. "What, not looking forward to my company?" he prodded, chuckling quietly. There was nothing he could do about the situation, may as well enjoy it.

"No, absolutely not," she snapped, eyes opening in the dark. She was stressed, and hurt, and trapped like a fucking rat. Like hell she was going to grovel.

He laughed at that. "Christ, Harrison. You used to be more fun."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she snarled, a blinding surge of sheer anger hit her, and she drew back one leg and then kicked, hitting something fleshy with significant force. "Little Jim wants to keep playing? Then he shouldn't have broken his TOYS," she hissed, slamming her foot into him to enunciate each stressed word. "FUCK you, Jim. You're a fucking animal. I trusted you, you piece of shit! And now I walk into your office armed so I can slit my own FUCKING throat if you try to even touch me again."

He tensed slightly as her foot connected with his hip, and remained silent as she continued to kick him, separating himself from the pain it caused. He waited until she paused for breath, and spoke softly. "Been bottling that up, have we? Do stop flailing about before this whole rubbish pile comes down on us. Darling Sebby would be very disappointed."

"Good," she snapped, "I hope we both get fucking crushed in here. It's better than having to deal with you for the rest of my fucking life. Maybe Sebby would even fucking mourn. God knows you wouldn't."

He was surprised by that, and it took him a moment to process. He'd been playing, yes. But he wasn't aware that he'd pushed her to the point where death was a better option.

He was better at this than even he'd thought. He rarely underestimated himself these days. It was a pleasant surprise. Still, it presented a rather sticky situation. Harrison was useful. He didn't want her to off herself over a little game.

He sighed. "Is this because we fucked?"

She snarled at that, and kicked him again, harder. "WE didn't fuck, Jim," she seethed through her clenched jaw. "You fucked, and I had the absolute fucking privilege of taking it. Do you really think that we fucked? I was two conscious days away from daily sexual assault by bloody fucking Italians, and then I get home, and, oh, welcome back Lorna, but I'm pissed at you so I'm going to cut you open at one of the most painful places, and then I'm going to make you associate me with your rapists, isn't that delightful?" She laughed, mockingly, almost manically. "Are you not getting this? This isn't a fucking game, you colossal fuckwit. You destroyed my loyalty to you. It's gone.
Before, I would have taken a bullet for you. Now, I would rather manually shove one into one of your pretty brown eyes."

That brought him up just a bit short, torn between fury and confusion. He decided to combine the two. "If you kick me again, when we get out of here I will have your leg removed and replace one of my desk legs with it," he snarled. "What sort of loyalty is that, that flees at the first sign of trouble? I trusted you, too, Harrison. I trusted you to know that you were worth more than the goddamned meat shield, and to not get your emotions tied up in your fecking decision making. Instead I almost lose an employee I've put years of my life and my money into shaping, all over some boy who's been working for us for less than six months." He took a breath, then, and when he spoke, his voice was softer. "So yes. You got punished. Yes. It was meant to hurt. Because you were a fucking imbecile!"

"Two years, Jim!" she shouted, furious. "TWO. It would not have been a fucking goddamn tragedy for you if I had died - and it wasn't because of my FUCKING EMOTIONS. THAT was our way out, James! I can't operate a fucking machine gun, nor do I possess the strength to combat the people carrying those guns! I'm deadly against one opponent, MAYBE two, but above that? I need decent weaponry, clothes, and the bloody element of surprise. I had none of them, Jim. Would you have rather I let Moran die and attempt to escape by myself, only to get gunned down the first time I try to hit one with my malnourished punch? Jim- Jesus-" she thunked her head back against the wall, her voice breaking, tears spilling over her eyes. "Earlier, you claimed to have faith in me, but for fuck's sake, what's the point in lying to my face? I did what I had to. Was I sympathetic for Moran? Yes. But we both know I am, at my heart, a deeply selfish person. I didn't do it for him. And as for my loyalty? James, I can take punishment. I have done it before, and it never shook me. This isn't the first sign of trouble. You have put me through the ringer, and you bloody well know no one else has survived. But that?" she shook her head, closing her eyes in the dark, fiercely grateful he couldn't see the sheer volume of tears rolling down her cheeks. "Jim, you can't do that. I can forgive everything else, but not that. You don't want to lose an employee you've invested in? Don't psychologically damage them to the point of suicide. I need to have some line you're willing to respect. If you won't accept that, I'm putting in my resignation. Put a bullet in me as soon as we're out of here."

He was quiet for a long time after that. He could hear her sniffling, but tuned it out, closing his eyes and replaying the last few weeks, watching for details, for clues, evaluating his actions and hers with the data he had, making his judgment.

It was almost a half hour later that he spoke again. "It is possible," he said levelly, "That I may have not had all of the information when I made my decision. Given the information I have acquired since then... It is possible that I would not have made the same choice."

She didn't know what to say about that, so she said nothing, just sitting there in the dark and letting herself feel the betrayal and the hurt and the helplessness that she had been stuffing down into a tight little box and trying to function around. She'd always enjoyed her work. She didn't have to do it. She could have easily lived off her parents' good wishes, or gone to school and been a nurse or a teacher or a shop owner. But her father had introduced her to the life, and his blood ran strong in her. She got her looks and her bloodlust from him.

That didn't mean that the job was easy. Long jobs were always draining, and having to fuck her way into places wasn't always fun. Armetti had introduced her to the concept of real Bosses, and how messy it could get. He'd asked for her hand in marriage, and she had said yes, and maybe even believed that she would do it, for a minute. But then she got pregnant, and she saw what kind of man he really was.
He'd known that for her work she had to fuck other people, and accepted that easily. When she'd told him, he had only pulled her into a hug and pressed a kiss to her hair. And then every man she'd slept with in the past six months who wasn't already dead was put six feet under, and the men employed by Armetti who flirted with her lost seemingly random body parts. Never once did he direct this anger at her, but she'd come in on the tail end of one of the punishments, had seen the look in his eyes. Afterwards, he was never the same. The jobs got dirtier. The real nail in the coffin had been his sister's death. Valerie. She and Lorna had been close, even though Valerie was at least four years her junior. Just a girl, still. Vince's revenge paid them back in kind.

And that had been the nail in the coffin between the two of them. Lorna would do almost anything, but killing children... Not even doing it in Valerie's name, especially in her name... It wasn't right. He'd forced her to kill children, and he hadn't respected the line she'd drawn.

The wedding was three months after she'd given birth, and would have been closer if it hadn't happened so prematurely. Vincent hadn't been saddened when she came home one night and was neither pregnant nor carrying a baby. It wasn't his, what did he care? Two weeks before the wedding, she told him she was going back to London, and that she wasn't going back. He'd grabbed her arm, demanding, begging that she stay. Her things were already on their way across the ocean. She needed him to let her go. So she told him the truth, that the baby had been his.

She met Jim soon after she returned to England. He was unpredictable, but she preferred that. Armetti had been steady, but hiding turmoil under the surface. With Jim, it was all on the table. She could trust in that kind of chaos. She needed to keep trusting in that kind of chaos. Because beneath the surface, Jim had a bottom line, and it was as strong as steel.

He let the silence reign between them, unperturbed. The ball was in her court now. It was only because she was valuable to him that he had even paused to consider his actions. If she expected more than that, she was a madwoman, and he'd accept her resignation.

Eventually it dawned on her that maybe he was expecting a response from her, and she scrambled for something to say. "Just..." She sighed, trailing off briefly. "Just don't do it again, and... Give me time. Before you... Want company again. If something happens in the future where that's the punishment you're going to give me, I rather you put a bullet in me instead, sir. I'll put it in writing, if you want. Otherwise.... We're good, I guess."

He nodded just a little, eyes shifting to her form in the darkness. "I suppose that is a fairly reasonable request," he said after a moment. "Writing will not be necessary. I will give you the time you requested to recover. But my patience is not infinite. Do whatever you need to do to recover quickly."

She nodded to herself. There was something resembling relief in her chest. "Thank you. And understood."

He nodded, letting the subject drop. He had absolutely no interest in discussing this further. "Johnson is taking his sweet fucking time."

She snorted, vaguely amused. "Well, he's got several tons of rubble to carefully sift through. Hate for him to accidentally crush us."

He made a disgruntled harumph, and shifted again, gritting his teeth slightly in annoyance. "Glad to hear your opinion reversing on that," he muttered. His left leg was cold, and still a bit numb. He disliked not being able to see it. He hadn't bothered learning trauma medicine. That was something he would certainly be reading up on once they got out of here.
She fell silent, closing her eyes and deciding that she may as well try to rest. They were not going to get themselves out of this one, so they had to wait for rescue.

He, too, fell silent, drumming his fingers absently on the rock.

Chapter End Notes

Falling In Reverse - Loser
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hfp7BslbwfM&index=26&list=PLSCvi5dTAM1AhDvJwz8x5mRI4kKDxqhd4&t=0s
It ended up being another four hours, by his estimation, before they heard the rubble above them start to shift. By that time he was exhausted, thirsty beyond belief, and desperately needed a piss.

When light shined through onto her head, Lorna groaned in relief, though flinched away from the flashlight, and it took them another half hour to move things enough to get them out safely. Johnson pulled her up by her bad arm and had to clamp his hand over her mouth as she screamed, and then passed her off to one of the other men, looking a little bit harried.

It took them another quarter hour to figure out how to get Jim's ankle free of where it was stuck. He had been bleeding rather heavily from his thigh, as he'd suspected, and had been a touch light-headed as they helped him up. There wasn't much he could salvage of his dignity at that moment, covered in dust and blood, shivering from the London cold, unable to walk on his own without his leg buckling. So he kept his chin high and his eyes cold, and let them help him to the car.

They'd already taken her away in another car by that time, eyeing the gash on her head and deciding that it was better not risking anything, and this time when the doctor told her he wanted to take x-rays, she let him. Her hand did indeed sport a hairline fracture, and her arm sported a bit of a bigger one, which she gritted her teeth at. Six weeks of restricted movement, with periodic checkups. Well, at least it would buy her the time she needed away from Jim. She was a little surprised to be alive after that conversation. Oddly, she wanted to tell Sebastian about it.

She didn't have to wait long. Moran, pale and glassy-eyed, but focused, and looking disgruntled, opened the door to the room she was in awaiting a cast. He was in flannel pajamas, and had an IV stand with him, half dragging it along, half leaning on it. He relaxed a little when he saw her, apparently alive and well. He slipped in the door, closing and locking it behind him and his stand. "Jim?"

She shook her head, silently pleased to see him. He looked a little better. "No. Bomb fell on us. Took a piece of building on my arm to avoid taking it on my head. I got hit there anyway, of course," she smirked, pointing to the bandage on her head. "I heard his leg is injured, but otherwise he's okay. Don't know how bad his leg is, though. They hustled me back here so I could get my skull looked at."

He nodded a little, leaning against the wall. "They wouldn't let me go look for the two of you. I tried to escape, but this damn thing got caught in a door, and then they locked the door to my room and stopped telling me things. I finally found a probe sturdy enough to pick it with." He glared in the direction of the hallway.

She chuckled a little, wincing as she shifted her arm. "I appreciate the commitment, but I doubt you would have been very much use to us while in that condition. Maybe in a week."

"I was of fine use to you in worse condition in Italy," he muttered, still annoyed. He sighed. "Of all the fucking places to get bombed..."

"In fine condition to lift me. Rubble? Moran, please," she scoffed, and then shrugged. "It was bound to happen eventually. Hopefully it's the last time it happens."
He let the topic dropped, more annoyed with her accuracy than her statement. He just nodded, and then snickered as someone tried to open the door a few times. A nurse peered through the window and glared at him spitefully. He gave a shit-eating grin and waved his fingers.

She cleared her throat, raising her eyebrows at him. "Moran, I still need to be fitted with a cast. Unless you need to speak to me in private you are standing in the way of my proper health care."

He sighed at that, glancing at her, before conceding the point. "Back to captivity," he muttered blackly, unlocking the door and stalking past the furious nurse, the effect somewhat ruined by the fact that he had to drag his IV pole along behind him.

She watched him go and then returned her attention to the nurse. At least, most of it. She digested the events of the day while robotically following directions. What a strange fucking day.

They released Moran from the infirmary almost a week later. He was still weaker than they would have liked, but he was fever-free, and could walk on his own and keep down food and fluids. Not to mention that if they had tried to keep him another day, he had threatened to start offing people. Still, he was required to check in daily to have his wounds cleaned and rebandaged.

He headed down to his quarters to shower carefully and change into a fresh uniform, before heading for Jim's office. It was risky to go without being called, but he felt it was his obligation to check in as soon as he was prepared to return to duty.

Jim looked up as a knock on the door that wasn't Lorna's reached his ears, squinting a little at the door before realizing that it must be Moran. He hadn't shown up without being summoned, before. Interesting development, especially considering his recent failures. "Come in, Moran," he said, for the moment returning his attention to the file on his desk.

He entered quietly, shutting the door behind him and walking forward, falling into a crisp parade rest in front of the desk, waiting to be addressed.

Jim looked up from his file, raising an eyebrow at the boy. "I didn't call you down here. What is it?"

"You had sent a message to me that you were impatient with my recovery time, sir," he said levelly, eyes meeting Jim's calmly, though his pulse was elevated. "I thought it prudent to inform you immediately that I was ready to return to duty. I also wanted to apologize for the errors I have made in the past few weeks. I am very cognizant of them, sir, and I am prepared for whatever discipline you deem desirable." He shifted just slightly, took a slow breath to ease his nerves. Focus on the goal.

His eyes scanned over the boy, curiously, taking in the signs of nerves. He wasn't a complete fool, then. The punishment he'd planned had at first been similar to Lorna's. But then they had been trapped together at Buckingham, and he'd reexamined the events with slightly different eyes. The punishment for that would not be as severe. The blood poisoning, however, was still on the market. He laced his fingers together and then rested his chin on top of them, smirking at Sebastian. "And tell me, Moran, what discipline do you feel is deserved?"

He hadn't been expecting the question, and it disarmed him for just a moment. Still, he recovered quickly, taking another slow breath, and eyeing the man carefully as he turned the question over, composing his answer. His heart was in his throat. "I disappointed you, sir," he said finally,
focusing on keeping his voice even, though his mouth was dry. "I was the cause of some strife to you and to Harrison. It seems fair that whatever you do to me make up for that strife in some way, either by afflicting it on me in turn or by deriving some... pleasure from the situation yourself, to balance the scales."

His smirk grew wider, and he stood, walking around his desk to come up in front of Moran. So much taller than Lorna. A pleasant change of pace. He lifted a hand to catch the boy's chin between his thumb and forefinger, pulling his face down a little so he could get a better look at it. "You offer that, after what happened to dear old Lorna? Aren't you loyal. Why don't you define for me what you mean by you were the cause of it. In detail."

He relaxed a little as Moriarty's smile widened. The hook was set. Now it was just a matter of reeling in, and that just required patience. It wasn't a sure thing, but it was downhill from here. Muscles that had been tense for what felt like months eased as the shorter man took a hold of his chin, inspecting him. The sense of ownership was relaxing. He knew this situation. Understood it. He couldn't say he liked it, but it was predictable. Not safe, but a kind of danger he was trained for.

He caught Jim's eye just once, then returned his gaze straight ahead at Jim's question. "I have the authority to refuse orders which I feel compromise the safety of a charge, sir, as laid out in my contract. I should have countermanded Harrison's orders and continued to take the brunt of the situation on myself. I misread the situation, and my actions almost resulted in Harrison's death," he said robotically. Giving a report was easy once you removed the emotion, and he knew that he was to blame.

"Additionally, sir, I neglected my own injuries to the point where they almost cost me my life and greatly extended my recovery time. As a result, I was unable to come to your aid during the bombing, which put you at further risk." He fell silent, eyes ahead, waiting.

He would wait to inform Moran that Lorna had possibly been right, if he bothered to tell him at all. "Not taking care of your injuries was insulting, Moran," he said softly, grip tightening a little, "After Harrison took a beating for your punk ass... It's a wonder she didn't put you in the hospital for an extra week. But then, you're something of a soft spot for her, aren't you?" He dropped Sebastian's chin, stepping back and leaning against his desk, sliding his hands into the pockets of his trousers. It was partially a move to take weight off his injured leg. "Show me it. The brand. I want to see for myself what's kept you out of commission and landed me in the infirmary."

He took the comments without flinching, and ignored the remark about Harrison's soft spot. That wasn't his place to say. Jim's request made him stiffen just a little, however, and it took him a moment to comply. There wasn't any question of whether or not he would. Jim was his superior. He would obey. But it took him a moment to get up the nerve to reach for that first button. He had barely been able to stomach the care of the the one nurse who he'd dealt with and vaguely trusted. Even the dozenth time she unwrapped the bandages, unaffected, he felt nauseous. Now, he undid the buttons of his shirt and pulled it off, cheeks tinted just a touch red as he set it neatly over the back of the chair and slowly started unwrapping the bandages.

Jim openly smirked at his embarrassment, always one to relish others' discomfort. "Such a good little soldier," he hummed, taking stock of all the new scars in front of him. "I bet your superior officers in the army were positively loathe to give you up. Pretty blonde boy, talented, good at following orders. You're the dream pet. I wonder if the Italians miss you just as much."

The redness increased, then, his ears flushing too, now, as he set the bandages aside and started working on carefully pulling the gauze away from the burn. "I'm sure they do, sir. I do my best to make myself memorable," he said quietly, finally pulling the gauze free and setting- after a
moment's hesitation— with his shirt and bandages on the chair. Then he straightened for inspection, not allowing himself to shy away from Jim's gaze, though his pulse was thundering in his ears and he felt like he was going to leave his lunch on the carpet.

The brand stood out livid red against his pale skin, a raised, ropey scar that was still healing in places where drainage incisions had had to be made. He felt incredibly exposed with it in view, but swallowed past it, waiting.

"Bit of an eyesore, isn't it?" he chuckled, eyes sharp on Moran's, looking for his reaction. He was so pink. He hadn't known that he could even get so flushed. He stepped forward again, raising a hand to trace a finger along the outside of the brand, just close enough to sting a little. "You're going to be sporting this one for the rest of your life, I'd bet. Guess you'll have to settle for your fellow men, won't you?" He clicked his tongue, eyes shifting from the wound to those icy blue eyes. He knew this trauma lay deeper than just Italy. Physical pain would be a poor punishment, not with that so close to his reach. "At least you have daddy."

His expression tightened at the jabs, as he kept it carefully controlled. He was beginning to regret his choice, though he still knew it was necessary. He swallowed as Jim's cool fingers brushed his skin, counting his breaths to keep them even.

Despite all of this, he physically flinched at the mention of his father. There was nothing for it. His abdominal muscles contracted, trying to pull him into a protective ball, and his breathing stuttered. His eyes bored a hole in the wall beside Jim's head as he forced his heart rate to settle. "Not anymore, sir," he said finally, just a touch weakly. "That position is vacant."

"No, it isn't," he contradicted, voice playful. "You have me. Why? Who were you thinking of?" He asked innocently, eyes wide, and then he laughed. "I would punish you with pain, Moran, but I get the feeling that that wouldn't affect you much, would it? You took my beating on the plane without breaking, and you were in worse condition. Besides, my anger is dissipated by now. This is only discipline. And fun, for me personally." He stepped back again, leaning against the desk, wincing slightly as his leg twinged. "I'd relish fucking you over my desk in the exact same spot as darling Lorna, but I'm afraid my leg just isn't up to it. So get on your knees, Sebby dear."

He took a slow breath, eyes blowing out black at the command as his adrenaline and arousal increased simultaneously. The first time with a new one was always the most stressful, and the most intense. Solidarity, familiarity, that came later. For the moment he was just betting, and the thrill of the stakes was making him giddy.

He delayed just long enough to maintain his dignity, before slowly getting down on one knee, and then both, eyes never leaving Jim's.

The power trip was as good to Jim than anything else. Judging by the look on Sebastian's face, it was not an unpleasant idea to him, either. But he couldn't be allowed to wholeheartedly enjoy this. Not this time; maybe in the future, when he'd had his fill of acute discomfort. Just like Lorna, he wanted to trigger that fear response, those memories. He smirked down at Moran as his hands went to his belt, unbuckling it slowly. "Come to daddy, Sebastian."

The word twisted his gut. He hadn't followed where Jim had been going before, what the man had meant. His mouth went dry, his face drained, and for a moment he fought with the urge to hyperventilate as his heart rate picked up again. He closed his eyes, fighting with himself to take a slow breath.

You want this. The outcome is worth it. You're a soldier, you can live through anything.
He opened his eyes again, ignoring the nausea and trying to focus on anything but the name, shifting forward a little until he was face to face with Jim's hands at his belt, waiting.

He finished with his belt and unbuttoned his trousers, then his hands fell to his sides. "Well? Get to work, then."

The fun had gone, all in that one damned word, and as much as he tried to get it back, his fingers still fumbled slightly with nerves as he reached up to pull Jim's trousers out of the way. He closed his eyes, to see if that would be better, but that just brought back memories he didn't want, playing like old movies across the inside of his eyelids. He opened his eyes again quickly; sturdy, nimble fingers cupping Jim through his pants, massaging, stroking, coaxing.

He tried to associate this with other memories. Tried to focus on officers he'd had doing whatever he wanted, on the camp director that had been his first real taste of power, but no matter what he did, he couldn't get his father's silhouette in the doorway of his bedroom out of his mind.

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When Jim was finished, he righted himself with practiced ease and walked around the desk to open up the file there, attention leaving Moran as quickly as it had found him. "You're dismissed, Moran. For now."

He stood slowly, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand and heading for the door without a word. He closed the door behind him, heading for the lift to take it up to his floor.

He felt numb. But numb was better than what he had felt for the past few weeks. And he was secure in the knowledge that this would happen again. He had a little control. Jim would focus his energies on him now, and maybe leave Harrison alone. He was back to being right with the world, back to where he belonged.

He could work with numb.

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Olivia O'Brien - Empty
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_DynzC99bk&list=PLSCvi5dTA1ahDvIwz8x5mRI4kKDqhd4S&t=0s&index=27
Sebastian stepped out of the lift, and headed for his flat.

He showered and changed mechanically, and then sat on his bed for a while, just staring at the wall, his mind blank. Eventually, though, the numbness started wearing off, and he became increasingly aware of how goddamned panicked he was.

It took him another ten minutes to evaluate the situation, decide against alcohol as a solution, at least not alone, and head across the hall, as close to normal as he could manage, a growler of beer in his off hand.

Lorna was back at her flat, drinking a small glass of cranberry juice and vodka, reading a book on birds. It was a little awkward, with one arm held largely immobile, but it was better than just sitting there with an idle mind that was liable to wandering places she didn't like it to go.

She looked up at the knock on her door, eyebrows furrowing a little. She wasn't expecting housekeeping, and the only other person with access to this floor was Sebastian, excluding Jim. She got up, glass still in hand, and walked over to open the door. "Moran," she greeted, though her face was clearly asking what he was doing here. Her eyes flicked to the beer in his hand. "Come bearing gifts, did you?"

He nodded just a little, not quite meeting her eye. "Sorry to bother you. I was just wondering if I could just... sit? You don't have to talk to me. I can be in a corner."

She looked at him for a moment, appraising him, considering whether or not it was worth letting him in. But it was obvious he needed to be in someone's company right now, and knowing him, he would be too suspicious to go to anyone else. She sighed, and nodded, opening the door wider to let him in. "We can talk, if you want. I don't mind. I'm not working."

He shrugged a little, offering the growler as he stepped inside. "Didn't know how much contact you'd be comfortable with, given..." he shrugged.

She took it after passing her glass into her right hand - her arm wouldn't like holding up a case of beers - and closed the door behind him, heading back to the sofa. "It's alright. I think we can let it slide just once," she chuckled, sitting back down and plunking the beers down into the coffee table.

He followed after her a bit awkwardly, trying to relax. He perched on the edge of the couch, muscles still coiled, and reached out to grab a beer, slipping a knife out of his pocket to pop it open. Beer was the smartest choice he could make at the moment. It would fill him up before he could get too wasted. He needed to stay sober enough to be ready of something else went wrong, but the temptation of oblivion was tantalizing. He'd been drinking a lot of beer lately.

"Relax, Colonel, I'm not going to bite," she said, finishing off the drink she'd had before he arrived. "How are you feeling?"

He took a long few sips of the beer, the cool liquid easing his somewhat sore throat. He shrugged a little. "Good enough to be back on duty, finally."
She nodded, leaning forward to grab a beer and reaching into the couch cushions behind her to pull out a small switchblade, which she used to pry off the cap. "Is that why you're here? Jim judged you well enough to punish?"

He shrugged a little, let his lack of response speak for itself, and took another sip of beer.

She sighed a little, and took an experimental sip of beer. It was good. Better than the swill you found in your average pub. "If it happens again, you can come talk to me again. Or sit, it doesn't matter to me. I know it was hard for me to be alone - or to be around anyone else, either."

He glanced at her, then nodded just a little. "Thanks," he said softly. "My flat was... not going well."

She made a sympathetic sound. "It's... Not a fun time. He makes sure it lingers."

He takes a slow, somewhat shaky breath. "Yeah. He was... Pointed."

She shut her eyes, pushing down an unbidden recent memory. "He enjoys it," she said, opening her eyes again and taking a swallow of beer. "We should consider ourselves lucky he doesn't just do it for fun."

He stifled a laugh in his bottle as he took another sip. He was fighting nausea, and swallowed beer and bile together. "We should," he agreed finally. Part of him hoped that she was wrong. The other part dreaded that she was.

She sighed, leaning back and running a hand over her face. "As soon as this cast is off, I should really go back on duty. That will be unpleasant."

He shook his head a little, but then changed it to a nod. "Yeah... might."

She sighed, closing her eyes. It would be jumping back in that would be difficult, really. But there was no easing into it, at least not with Jim.

"Maybe we'll get lucky," he said after a bit. "Seems like it's about time for our luck to change."

She chuckled. "That would be nice. I won't hold my breath for it, but I'd like that very much."

He drained his beer, then, considering the bottle before setting it down and reaching for a new one. "Army was a lot more straightforward than this."

"It's not always like this. Rarely is, really," she murmured. "It's serious work, but it's fun. You get to do things you otherwise wouldn't."

He smirked just a little, eyes not following the expression, fixed on the bottle in his hand as he picked at the label. "That's for sure."

She looked over at him, just appraising him in silence. He really was one of the most handsome young men she'd ever seen, at least according to her tastes. She hadn't shielded him in there in sympathy for him, but she felt it acutely for him now, especially now that she was out of the immediate firing line. But she didn't know how to help him without putting herself back into that position. Where did Jim's line lay?

He could feel her eyes on him, and took a long pull of beer, before shaking his head a little and standing. "I'm poor company. I should go." He picked up his empty bottle. "Keep the beer. Thank you for your time."
She made a split second decision she was certain she was going to regret. "Do you want to go, or do you just feel you should?" She asked, eyebrows raised a little. "Sebastian... we've been through a nightmare. You even distrust the nurses right now. I can keep you company. Doesn't matter if you don't make conversation."

He glanced at her sideways, uncertain. "I... Don't..." He hesitated. "I shouldn't stay."

"No, maybe not," she sighed, finishing off her beer and leaning over to get another one. "But right now, I can't bring myself to care. It's up to you."

He glanced her way again, staring quietly before he shifted and sat down again. "Okay."

She nodded, then stood and walked over to the phone, picking up the receiver. "I'm hungry, I'm having the kitchen make something. You want anything in particular?"

He glanced her way, and then shrugged just a little. "I'm not too hungry. Thank you, though." He was never too hungry. He ate twice a day, on principle, but it was rarely very much. His appetite hadn't recovered since their captivity, and he didn't care all that much whether it did or not.

She just nodded and placed the call, ordering a positively decadent meal. The best steaks they had, a side of mashed potatoes slathered in gravy, a side of vegetables cooked the French way (sauteed, NOT boiled), and a thick slab of a chocolate cake she knew they kept in stock for its popularity. She would entice him into eating.

He listened quietly to her order, and knew he should be slavering. It sounded good to the part of his brain that was trained to think that sort of thing, but his appetite remained un-roused. He shook himself just a little, and took another sip of beer, trying to wash away the salty taste that still seemed to linger in his mouth, even after brushing his teeth repeatedly.

She sat back down, in silence, thinking to herself. It was obvious he was just as messed up as she was, if not more; she knew that the worst was over, that she'd managed to strike a truce with Jim. But his future was uncertain. They sat in silence until there was a knock at the door, and she put the bottle on the coffee table and got up to take the big platter from the mousey woman who had access to this floor, walking back in and setting it down on the table settled in the corner of her kitchen. "Come, eat. Or at least smell. It might activate your appetite."

He glanced at her, surprised she could follow his thoughts so well, but didn't comment, just stood and walked over, beer in hand. It did smell good. Steak had to try hard not to smell good, and this wasn't just any steak. It was the kind of steak the world's foremost criminal organization served its chief officers. The potatoes, chock-full - it seemed from the aroma - of garlic, were just as enticing. He sat when she did, eyeing the plate experimentally. He wasn't hungry, but he could eat a bit, he supposed. Just for the sake of enjoying the food.

She dug in without hesitation. She never lost her appetite, not unless she was truly sick, and she was still healing from her injuries. Judging by how Sebastian had neglected caring for something as important as a chest wound, he probably wasn't feeding himself very well.

He ate slowly, enjoying the taste, more for the aesthetic than any real hunger. He more picked at it than anything, debating the Rudeness of leaving food on his plate, but eventually deciding that she had just ordered it up, not paid for or cooked it, so it couldn't be that rude. He ate about half, before he returned to quietly sipping his beer, watching her as unobtrusively as possible as she ate. She was looking... better. Healthier, certainly, but the dullness that had clung to her, shrouded her, for the past weeks was gone. She seemed almost lighter. He was pleased by that. It was good for his charge to look well, he reminded himself. Anything more than that would cause them both even
more trouble.

She let the silence sit comfortably as she ate, well aware he was watching her but unoffended and unaffected by it. When she was done with her main meal she pulled the chocolate cake over to her, and cut them both a slice, pushing his towards him without comment. She ate about two bites before she said anything again. "I'm... Going to attempt a conversation with Jim." She cut another chunk of cake with her fork. "I don't think it's conducive to either of us recovering if we're isolated. He needs to see reason on that."

He considered the cake quietly, uncertain if he wanted to eat it, but looked up as she spoke. His eyes tightened. "You shouldn't do that," he said, almost harshly. Then he remembered who he was talking to and deflated a bit, adding a hastily mumbled "-ma'am."

She raised her eyebrows a little at his outburst. "Why not?"

He sat back, took another sip of beer, only to find his bottle empty. He sighed, and set it next to his plate. "It may not be ideal to be isolated. But it's more ideal than Moriarty making our lives hell. The first thing you learn in boot camp is not to show your throat, or it's going to get slit. No reason to expose a weak point to someone who's just gonna kick us in it."

_Come to Daddy..._

She gave him a dead look. "Moran, Jim is not boot camp. The man told me his patience wasn't infinite, but he does have it. And in any case, there is not a speck of me that Jim does not know. My weak spots are always available for him to pry open." She finished off the last bite of her cake and got up, retrieving a fresh carton of cigarettes off the counter and putting one between her lips as she lit it. She took one long draw before speaking again, leaning against the counter. "He's aware I need my vices. His problem with us interacting isn't that it's a weak spot. His problem is he doesn't tolerate his ownership being threatened, which was what he perceived. He made it very clear not to forget it again. Which is why I will ask him for this."

He studied the cake in front of him for a while, twirling the fork around in his fingers. It was his duty to protect Harrison. His plan required a few more days, at least, maybe weeks, before things would be cemented. If she came in with this now... He needed more time with her out of Jim's line of sight. That was the bottom line.

He stood, brushing his trousers off a little. "He may know all of our weaknesses, but there is a difference between him knowing where they are and exposing them outright. I'd rather not be a part of that. Thank you for the food and company, I appreciate it, but I think it's time I go. Have a good night."

She rolled her eyes at him, leaning back and taking another drag off her cigarette, flicking a dismissive hand at him. "Whatever you say, Colonel. Go, then."

He headed for the door, shaking off her eyeroll, despite the fact that it pissed him off. She could be as cavalier as she liked about getting fucked over, but that wasn't what he wanted, for either of them.

She rolled her eyes again once he left, irritated. It was only a matter of time before he combusted and she had to yell at him for not taking care of himself.

He ended up in his flat, every door in the place closed and locked or jammed up, sitting on his bed, watching the room around him quietly, until finally he fell asleep.
It was a couple of weeks later, and she'd fully resumed her more administrative duties while her arm healed. The cast was irritating, but necessary, so she coped in sullen silence during her checkups. However, it meant that everyone underneath her worked just a little harder, because when she got frustrated with writing with her left hand, she took it out on the nearest person. They'd come up with some sort of pact that kept most of the work off her desk. So when Jim asked her to come up at her earliest convenience, it was only an hour at most before she made it, and walked into his office to find him and Moran engaging in less-than-professional activities, and actually swore in surprise. "Jesus, Jim - in your office?"

Moran tried to scramble for some sort of cover, but there wasn't much he could do until Jim moved away. Jim didn't make much of a hurry, pulling back at his leisure and kneeling Sebastian aside as he reached for his own trousers. "Stay, Sebby. We're not done." He turned to look at Lorna. "I've fucked you plenty of times in this office," he retorted, raising an eyebrow as he stepped into his trousers, buttoning them but leaving his belt unbuckled. He leaned back against his desk, still shirtless, looking vaguely amused.

"Not after you summoned someone else to come here," she retorted, eyebrows raised. "Is this how you've been holding yourself over until I'm well again?" She scoffed, gesturing vaguely at Moran. "What was that about not getting involved with the bodyguard?"

"That was you not getting involved with the bodyguard," he shot back, reaching out to where Moran was kneeling, fingers tangling in the boy's short-cropped hair and yanking slightly. "I pay his salary, I can do as I please."

She scoffed, rolling her eyes. "That's just ridiculous, and you know it. I oversee him, too. It's not like I'm going to forget I belong to you, Jim, but if Moran and I aren't allowed to interact with each other, and you want me protected, you should hire another bodyguard that I'm allowed to be in the same room with. How is he supposed to protect me by avoiding me all the time?"

He shrugged. "I never said you couldn't be in the same room. Unless you're suggesting you can't be in the same room with someone without fucking them, in which case I've severely misjudged your restraint." His voice dripped sarcasm.

"You only threw a fit about it after we'd been captured together, during which I can assure you, we didn't fuck once," she shot back, "Which implies that you think us interacting in a supportive manner constitutes too much. And for God's sake, please tell me you aren't still punishing him," she said, making another gesture towards Moran. "I was bad enough, and I've been psychologically prepared for it since I was younger than him. Don't break your bodyguard, Jim, please. This one was hard enough to find."

"Oh, no, he loves it," Jim chuckled, thumb rubbing across Sebastian's temple, lips twisted in a smirk. "Tell her, Sebby. Does she know? Tell her how daddy used to touch you.... Tell her how you feel all safe inside when I fuck you, hmm?" He shoved Sebastian forward onto his hands and knees, still smirking, but the boy remained silent, eyes straight ahead. His expression sobered, and he snorted in disdain. "Boring. I changed my mind. We're done. Leave. Not you, Harrison."

Moran didn't say anything, just got to his feet off of skinned knees and gathered his clothes, not looking at Harrison as he walked out the door quickly.

Her face hardened as Jim spoke, and she did Moran the favor of not looking at him as he went past, though she was furious for him. She didn't let it show on her face, though, her face just hard set, impassive, eyes sharp on Jim. "Is that really necessary, sir?" She asked, emotionlessly.
"Is what necessary?" he asked, rounding his desk, picking up his shirt on the way and pulling it on.

"That," she said, pointing behind her at the door. "Jim... It's been weeks. Why are you purposefully acting out some- some pedophilic farce?"

He laughed. "No, Lorna dear. I meant it. He likes it. He came to me. Not the other way around. If his father fucked him enough that he wants to keep doing it, how is that my problem? I get some excellent tail out of the deal." He smirked.

She stared at him for a moment, amazed, and said nothing, shaking her head a little. She put her hands on her hips, and let out a chuckle. "Wow, Jim. Wow. I never thought I'd see willful ignorance from you. You're a reader, Jim! Moran isn't a good enough liar to be fooling you, and from the two minutes I saw him, he wasn't a good enough liar to fool me. Did he explicitly ask for this, or did you just assume? Was it supposed to be punishment? Because it's gone on long enough."

He went from playful to angry in the span of a few seconds. "Watch yourself, Lorna dear," he snarled softly, voice dangerous. "I know he doesn't enjoy it, but he keeps coming back. Half the time, I don't invite him. He just shows up. Today's little adventure, for example. You don't really think I'd make such a blatant scheduling conflict?" His teeth were bared.

"So you didn't think to find out what his motives are?" She demanded loudly, partially because she was angry and partially because she was concerned he was losing his damn mind. "If he doesn't enjoy it and you don't invite him, why is he coming and why are you letting him do it?!"

"That is none of my goddamned concern!" he half-shouted. "What the fuck do I care? He does his fucking job, and he does it with reasonable competency! I couldn't give less of a shit what his motives are! It doesn't bother me, quite the opposite. It doesn't mess with business or his job performance. If you want to play shrink, be my fucking guest. But don't come in here looking for a soul, Harrison, Christ. Have you lost your fucking mind?"

"Have you?" she half-shouted back. "His motives should concern you, Jim! He has direct access to you! He has as high of a clearance as I do! We should know what his fucking motives are, especially because we got back from being captured a month ago and I didn't have eyes on him that entire time! I'm just asking for some fucking caution, Jim!"

"You don't think I can read murderous intent on someone like they're a fecking neon sign?" He stood up then, eyes flashing. "He's doing his goddamned job. I said that. I don't know where this little protective streak came from but it is really starting to piss. Me. Off."

"I have had this protective streak since I signed on with you, Jim, because you needed a second set of eyes so they could watch your back," she snorted, adjusting her arm in the cast, really wishing it was off, in case she needed it. Worst came to worst, she had a knife she could cut it open with. Though honestly, they were at the fork in the road between fighting and fight-fucking. "God, all I'm saying is that even if he doesn't have murderous intent, isn't it worth knowing? There could be a dozen other things, harmful in different ways."

"Then if you care so much, find out!" he snarled, leaning across the desk. "I DON'T GIVE A FUCK!"

"God, James, you're fucking hopeless," she sighed, shaking her head, pulling out her knife and scrunching up her nose as she wedged it between her skin and the thin plaster, and started sawing her way through it. "Now are you going to finish with me what you started with him, earlier, or just sit around with your fly down for nothing?"
He grinned at that, anger forgotten. "I think we could have a bit of fun."

"Good, then help me get out of this," she smirked, sawing a couple more inches through her cast. She hadn't been planning this at all. She hadn't even considered it happening until she was all better. But fights with Jim either went very poorly, or they fucked and got over it. So when she wanted to fight him, the urge was already there, all tangled up.

He stepped forward, taking the knife and attacking the cast with gusto. He was riled up, physically and emotionally, and the prospect of an outlet made everything that much more pressing. "About time you came back around."

"You pissed me off. I have some very closely tied urges, there," she laughed, wincing a little as the cast came free, tugging a bit at her arm. "Just be careful with the arm," she said, then grabbed his collar and pulled him over to kiss him.

He grinned against her lips, letting her pull him across the desk as he kissed her roughly back. She snogged him across the desk for approximately two seconds before she just climbed across it, knocking over several files in the process.

He pulled her across to ease the process, sitting back into the chair and pulling her into his lap, his arms sliding around her waist. He pushed his tongue past her lips, seeking hers.

She settled into his lap in a straddle, hands still with a hold on his collar, biting down when his tongue got too pushy, both a warning and a challenge.

He growled, but didn't pull away, hips bucking up against her as she kissed him. He was impatient, already turned on and raring to go, one hand grabbing her arse playfully.

She made a soft sound, a shiver going down her spine at enjoyable friction, grinding her hips down to chase his. She pulled away then to chuckle in his ear, one hand sliding from his collar to the nape of his neck, into his hair. "Did you get any less hard after I interrupted you?"

"Marginally, I assume," he retorted, eyes on her neck, on her pulse. Her hand was hot against his skin. "You did interrupt things rather underway..." he reached up to curl fingers around her throat, much gentler than he normally would have even considered, more to feel her pulse against his hand than anything.

She swallowed, fear and enjoyment battling each other for a moment before the latter won out, helped along by the lack of his usually tight grip, nails scraping through his hair a little. "I'm not going to apologize, if that's what you're looking for..."

"No, I didn't imagine you would," he said quietly, leaning forward and biting her collarbone. "You've been particularly rebellious lately..." He rolled his hips up against hers impatiently, his breaths a bit stilted against her neck. "Get undressed, this is ridiculous."

She nodded breathlessly, hands leaving him to hastily unbutton her blouse, hands shaking with uncertainty like it was her first time again. "You've been pissing me off lately," she smirked, shrugging her blouse off her shoulders.

"I always piss you off," he retorts, starting at the bottom of her blouse to pick up the pace when he saw how badly she was fumbling. His knuckles slid over her abdomen as his hands moved upward.

"I guess we've both just been pissing off each other more than usual, then," she laughed, getting out of her shirt and kissing him again, deciding that if he wanted her to get undressed the rest of the
way, he would need to make her get up.

He kissed her back roughly, his hands exploring newly-exposed skin, tracing new scars, touch unusually gentle.

She rolled her hips down on his again, making another soft noise against his lips, sliding a hand in between them to grip his hard cock through his trousers for a moment before unbuttoning them hastily, trying to get them out of the way.

"There we go," he groaned, pushing her skirt up around her waist and trying to adjust her knickers so they stayed out of the way. Her hand at his cock made his breath catch, and he ground upward, eager.

As soon as she got his trousers undone her hand left him for herself, hand sliding between her thighs over slick skin, knowing that she'd regret it if she just dropped herself onto him without any preparation at all, breath coming a little sharper and her teeth biting into his lip.

He huffed impatiently, but let her take her time. It was against his nature, but so was losing a valuable asset because he couldn't control himself. He pulled his lip free and returned the favor, leaving a mark in her lip that he traced with his tongue. His fingers met hers between her thighs, hoping to speed the process along.

She smirked at the huff, and decided that if he was going to be that impatient, he needed to pay for it somehow. "Moran is better than you at this part," she teased, the slightest bit breathlessly. "So courteous. Besides the time on the rooftop..."

He slid his fingers over her heat, doing his best not to rise to the obvious bait, and failing a bit. "He has to be courteous. I don't. And ah, did you fuck the corpse my people found down by the docks?"

"His name was Marco," she hummed, a shiver going down her spine at the memory, and she had to close her eyes for a second to compose herself, though now she was extremely aroused. Her hand returned to his waist, pulling him out of his pants with little ceremony.

"How appallingly Italian," he shot back, though it did something to him, to see her so stirred by the memory of what had to be quite a good kill. And he was about at the limit of what could be done to him at this point, while remaining calm. He needed to fuck her. His hands moved, hot and compelled, over her skin, anchoring at her hips as she finally pulled him free of his wretched pants.

"You should have seen Moran lose control," she murmured, shifting up over him and hissing as she slowly sank onto him. "Fuck."

"Fuck -" he agreed, his back arching just a little with the effort of not just fucking her senseless right then and there. His hips rolled against hers, movements a bit jolting as he fought for restraint, breaths coming short. "L-lost control how?"

She took a second to answer, fingers tight on his shoulder as she grinded down on him, her breath stuttering. "He.. he pinned me to floor with his knee and pulled a- a knife on me. If he'd been slower I would have slit his throat...

Had he been any less pent up, that would have brought him to a dead halt. As it was, the idea of stopping was laughable. So he multi-tasked, his hands shifting to grab her arse in a tight grip as he moved beneath her as best he could, eyes shutting tightly. "He what?"

She groaned, fingers flexing on him, head falling to bury her face in his neck. "Like I said, he... he lost control," she breathed, "He di-didn't have any intention to kill me, just wanted the blood. Can't
He tilted his head back, pressing his head into the chair, pressing his shoulders back to get more leverage to get his hips up against hers with more force. "Fuck... We should... Leash that boy..."

She gasped as he got the leverage to go deeper, bearing down on him a little harder, her knees slipping against the leather of his chair, slick with sweat. "When I've been asking for years? Jim, I'm- I'm offended," she laughed, half panting.

"You want a collar, pet?" he breathed, his hand reaching up to tangle in her hair, a tight grip, pulling her head back a little. His chest heaved with his breaths, and he could feel her skin, hot against his. His free hand slid up her spine, counting vertebrae, taking in the contortions of her body as she rode him. "I can get you a collar."

"I couldn't wear it out your quarters- or this room-" she groaned, a shiver running through her at the combination of the sensations of his fingers tight in her hair and running up her spine. Only with Jim could she ride someone and feel like the other party was in power. "Someone other than you might try to choke me with it."

He laughed, fingers tracing the still-healing wound at the top of her spine. "True... su-uppose that's a fair rule..." He was tempted to press his fingers down, to hear the cry of pain he knew would bring him over, but pragmatism won out and his fingers shifted lower again.

She nodded breathlessly, falling silent, too consumed with him to access the parts of her that processed and produced language, just soaking in the feeling of his body against hers, doing her best to overwrite the bad memories like writing over freshly dried whiteout.

He let the silence stand, planting his feet wide and moving without hindrance now, letting the heat of her put him into a thrall. The world narrowed- his mind, for once, distracted- and he focused solely on the rhythm of her hips as they rolled and swung over his, and the feeling of her tight around him, enticing him toward climax.

She gripped the back of his neck as she got closer, her breath coming raggedly, her rhythm stuttering as she started to shake, and she made a desperate noise, her other hand clutching the side of the back of the chair. "Jim- Jim, please," she gasped, a high whine to her voice, not even sure what she was asking of him, just knowing that she needed something.

The temptation was there, calling him like a siren, to break her again. He could see the jagged lines of fragility delicately lacing through her otherwise iron-strong composure. He could see the pressure points, the weak places where it would take only a touch, a flick of the tongue, and she would be sobbing and screaming again. That power... He could live quite happily on nothing but that rush. It sustained him.

Still, he needed her for many things, the least of which was pleasure. So he boxed his creativity away for now, the hand in her hair sliding down to grip her throat lightly as his other hand delved between them to rub firmly against her clit.

She gasped and swore as she came, heat unfurling in her stomach like a sail that had suddenly caught the wind, curling over him as much as was possible with his hand on her neck, her rhythm stuttering as she bore down on him in a motion that was as much reflex as it was on purpose. She kissed him hard, teeth clashing with his for a moment, then she pulled away again to try and get some air, her forehead pressed against his. "Give it to me, James," she panted, nails scraping the nape of his neck. "Come for me."
She was one of the few people who called him James. Most of the time it annoyed him, but in moments like this it was a reminder of the game they played, the intricacies of it, and it thrilled him.

He wasn't struggling to reach the edge, either. He had been nearing his edge with Moran, and she had come with all the beauty he expected of an artist of her calibre. She asked, and he came, not in reaction as much as coincidence, his body shuddering and writhing under hers, though he remained silent.

She gradually fell still on his lap, her head resting in the crook of his shoulder as she caught her breath, waiting for the push at her hips from his hands as her signal to get off; she knew he would never admit it, but sometimes he liked at least a moment of still warmth. Her arm was a little sore, where it was slung around his neck, and she was looking forward to telling the infirmary she needed another cast, and watching the confusion on their faces.

He did eventually shift her off of his lap, giving her a chance to gain her feet before nodding toward the door. "Out."

She nodded, gathering up the clothes she had shed and relocating to the waiting room to put them on. As she got in the lift, she hesitated. The need to shower, plus the need to visit the infirmary... She pressed the button for her floor, but when she got out, she walked to the opposite side of the hall and knocked on Moran's door.

Chapter End Notes

Cruel Youth - Hatefuck  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW6xG6YpIok&t=0s&index=28&list=PLSCvi5dTA1ahDvIwz8x5mRI4kKDxqhd4S  

Sir Babygirl - Haunted House  
https://youtu.be/G0c71QCx4ug
He opened it a few minutes later. He had showered and changed into a fresh uniform, his demeanor careful. He eyed her with just a hint of uncertainty. "How can I help you, ma'am?"

"You can drop the formality right now, Sebastian. We need to talk," she said.

He bristled slightly, but didn't react physically, staring down at her coolly. "What do you want to discuss?"

"We need to discuss why I walked in on what I walked in on," she said evenly. "And I'm going to have to insist that you don't deflect me for the moment."

He held her gaze, but his eyes cooled. "Ask whatever you like."

"Why are you doing this, Moran?" She asked, almost mystified. "You're not a masochist, especially now. Jim thinks you want this. So what's the motive?"

He shrugged just a little, his eyes still cool, cautious. "I'm doing my duty."

"I- what do you mean?" She shook her head, eyebrows drawn together. "Your duty? Jim would not continue this long for a punishment."

He kept his breaths slow, even. "Moriarty's wrath and fixation with you was causing issues. You stated that you were inclined to injure yourself if he touched you again. I intervened."

He kept his tone quiet, formal, factual.

She took a deep breath, closing her eyes, getting a hold of herself before she spoke again. She opened her eyes again looking pained, and sighed. "Sebastian... You should have talked to me. When Jim and I were trapped in that rubble, I snapped. He admitted that he might have been wrong and that he might have made the wrong decision. I told him that if he was going to do it again I'd rather he put a bullet in me. He gave me time."

He would have rathered she kick him between his legs that tell him that. His whole body faltered slightly as he adjusted to the information, his face going slightly green, before he blinked slowly and regained himself. "Thank you for informing me. Either way, it appears you have made up with him, so I'll step back. Is that all?"

She felt sick for him, half reaching out towards him for a moment before she dropped her hands, wishing she could comfort him in some way, guilt rising up in her for the first time in a long time. "Yeah, just..." she shook her head, taking a breath, her emotions clear on her face for once in her life. "If you need things to be like they were in there, between us... I can do that." She'd welcome it, honestly, but she couldn't say that out loud to him. "You're not required to get through this alone. I
know I didn't.. don't want to. I won't mention it again, so if you want to ignore it, fine, it's your choice. But it's there. That's all," she said, taking a step back, running her fingers through her hair anxiously.

He looked at her for a long moment, and he could see the pity in her gaze. He felt ill. He didn't really follow what she was offering, and shook his head without trying too hard to find out. "I don't need anything from you, boss. Thank you. Will that be all?" He couldn't control this. He needed to get away.

She could tell that he didn't understand, and she allowed herself one last ditch effort, looking away for a moment, biting the inside of her cheek. "Just - fucking hell... Keep in mind that day in Italy, after we got out, before Jim arrived." She considered telling him what he'd said while feverish, but shook her head at herself, turning on her heel and walking into her flat, feeling embarrassed and sick to her stomach.

Italy... Italy before, Italy after... Both seemed like a distant, pleasant dream. What she had meant clicked suddenly in his head, and he felt like an imbecile for not understanding before. He wanted to call after her, but she was already gone, and the words died in his throat. He closed his door quickly and leaned against it, closing his eyes and doing his best not to cry.

She stripped down and took a shower, beginning to regret fucking Jim. It felt like a betrayal, somehow. She wanted to help Sebastian, but there was nothing she could do if we didn't take the rope she threw his way, not without jumping into the water herself.

He went to lay in bed, still in uniform in case Jim called him. He felt terrible. He couldn't lie still for long, his body shifting every chance it got, feet and fingers tapping compulsively, his breaths uneven, uncertain.

*Keep in mind that day in Italy.* The day he had held her, kept her from panicking, helped her stay sane, helped her sleep.

He couldn't stand it. He stood suddenly, and headed for the door, crossing the hall. He raised a hand to knock, faltered, turned away, then turned back and knocked before he could lose his nerve again.

She answered, dressed in fresh clothes, a cup of tea in her hand for lunch. She looked up at him uncertainly, and stepped back a little, a silent but ignorable invitation.

He stepped forward uncertainly, taking a quiet breath. "You said... Italy. That..." He took a slow breath. "I'm sorry. I didn't..." He shrugged.

She shook her head. "You have no need to apologize. You haven't done anything wrong," she said quietly, taking a quick sip of her tea and then setting it down on the small table to the side of the door, and then offered her hand to him.

He reached out to take her hand after a moment's hesitation. "I interpreted the situation poorly."

"It's alright," she said reassuringly, tugging him gently forward so she could shut the door behind him, then tugged him in the direction of the couch. "Come sit?"

He followed meekly, still not quite sure what it was he was doing. He sat beside her, his hand still in hers, chasing that safety he had felt once after everything went wrong.

She shifted to sit sideways on the sofa, facing him, the hand holding his running her thumb across his knuckles, only half on purpose. "If you want to talk about any of this, you can. If you don't
want to, that's fine, too."

He shook his head just a little, tired, empty. "No. I did my job. I fucked up, but I did my job. It ends there."

"I know," she murmured, "But I meant, even, the past," she said softly. "You don't have to if you don't want to."

He glanced at her, and shook his head just a little. "I don't," he said softly. "Not right now."

She nodded and raised a hand to cup his cheek briefly, trying not to touch him too much without his prompting her to do so. "Do you want tea? Coffee? I'm inherently British, my instinct is to offer you a hot beverage."

He laughed just a little. "Either is fine," he said softly. "Thank you."

"I've got a pot of tea still hot in the kettle," she smiled, standing. "You want cream or sugar?"

"Sugar," he said quietly, nodding just a little. His cheek was warm where she had touched him, and he wished it had stayed longer.

She walked over into the kitchen and came back a few moments later, handing him a large mug of tea and putting down her little jar of sugar on the coffee table before she went over to grab her own cup of tea from the table by the door. "Take as much as you like. Plenty of sugar down here in the bunker."

He put in two even scoops, and sat back, letting the beverage warm his hands through the ceramic, trying to ground himself with that heat. *It was all for nothing....*

She sat back down with her tea, drawing up her knees to her chest. The benefit of trousers. She rested the mug on her knees, looking off into the distance for a minute, not sure what to say. Distraction, maybe? Not work, or anything close to it. But so much of her life was entwined with her work. "I was going to get married, you know," she said, her voice light. "Once upon a time. Before I came back from America."

He looked at her, grateful for the distraction. "Oh?" He sipped his tea, raising an eyebrow. "Who was the mark?"

She shook her head a little, letting out a soft chuckle. "He wasn't a mark. He was my boss. The one that inadvertently sterilized me. Really, I should send him a postcard to thank him."

His other eyebrow went up as well. "Wait. You seriously almost married someone?"

She laughed and nodded. "I know, I know. I was pretty much your age when I agreed to it. Maybe I would have followed through on it if I had never gotten pregnant. It wasn't that it put strain between us - but he became... insanely jealous. He killed marks of mine that I hadn't needed to kill, and he punished any of his workers who had ever thrown an odd flirting remark at me. I walked in on him once, while he was sawing off the hand of a man who worked for him. We were friendly. I knew his wife. I realized he was too deranged. Though I don't know if I ever would have gone through with it anyways."

He let out a low whistle, though the idea amused him a little. "Sawing off a hand. That's a hell of a thing."

"Vincent was- is - unhinged," she snorted, shaking her head and taking a sip of tea. "It just took
him maiming somebody I could summon sympathy for for me to see it."

"If maiming is your definition of 'unhinged', I have some bad news for you," he shot back, actually managing a weak laugh.

She looked over at him, raising her eyebrow at him. "The man he was maiming was named Fred Lourd. His wife's name was Erica. Fred didn't want me; he was madly in love with his wife. We had a joking relationship. We only pretended to flirt with each other. It was our way of having fun, like some friends have. Never once did Fred have a thought of desire about me. And then he lost a hand because my fiance was jealous of every man who had ever looked at me."

He raised his tea-free hand in surrender, sobering a bit. "Unhinged. Noted."

She shrugged, taking another sip of tea. "He also had me murder children, but, you know," she rolled her eyes, smirking a little. "Whatever, right?"

He glanced at her, uncertain how to react to that statement said so cavalierly, so he just nodded a little and took a sip of his tea. It wasn't that he wouldn't kill children if ordered, but...

She sighed, leaning back against the sofa, letting her eyes fall shut for the moment. "So that's where I could be right now. Married to a mafia boss. Christ, my parents would have been so pissed."

"Yeah? Why's that?" He sipped his tea. It was too hot, but he didn't care. "Seems like an alright position to be in."

"I didn't tell them," she chuckled. "My father would have been livid he didn't get to walk me down the aisle, make idle threats to my fiance, all that normal stuff a father does. My mother would have thought I was marrying beneath me - she really wanted me to marry up, coming from a lower class herself. She had high aspirations."

"You speak in the past tense," he pointed out, glancing over at her. "Are they dead?"

"No," she shook her head, "They're fine. We don't speak much these days, though. I'm busy all the time, and there's only so much I can tell them about my job. I could put them in danger, or they could put me in danger. It's better not to risk it."

He nodded just a little, sipping his tea again, falling quiet for a moment, before saying "They sound like good people."

"Good to me, at least. My da's got a reputation for being willing to kill anyone or anything," she snorted, smiling with some amusement and taking another sip of tea. "I've got a little brother, too, but he's just a little too young for enlisting age. Good thing, too," she sighed, shaking her head. "He's not made for open combat."

He shrugged a little. "Few people are until you train them properly. He'd do alright. But young is young."

She made a hesitant humming sound. "Mmm, he would make a decent typical soldier, I assume, but he's more like my mother than my father or me. He didn't get the murder instinct like we did."

He smirked. "What must that be like?" he asked softly. "Do you ever wonder? What it's like for all of them?"

"No," she laughed quietly, shaking her head again. "No, never. We'll never be able to comprehend
the answer, just like a gambling addict will never know what it is like to be someone immune to a gambling addiction. That's enough for me."

He tilted his head slightly in acquiescence. His thumb rubbed along the rim of his mug. "Why did you invite me here?"

She looked over at him, considering. She wasn't entirely certain herself. "I..... Felt like it," she said, uncertainly, and shrugged a little bit defensively. "I don't really have friends or equal colleagues. I can't trust anybody that much. There's a limit to the interaction I can get from Jim. You..." She sighed. "I don't know. I get along with you, for the most part. If you fall apart and the next bodyguard is a complete boor, I'll be right back where I started."

He nodded just a little, accepting that for what it was, though it was a weak answer. He didn't press. Pressing might make her close him out, and like it or not he needed to be here right now. She could tell from his silence that he didn't entirely accept her answer, and that was fine with her. She didn't entirely accept it, but what was she supposed to do instead? She finished up the last of her tea and stood to get a refill. "Want any more tea?"

He shook his head just a little. "Still working on this... Thanks."

She made a noise of confirmation and returned to the kitchen, coming back a minute later with a fresh cup of tea, and sat down again, in silence. She was normally so good at speaking, at filling up a silence. But they were both hurting, to varying degrees. After a couple minutes, she cleared her throat, running her finger around the rim of her mug. "This is going to sound horribly clinical and contractual, and I apologize in advance, but..." she shrugged, looking over at him. "If you want to, when you feel ready, you can make time with me. Jumping back in with Jim..." She shook her head, looking away again. "Just an offer. As somebody who knows everything that has happened."

He tried to puzzle out exactly what she was offering, but finally he was forced to admit defeat, and shifted uncomfortably. "What... do you mean, by that, precisely?"

She sighed, disappointed and somewhat surprised he didn't know that slang term. Maybe it was an American thing. She lifted her cup of tea and took a slightly pained sip. "It means we can have sex, if you want to do it with somebody less predatory than Jim, when you're ready. If you like, we can pretend I never offered, but there it stands."

He grimaced slightly at that, and set his tea down. He'd thought that was what she was getting at, but he had hoped otherwise. "No, thanks for the offer," he said a bit stiffly. "But I can do without the pity fuck." This had been a bad idea.

Her eyebrows shot up, and she looked over at him again, flushing with surprise. "What?? Moran, it's not a pity fuck. I wouldn't offer if I didn't have a desire to sleep with someone who isn't Jim and who isn't some random man I grabbed off the street!" She said defensively, embarrassed that he'd think she was suggesting such a thing. "I wasn't offering in a business sense, alright? But I wasn't going to throw myself at a recent assault victim, and I doubt you would either - thus why I brought it up verbally, to avoid pain and discomfort on either of our parts," she huffed, waving a hand aimlessly and setting down her tea on the table a little hard so she could grab her silver cigarette case and light up in record time, cheeks hollowing out as she pulled in a harsh drag. She'd been allowing a small vulnerable piece of her show, and he'd recoiled, and now she felt discombobulated and out of place. Nicotine was the best remedy.

He glanced her way, surprised at how harshly she'd reacted, his own cheeks reddening a little. He watched her light up, opening and closing his hands a few times before he responded. "I'm sorry.
"That shouldn't have been my reaction. I... apologize." He cleared his throat, looking back at his tea, uncertain. "If that's how you meant... Well, that wouldn't be so bad."

"It's fine," she shrugged automatically, still pulling in breaths of smoke a little harder than she needed to, fingers a little tight on the cigarette. "And, well, good I suppose. Keep me updated on that, then," she nodded, drumming her fingers against her thigh a couple of times before she stood, heading for the radio, and turned it on, the sound of some dramatic radio show starting up and filling in the awkward silence. She relaxed immediately, sighing and sinking back into the sofa, eyes falling shut. "It's fine," she repeated, this time more calmly.

He watched her fidget, though he relaxed slightly as well once the radio came on, picking up his tea and leaning back in the couch for the first time since he'd gotten there, listening to the broadcast absently for a few minutes. "I'm not a grifter, ma'am," he said finally, quietly. "I can read body language fairly well, and I can say pretty things if I think about them long enough, but I don't interpret spoken nuance well. I'm a soldier. It isn't really... there. So I apologize. Sometimes I'm more blunt than is called for."

She chuckled a little, leaning forward to tap her cigarette over the ashtray before it burned her couch. "Truly, it's fine, Sebastian. No need to resort to formality. While you don't always get nuance, I'm too used to limiting how clear my sentences are, in order to avoid invoking Jim's wrath. Too used to saying things carefully, you might say. But I appreciate the apology nonetheless."

He chuckled, leaning back to tap her cigarette over the ashtray before it burned her couch. "'Truly, it's fine, Sebastian. No need to resort to formality. While you don't always get nuance, I'm too used to limiting how clear my sentences are, in order to avoid invoking Jim's wrath. Too used to saying things carefully, you might say. But I appreciate the apology nonetheless."

"Okay," he says quietly. "We're good, then?"

"We're good," she nodded, smiling. "You can rest easy."

"Oh, good. Was going to have some late nights over that, otherwise."

"I know you were," she smirked, winking at him and then finishing off the rest of her cigarette, stubbing out the filter in the ash tray. "Lucky I'm so benevolent."

"Mm, benevolent. Sure," he muttered, sipping his tea, amused.

She chuckled, falling back into silence, considering the nature of their relationship quietly. It had been a long time since she'd been able to act this way with anyone. It was strange. Refreshing.

"I think we may end up in Greece, next."

"Greece? Hm. I think I have a cousin or two there. I speak a little Greek, but I understand it like I'm a native. My father is Greek," she murmured, looking distracted, her mind turning over the possibility of a mission in Greece. "But yes, I have to agree. We got bombed while looking for the ambassador."

He nodded just a little. "Before I fell ill, the boss had me monitoring a lot of communications in and out of that area. Special interest."

She sighed, shaking her head a little. "It would be nice if he told us what his interest is there, but I suppose that's too much to ask, isn't it?"

"I imagine he'll tell us when he needs to."

She made a skeptical noise. "I forgot you haven't been subject to his 'telling you when he needs to' yet. When you think he should tell you is never when he tells you. Sometimes it's years later."
He shrugs. "We'll see, I suppose. Not much we can do to affect it, at this point, is there?"

"There's not a point where we can affect it, but yes, you're right," she agreed, shrugging a little. "That's life under Jim. Even I am still getting used to it."

He shrugged. "Had worse supers. At least this one pays well."

"Yes, that's certainly true," she agreed, giving a flick with one of her fingers to the flat around them. "My father offered me a job with him when I got back from America, but this fell into my lap. It pays double what I would have made there. Not that I need the money, but still. Certain amount of prestige it comes with, I suppose."

He nodded in understanding. "Yeah, it does a bit. One of the bigger networks around, certainly the best connected."

"And we're still small," she pointed out. "We only have two out-of-country branches so far. And we'll see whether or not we won't lose either of them, with this war. A stray bomb can do so much damage."

He nodded in agreement. "Still small, but competitive. I've seen tiny sections of Jim's plans, and even those are... massive. Intricate details looking down, infinite expanse looking up."

"There's good reason why his competitors disappear so fast. They underestimate his plans, and then they get engulfed in them," she shrugged, amusement in her voice. "That's how I got employed, you know. I underestimated him. Then he underestimated me."

He raised an eyebrow. "Sounds about right. Seems like to make it around here you need to be interesting, in some way or another."

She nodded, leaning forward to tap the building ash from her nearly-forgotten cigarette into the ashtray. Her tea was also sitting neglected on the table, and she took another drag before taking a sip of the tea, soothing the harsh burn. "God knows I don't recruit every young thing I fuck on New Year's. I can already see Jim's face if I made a habit of it..."

"'Young thing'," he snorted, a touch insulted, but not saying much about it. He glanced over at her. "What caught your interest? I can't be the only killer you've stumbled onto."

"Not like you I haven't. You're not just a killer, you're a serial killer. You have thought-out plans and methods. You have dumping spots. Believe it or not I don't often chance into other serial killers. They aren't that common," she snorted.

The words seemed odd, applied to him by someone else. He knew what he was, but it was strange to hear himself labeled as such. He smirked just a little.

"When's the last time you went and had a hunt? You should do that when you have a chance. Let off some steam," she suggested, eyes on him, curious. "That's a good clean way to do it."

He glanced over at her, studying her for a moment. "Come with me. Let's go now. Go find someone and make it their problem."

"Make what who's problem?" She raised her eyebrows. "I'm all for making a kill, however."

"Make... Everything, I don't know..." he waved a hand. "Make it someone else's problem. Let's just go murder someone, that's all I mean." He was tired.
She appraised him for a moment, took another drag off her cigarette, then nodded, leaning over to grab the phone off the side table, pulling the console into her lap and tucking the receiver up against her ear, waiting for the operator before speaking. "Hi. This is Harrison; Moran and I will be out of base for the next... Mm, three hours. If one of us is desperately, desperately needed, have a couple of the civilians on payroll signal. Thanks, Ethyl."

He stood up quickly, eager now that there was the chance for some relief on the horizon. Some hint of normalcy. He had felt so far from his usual self since Italy. Jumpy and exhausted, lacking motivation. Afraid. He hated it.

She stood, looking down at herself for a second in an appraisal of her clothes, and decided they were good enough to murder someone in. "I'm ready if you are."

He nodded, adjusting his jacket. "Absolutely ready. Let's go," he said, heading for her door. The gun at his chest and the knife in his boot pressed hot against his skin, eager to be useful.

She nodded, tucking the key to her flat into her brassiere and stubbing out her cigarette in the ashtray before she headed for the door. "Alright. Let's get cracking."

He called the lift as she locked up, feeling the anticipation of a proper hunt starting to run through him now. It had been so long since he'd gotten a chance to have any fun, and now that it was in grasp he was dying for it.

She smirked as she stepped into the lift, glancing over at him. "You look like a kid on Christmas."

He shot her a look, but then smirked just slightly. "Been a long time since I've been the hunter, not the hunted."

"Same here," she snorted, not really amused about it. Italy was the worst thing that had ever happened to her. She was sure it was the same for him, even though he had been in the war. "I'm ready to change that."

He nodded emphatically as the lift rose, straightening his jacket slightly. "Where do you want to start?"

"I chose the last one; this one is all yours," she smiled, giving a little gracious wave of her hand.

He nodded, smiling just briefly as the lift jolted to a stop. They stepped out and headed for the street exit. "Alright, then," he said after a few minutes' thought, as they passed the guard and head out into the street. "Let's head for Kensington... Find some rich fucker to mess around with."

"Sounds delightful," she nodded, breathing deep the night air and hoping that they'd get lucky tonight in terms of air raids.

He headed for the road, intent on getting a few blocks away before hailing a cab. She walked next to him comfortably, though stretched her arm carefully. She hadn't gotten around to getting a cast back on it, and it ached a little from being treated like normal.

He hailed a cab after a few turns, and within half an hour they were in Kensington. He walked with a careful slowness, eyeing houses with an appraising attitude, though in reality he was walking a very familiar route. They stopped in front of one particular townhouse, and he eyed it up and down, before turning to Harrison with a grin. "Shall we see who's home?"

She raised her eyebrows. "How do you want to go about this? Knock on the door?"
"I bet they don't keep the windows locked," he said with a grin, heading for the side yard.

Breaking in wasn't her preferred method, but she wouldn't say no when he was obviously in a good mood, so she chuckled a little and followed him. He tried a few windows before finding one that slid up at his command. He hoisted himself through fairly effortlessly, and reached out to give her a hand if she needed it.

It was awkward pulling herself through with just the one arm, but she managed it with his help, stifling a choice swear when her arm clipped the window frame.

He considered asking what had happened to the cast, but decided against it for the moment. He needed to focus. He took a slow breath, the familiar scent of the house making muscles tense all along his body, and suddenly he regretted making this choice. He closed his eyes, not breathing for a moment as he fought back waves of images that were clamoring for his attention. His hand found his gun, and he calmed slowly, forcing his pulse to slow.

He wasn't tense long, but it was long enough to notice, and she felt a dreg of suspicion stir in her gut. Her first instinct was trap, but she thought about it for a second and realized that it was an awful strange trap, and an unreliable one at that, so she threw that out the window, and went back to assessing his behavior. She raised an eyebrow a little at him. "Moran, where are we, exactly?"

He glanced at her, forced his muscles to relax, heard the suspicion in her voice. "Kensington," he said quietly, heading further into the room and toward the stairs.

Her knife was in her hand the moment he turned away from her, and she made sure it snicked audibly. "Try again."

He stilled, his hand at his gun now, back to her, body relaxed now at the prospect of combat. "No need to get tense, ma'am," he said quietly. "Welcome to my father's house."

"Jesus," she muttered, rolling her eyes and tucking her knife away again. "I specifically granted you permission to do this, you didn't have to trick me into it," she snorted softly, walking up to stand by his side. "Carry on."

He didn't respond. He had been worried that she would delay him, make him wait for proper planning, but he didn't want that. Not right now. He wanted revenge. He headed for the stairs once more.

She walked behind him, feet just shy of silent on the floor, her eyes roving over the house, analyzing what she could. There might be consequences to killing a Lord like this, but she'd promised him this, and he needed something to keep him going. They could figure out a way to lessen the impact of the elder Moran's death.

Moran's pulse was thundering in him despite his usual control, and he was trying to plan ahead. He hadn't, really. This had been spur-of-the-moment, fueled by rage brought to a boil by his interactions with Jim without his even knowing it. It had lingered deep, building pressure, and now it was erupting and it was all he could do to plan a step ahead of it. He walked up the steps that he had tracked so many times as a child, terrified of the tall shadow on the stairs behind him, knowing what was coming. Now he was the shadow, and he was going to take advantage of every opportunity afforded the position.

She stayed two steps behind him, wary of getting any closer. It wasn't that she still thought this was a trap - she believed him - but the fact was that she could see the tension rolling off of him in waves, and if he was startled she didn't want to be in the immediate strike zone. He looked like he
could snap out at any moment, and she was well aware that if she caught even a sub par blow of his to the face, she would hit the ground. His arms were at least twice the width of hers, if not more.

He finally stopped outside the master bedroom, with its carved wooden door, and took a slow breath, closing his eyes again before turning and looking at Harrison. "I don't want to kill him," he whispered. "Not yet. I want him to play with."

She nodded. "Do you want to incapacitate him and I'll call for an extraction team? What do you want to do here? I'll follow your lead."

He hesitated, but the suggestion was a good one and he nodded slightly. "Yes... That would be the best route, I think."

She nodded. "Alright. We'll knock him unconscious and then use a phone in the house. I assume you know the address to this place."

"Yes, of course," he said quietly, taking another breath before pushing the door open slowly. It swung on silent hinges- a foolish luxury- and he stepped inside onto the deep pile carpet that muffled his footsteps. The lights were out, moonlight filtering through the window, and his father lay sleeping in the large four-poster.

Lorna lingered behind him, giving him some space to move, to breathe, to take revenge in whatever way he saw fit. He'd never spoken to her about why he hated his father, but after the recent experience with Jim, it was clear what had happened. She couldn't give him closure for Italy, but she could for this.

He walked forward slowly, approaching the sleeping man in his bed, and there was such giddy irony to it that for a moment he just paused, savoring. Then he slid his gun out of its holster and walked forward, pressing it to the man's chest at the same time as he slid his free hand up his father's blanketed thigh. "Wake up, Riordan..." he whispered softly.

The man stirred in his sleep, groaning softly, and then seemed to realize the touch was real, and blinked his bleary eyes open, confused. He squinted in the dark up at his son, then drew away a little, surprised. "Sebastian..?"

"Hello, Da," he whispered, smiling. "Be a good boy now and don't make any noise."

Lorna immediately felt the urge to exit the room. This was an imitation of what Sebastian had been through, it was obvious, and it was sickening to think about. Happening to him now, at his age, was horrific, but as a child? She turned away, a hand covering her mouth.

Riordan was frozen, his attention only just now coming to the gun against his chest. "Sebastian... Don't do anything stupid."

"I think that's my line," Sebastian retorted, eyes alight, a touch frenzied, high on the power of this moment. "Close your eyes, Da. It'll all be over soon." He shifted his grip on the gun suddenly, and brought the butt down hard on his father's temple. Riordan fell limp.

She still didn't have a handle on herself when he knocked the elder Moran out, and she closed her eyes for a second, trying to figure out why exactly she was so affected. She settled on two things. One: Italy. They'd said all sorts of things to her while they took what they wanted, and a couple of them were heart-stoppingly close to what Sebastian had said. Two: Valerie. Vincent's sister. They never really knew what had happened to her before she died, what she had gone through before perishing in that cellar. It broke her heart to imagine this happening to her. But it was unfair to
Moran to make this about herself. She needed to be solid here. How did she fucking do that?

He took the bedsheet and tore a few strips off, using them to bind his father's hands tightly, his movements rough but precise. Eventually he looked over at Harrison, her silhouette hunched slightly in the dimness. "Alright, let's call..." he said quietly, still alight with adrenaline.

Her posture snapped up and she nodded once before turning and exiting the room. She was capable of finding the kitchen herself. It would give her time to collect herself.

It was his turn to be suspicious. She seemed off, and he wasn't about to let her double-cross him. He used the last piece of cloth to tie his father's bound hands to the bedpost, and then slipped after her.

She found the kitchen and then the phone, and after the long series of code words with the operator got through to the small kidnapping division. "This is Harrison," she said when Frank picked up the phone, and she heard him take a puff off his cigar.

"How can we help you tonight, ma'am?"

"I need a pickup of live cargo at... fuck. I don't know the address. Hold for a minute while I find out." She set the phone down on the counter without waiting for his reply and set off back the way she had came, and when she saw the black shadow in the hallway her hand darted for her knife. She was a split second from throwing it when she realized it was Moran.

"Jesus, Moran, you goddamn wraith. I just about put this between your eyes. Go tell the man on the phone the address, will you?"

He didn't comment, just slipped past her and into the kitchen, giving the address quietly before offering the phone to Harrison again, unperturbed by her attempt at the knife.

She watched him cautiously, unsure why he had been following her, but with no real reason to be overly suspicious, and took the phone to finish hammering out the details with Frank before hanging up. "Alright, they should be here soon."

He nodded slightly, turning to the cabinets and starting to root through for anything good to eat. He was suddenly starving.

She leaned back against the counter, just observing him. She didn't know what to say to him, if she was being honest with herself. How did you talk to somebody who had just begun getting revenge on their sexually abusive father?

He turned around a moment later with a box of cookies, offering her one as he crunched away at another one. He didn’t know what to say either. He didn’t know what she had pieced together, and he didn’t really want to know.

She took one just to be polite, quietly noting that his appetite had returned. That was good. It was good to know that this was cathartic for him.

He just ate quietly for a bit, before setting the box aside with a sigh and heading for the staircase again. He didn't want to leave his father alone for too long.

She looked after him for a moment and decided to give him some space and wait for her men to show up. Had it only been an hour or two since she'd put her hand on his cheek?

He watched over his unconscious father quietly from the doorway. He didn't get too close, not
trusting himself to be in control. He didn't want to kill him. Not yet.

It was five minutes until the knock on the door, and when she let them in and directed them upstairs she stepped back and waited by the door. She would only get in the way of them carting the man down the stairs.

He stood beside the door, out of immediate sight, as the men entered, gun raised until he was sure it was who he was expecting. "Codes," he said quietly. The men jumped and turned, but responded quickly with the proper credentials, and he nodded. "Get him to the network and secure him. Alive. I don't particularly care how bruised he may get on the way."

"Yes, sir," the man nodded, turning to wave his men in and then heading for the unconscious man on the bed. Riordan was bustled down the stairs in the next minute, and then Lorna went up the stairs.

"Anything you want to grab from here, Moran?"

He shook his head, looking around the room one more time before heading out into the hall. He glanced at the door to his room for a moment, took an unconscious half-step in that direction, then stopped. A moment later he turned and headed down the stairs without looking back.

Lorna was waiting outside, a freshly-lit cigarette in her hand. The van with Riordan in it was already gone. She looked over as he came out, raising an eyebrow. "All ready?"

"I want to burn it," he said suddenly. The thought hadn't registered in his mind before it was out of his mouth, but he didn't dislike it. "Let's find a body. One his size. Make a body if we can't find a pre-dead one. And burn the place to the ground."

She sighed, dropping her cigarette on the sidewalk and stubbing it out with her shoe. "Alright. We'll give another call to HQ. They'll take care of it. I don't want to do it myself."

"I do. Go home if you want. I want to light the place my fucking self." He looked back at the building with a glint in his eyes.

She nodded, turning towards the street. "Don't do anything stupid. I'm going to go visit the infirmary, get another cast. If you'll be gone longer than three hours, call our operator and let them know."

He nodded, watching her go before walking back into the house to call the network.

Lorna returned to HQ and went to the infirmary, where a disapproving doctor fitted her with a new cast, and then she returned to her quarters, where she picked up the phone and dialed Jim's extension.

He picked up on the second ring. "Yes, Harrison, what is it?" he asked, sounding bored.

"We've kidnapped Lord Riordan Moran and are burning down his house, with a dummy body inside. Moran would like to kill his father, and I gave him permission while we were in Italy. I thought I should inform you before the deed is done," she said, a little cautiously. She regretted not informing him earlier, but she'd had other things on her mind, and she hadn't expected Moran to
make such a sudden decision on the matter. "I have a feeling he has some anger he needs to get out of his system. He..." she sighed, closing her eyes. "He thought by sleeping with you he was protecting me. After that time I told him I would kill one of us."

There was a long silence, then a sigh. "It's like a radio drama. Come upstairs, Harrison. I'm not doing this over the phone."

"Alright. I'll be there in a couple of minutes," she agreed, then hung up, sighing. Doing what over the phone? After the sort of things he'd put her through lately she couldn't help being a little nervous about any possible punishment for failing to inform him of something like this. She took a deep breath and then headed out the door, and a few minutes later knocked on his door, worrying the inside of her cheek with her teeth.

"Come in," Jim called, leaning forward, elbows on his desk. He was eager to see how this played out. There had been so much nuance to everything Harrison had just told him, so many tantalizing bites of information... He just had to see it all on her face for himself. "Sit," he said as she walked in, nodding to the chair across from him. "Let's talk."

She nodded and sat, her cast-clad arm cradled against her chest. "Where do you want me to start?"

"Let's start off at the top. You gave Moran permission to murder a member of parliament without mentioning the idea to me?" His voice was light, almost amused.

She sighed, lifting her unscathed hand to rub at her eyes. "It was back in Italy, when the idea of him being Lord Moran's son was a little less concrete in my head. I... ugh. I granted him a request for his work with Ciano. He's not a grifter; I had to find a way to motivate him, being as stubborn as he is. When he said he wanted to kill his father and I... yes. I thought I would have the opportunity to tell you. Tonight he suggested going out to make a kill and he led me to his father's residence. I thought he was going to betray me for an instant, he was acting so strangely."

He tsked. "Naughty. Permission or not, that will need to be addressed. And the other bit- his motivations for fucking me. I gather from your description that you mentioned your rather rash inclinations to the boy?"

She closed her eyes, sighing again. "Yes. I was a wreck. I hated you, Jim. I hated what you did to me. I still hate it. Suddenly the only person I could trust was the damn bodyguard. I told him that if you touched me again I would kill one of us, and it must have activated his guard dog sentimentality. I never told him that we came to an agreement in the rubble until... Christ... tonight? He looked like he was going to hurl."

Jim actually giggled. "What a delightful situation. The idiot up here martyring himself on my cock... Don't tell me you feel bad for him, Lorna, please..." He eyed her hungrily. "You do, don't you?"

She let out an aggressively tired breath, rubbing her forehead. "Yes, I do. I went through the worst thing that's ever happened to me with him, Jim. I'm not emotionless, no matter how much either of us wish I could be. I see myself in him. I'm a selfish person, and seeing myself in him means I can't help but feel sympathy for him. Christ..." She leaned back in her chair, looking weary. "Jim, I've never related to anyone like I relate to that boy. We can't relate to each other. You don't even want to. But I'm human, Jim. I have these weaknesses. I want to have meaningful relationships with somebody. It can't be whipped out of me. I'm sorry."

He gave a dismayed sigh, leaning back in his chair. "Christ, you lot are dull... you would fall for the bodyguard. Didn't your mother ever teach you not to fraternize with the help? But I suppose if
it can't be avoided, it could be mildly entertaining. It's already proven that. Just be mindful- if your fondness for him causes me trouble, I'll make you kill him and eat him, piece by piece." He closed his eyes. "Understood?"

She was immediately offended. "What?" She scoffed, eyebrows nearabouts her hairline. "Jim. I haven't fallen for him. He's a friend. Jesus.. if I was going to fall for anyone it would be you, now, wouldn't it?"

He opened his eyes, studying her for a long time, face unreadable. Then he nodded. "Let us hope so, Lorna. For both our sakes. You're dismissed."

She nodded jerkily and stood, leaving swiftly, her face beginning to burn. How could he think she'd fallen for Moran? She didn't fall for people. Not anyone.

Jim watched her go, eyes sparked with interest. Someone else had found a weak point in his impenetrable-save-to-him lieutenant. Now the question was whether or not to dispose of Moran... And that would depend greatly on how things turned out in the near future.

Lorna smoked a cigarette before she got ready for bed, trying to calm her frazzled nerves. She didn't know what to make of this. Now that Jim thought she was falling for Moran, did she push him away and look like she was overcompensating, or did she continue on as normal and accidentally prove his point? There was no winning, here.

Chapter End Notes

Leave us a kudos if you haven't already! Drop us a comment! We love feedback!

Imagine Dragons - Monster
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGbNbn8tB5k&t=0s&index=26&list=PLSCvi5dTA1ahDv1wz8x5mRI4kKDxqhd4S
The Young And Volatile

Chapter Notes

Uh yo this is a viscerally disgusting chapter y'all have been warned, huge TW for child abuse

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Moran got back early in the morning, smelling of smoke and blood and exhaustion. He showered and shaved, checking that nothing urgent had come up, before he fell into bed for a nap. He needed to be rested to deal with his father.

Jim stayed up, working and considering his plan moving forward with Moran and Harrison. If he pulled the right strings, he could be completely in control of the whole endeavor without them even realizing. That had the potential to be quite fun.

Sebastian woke with the sun, as per usual, feeling groggy but unable to sleep longer. He got up and headed into the kitchen to make himself a cuppa, considering the problem at hand. It seemed almost real, after all these years, to have his father in his clutches. The newspapers would be screaming about Riordan's death by now, and he could do whatever he wanted to his father, consequence-free.

Jim knew that if he waited too long in the day, Sebastian would be consumed with his father, and he wanted the boy's full attention. So just before noon he put a call out for Moran to meet him in his office, and waited with excited anticipation. Oh, the games this would make.

Moran knew better than to keep Moriarty waiting, no matter what lay in store in the cells. He finished dressing and took the lift down to the drab waiting room, knocking crisply on the door.

Jim called him in without further ado, standing and leaning against his desk in a bid to throw Moran off. "Moran. Take a seat, or stand, it doesn't matter to me. But we've got to talk."

He stood, not really pleased with the idea of sitting while Jim stood. “Of course, sir. What about?”

Jim had thought about bringing up Moran tricking Lorna into the night before, but that would raise his guard. He didn't want that, not yet. "Harrison. Specifically, your relationship."

He did his best to keep his expression neutral. “What are you referring to, specifically, sir?” he asked, uncertain, but well-aware that he should tread lightly.

He crossed his arms over his chest, the slightest bit of a smirk on his face. "She's got a crush on you, Moran. She won't admit it to me, but it's easy to see on a woman who never learned how to hide it. Now, I'm inclined to let you at her, on one condition. Don't pretend you're not intrigued. I can only put up with that from one of you."

He raised an eyebrow, still uncertain. “I... She’s certainly interesting, sir,” he admitted finally. He wasn’t going to disobey an order. “What’s your condition?”

"I want the inside scoop, Moran," he smirked, "I want the nitty-gritty details on Lorna Harrison falling for somebody. This is a take it or leave it deal. I'll consider sleeping with her without
agreeing a punishable offense."

He stiffened slightly at that. "To be clear, sir... I agree to your terms or any pursuit of Harrison is out-of-bounds?"

His smirk grew. "If you wanted somebody to agree to your terms, wouldn't you do the same?"

He shifted slightly, but then nodded. "Agreed, then, sir..."

"Good. That's settled," he said, shifting and moving around the desk to sink into his seat. His leg was bothering him a little. "I expect to hear some tasty little tidbit at least once a month, otherwise you'll be in violation of our agreement. Understood? Questions?"

"One," he said, straightening his jacket slightly. "What constitutes an acceptable 'tidbit'?"

"You'll know them when you see them. Confessions, habits, sex..." He shrugged. "Little signs that I'm right about her."

He nods just slightly. "Understood, sir... Is that all?"

"Yes, that is all, you may go," he replied, leaning back in his chair and pulling out a folder from a drawer of his desk before he raised a hand. "Oh, and, Moran. I shouldn't have to say this. But don't tell her."

"No, of course not," he said quietly, nodding and heading for the door, trying to turn the situation over in his head.

Lorna stood outside Riordan's cell, smoking, and observing the despicable man through the glass window. She couldn't get revenge on the men who had done those things to her, but here was somebody who deserved it just as much. She stubbed out her cigarette and opened the door.

Riordan was asleep in a metal chair in the middle of the room. He was strapped down with leather, dressed in pajamas and nothing else.

She shut the door behind her, taking a few steps into the room, heels sharp against the cement. "Riordan... Wake uuupppp..."

He was slow at first, but then started awake with a surprised noise, eyes wide as the found her. "What... Please tell me what's happening. I need to see my son..."

"Oh, I don't think you need to see him. You'll just have to wait until he comes to you," she said calmly, her voice quiet. "In fact, he was the one who requested to kill you, so I doubt it would help. I'm simply here to exact a little vengeance for my friend. Letting you get away with your abuse would be the real crime."

"I'm not certain what you're talking about," he said, bewildered. "Not my Sebastian... You must have me confused with someone else."

Lorna's lip curled in disgust. "You're one of those, are you? Oblivious? Let me help you understand, then," she snapped, anger very quickly filling her, and she closed the distance between them in a quick few steps, a knife appearing in her hand, which had abandoned its sling. Very suddenly it was under his throat, and she was leaned down in front of him, a hand on his groin.
"Get it, yet?"

His eyes were wide on her, breathing shallow in the presence of the knife. "Don't touch me, please. What is it that you want? Money? Influence? I can help you, I'm sure..."

"Peace of mind, Moran," she snapped, knife pressing harder against his throat, a warning, as her other hand started massaging his crotch. "That's what I want. Now give it to me."

"I don't understand... What's going on?" he asked, trying to pull away from the knife and her hand, wrists tugging at the bonds a little.

"Think of this as the equivalent of what you used to do to your own son," she hissed, not letting up on either front. "Instead of a knife, it was a grown man's power. Instead of my hand, it was yours."

He wrinkled his nose in disgust at that, eyes suddenly going dark. "That is none of your business. That is a family matter."

"Oh, it's my business now," she snapped, the knife nicking his throat. "Better get used to it."

"It isn't," he insisted, angry now, pontificating. "I don't see what right you have to come in here and discuss my private family matters. Where is my son? What have you done to him?"

"I haven't done anything to him, unlike you. Everything I've done with him has been consensual. I pride myself on it. I'm debasing myself with you," she hissed. "If what you did to him was so great, why's it such a secret? Why are you defensive?"

"I didn't do anything to him that is any of your business," he growled, trying to squirm away again. "How I choose to show affection to my son is entirely my choice. You, on the other hand..."

He wasn't getting it. She let out a sound of frustration and pulled back, slapping him backhanded across the face and turning to leave.

His head snapped sideways with the force of the blow, and he worked his jaw as he rounded back on her. "Women..." he spat. "All this suffrage bullshit... You think you're equal. You'll never understand what it means to be like a man in this world."

She whipped back around, fury blazing in her eyes. "Oh, that was a mistake," she laughed, walking back over to him, and without hesitating lifted her heeled foot and brought it down hard on his groin.

He let out a scream of pain, which ended in a rather undignified squeak, his chest heaving as he curled forward as much as his restraints would allow, face reddening.

"I understand that if you did that to me I wouldn't squeak," she said snidely, then turned back around and left the room.

He didn't respond, too overwhelmed with pain to care as she slammed the door behind her.

She lit another cigarette and headed for her office, fuming, and feeling absolutely filthy.

Moran got to the cell less than an hour later, waiting eagerly for the guard to unlock it and walking
in almost as soon as the door was open, buzzing with energy.

Riordan looked up as his son entered, hope entering his eyes. The nick at his throat had clotted, but a line of dried blood trailed down his throat. "Sebastian. Thank God. What's happening?"

He walked forward, eyebrows furrowing slightly in annoyance at the cut. He'd wanted to draw the first blood. He met his father's eyes, and smiled anyway. Still plenty of firsts to find. "What do you think is happening?"

"I think that woman is taking advantage of you! She was so meddlesome. She..." He shook his head. "Just, help me, Sebastian. Please."

"Sure, pop, anything," he said, walking around behind Riordan, smiling. "How can I be of service?"

"Let me out! Help me get out of here!" he pleaded, craning his neck to try and track him. "Tell me what's happening."

"Oh. That. No, I can't do that," he sighed, reaching out to run his fingers through Riordan's hair. "If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't be here at all. I want to have some time with you before I help you leave."

"What do you mean?" He asked, trying to ignore the nagging feeling in his gut. This didn't feel right.

"It's been a long time, pop," he said casually, walking over to the cupboards behind him. "I've hardly seen you since I shipped out... I've learned so much."

"Sebastian, you're not answering my questions," he said, voice tight with concern. "You know I don't like it when you ignore me. And when did you get home? Why didn't you inform me?"

"Oh, I've been home on and off, mostly taking time with friends, just enjoying life..." He opened a cabinet, starting to rummage around. "You seemed busy with work. I didn't want to intrude." He removed a knife, contemplating it before tucking it into the back of his trousers and hefting up a thin lead pipe.

"Stop ignoring me, Sebby," Riordan growled, trying to be stern, but his instincts were pinging unpleasantly and he was finding it difficult. "What's going on?"

"Oh, Sebby... I haven't been Sebby since before the war, pop. They beat little Sebby right out of me in boot camp and I can't say I was sad to see him go..." He walked around into view again, pipe in hand, eyeing Riordan with eager amusement in his eyes. "But I see you're behind on the news. No worries. I'll beat Sebby out of you, too, soon."

Riordan was very visibly alarmed by the pipe in his hand, his brain struggling to understand. "I... Sebastian, is she making you do this? What are you caught up in? Please, just let me out and we can fix this," he begged, eyes on the pipe.

"Oh, this?" he looked at the pipe as if surprised to see it, then smiled. "No... No, pop... This is my reward. I've worked hard for this moment...." Then he paused, his attention turning back to his father as something penetrated his glee. "Who's 'she'?"

"That woman! Insufferable, doesn't know her place. She touched me against my wishes. I feel violated."
"That woman..." he said slowly, eyeing the elder Moran. "Describe her."

"Dark hair, average height, had a knife," he frowned, trying to make sense of the question. He already knew, but the confirmation stung. He grit his teeth, contemplating, before dropping the pipe and walking forward, pulling his own knife out and reaching for one of the leather straps. He waited for his father to have a flicker of hope, before he grinned and started cutting through the man's clothes instead, pulling them off of him as he went.

"Sebastian! Stop this madness!" He shouted, pulling at his restraints helplessly.

"Stop what, pop? Isn't this what we always do? Sure, the roles are reversed, but hey, I think I'm more of a man than you are now, don't you think? My turn to be the one having fun."

Riordan's brain was short-circuiting. "But- but I don't want this," he objected, confused and disoriented.

"And I did?" he asked with a laugh as he finished clearing away most of his father's shirt and moved to the trousers.

"Yes!" He argued, though seeds of doubt were beginning to sprout in his head. He did his best to ignore them. The consequences of listening to them was too great.

"Go ahead, pop," he said, ripping up the left seam of Riordan's trousers and pulling them off of that leg. "Do you remember? Remember how I cried, how you told me it would all be okay?" He looks up with a sneer. "Well, it will. It will all be okay, daddy. Sebby loves you." He cut through his father's pants.

Lorna was sitting her office, doing paperwork with her cigarette in the corner of her lips. She was still fighting off goosebumps on the back of her neck. God, the man was just so disgusting.

Sebastian closed the door behind him, and went to wash off the blood at the nearby scrub sink. Or most of it, anyway. He just needed to be presentable. He'd shower soon.

His father was unconscious, and that was good enough for him right now. He headed for the lift. He had business to take care of.

He knocked on Harrison's door a few minutes later, after having stopped by his flat to get a fresh shirt.

"Come in," she said around her cigarette, still adamantly denying that she was holding onto it so long to calm her nerves. She looked up from her desk as the door opened and raised her eyebrows as she saw Sebastian. "Moran. How can I help you?"

"Did you go in with my father?" he asked, cutting to the chase immediately.

"Yes," she admitted, sighing. "Apologies. I should have asked for your blessing. I was angry, and wasn't thinking straight."

"You were angry?" he snapped, eyes tight, tall frame tense.
She closed her eyes, letting out a breath. "I'm aware of the unfairness, Moran. I'm sorry. What can I do to apologize?"

"What did you say to him?" he demanded harshly.

"I tried to make him understand what he'd done. Needless to say, I think, he didn't get it," she sighed, opening her eyes. She didn't want to, but it was only right.

"That wasn't any of your concern," he spat, his face reddening despite himself. He was angry and embarrassed, his gut roiling. "I don't need your interference."

She watched the flush cross his face, and very suddenly understood what he was so upset about. That didn't make his anger and easier to deal with. If anything, it made it worse. Embarrassed men were irrational. "Moran... I'm sorry. Really, I am. But are you angry that I tried to take things into my own hands, or are you angry that I figured it out?"

He worked his jaw. She was his superior officer, and a woman, so he curbed the urge to punch her in the throat. "I don't know what you think you're talking about, and frankly, I don't care. Just stay the hell out of my personal business. It doesn't have anything to do with the organization, and it certainly doesn't have anything to do with you."

That sparked a twinge of anger in her. She was doing her best to be gracious, and he was only digging himself deeper. "Alright, Sebastian," she said sharply, eyes sparking dangerously. "I'd like to think we've been through enough of a shitshow together for you not to lie to my face. I'd understand if you just wanted some privacy, but you don't get to come in here, reject my numerous attempts at an apology, and then pretend that I was mistaken in the first place. The last time you outright lied to me, I tried to give you your space, and you gave yourself blood poisoning like an absolute fucking idiot. Your judgment has not, historically, been stellar when it comes to your personal business. I'm sorry I interfered with your father, as I've said, but you've passed the line. If you don't want me in your personal fucking business, you don't get to treat me like a peer. You have to bottle your anger the fuck up and march your punk ass out of my office, understand?"

"No," he spat, eyes flashing, fists clenched. "No, you know what? I'm not the one who has to decide," he growled. "You want to be pals? Great. Then you respect my right to privacy and you get to deal with my anger when you don't. If you're my superior officer, then fine, you stay the fuck out of my business. You don't get to be the knight in fucking lacy armor charging in to save me. If we're peers? Fine. I get to be pissed for a bit despite your fucking useless apologies. And if we aren't? Great. I get to be pissed anyway because you were a fucking intrusive cunt. You want me to get out? I will. But you sure as hell don't get to tell me to bottle up my anger. I earned that."

He turned for the door, then turned back, a new thought on his roaring brain. "And if you don't want me to lie to you? Try living up to my fucking trust."

She laughed, standing with explosive anger, her chair falling back onto the floor with a crash, a hand plucking her cigarette from her mouth and tossing it onto the floor between them. "Call me that again, Sebastian, I fucking dare you. You've earned your anger at me? I'm sorry, but I think I remember you only taking one beating for me, or am I wrong?" She snarled, playing dirty and knowing it, but too fed up with him to care. "You're the one who has to fucking decide what you want from me, goddammit! First you keep me at a distance and then you tell me you fucking miss me? Do you even remember? You martyr yourself trying to protect me from Jim, but if you'd fucking spoken to me first, you would have known it wasn't fucking NECESSARY. WHERE'S THE TRUST THERE, MORAN?"

"It is my job to protect you," he growled softly, his voice almost shaking with anger. "One which
you have prevented me from doing on **multiple** occasions, I might add. I would have taken a lot more beatings for you, but you forbid me from doing it. This punk ass, as you put it, was the one you confessed murder-suicidal feelings to. But no, of course, professional working relationship. That's how bosses always treat their employees, right?" He wrinkled his nose in disgust. "You're the problem here, not me. I've done my best to respect your wishes, but you want all the fun of a friend with none of the work. I'm not your lapdog, and I'm not going to take whatever you dish out just because. If you're just using me to get your little matronly rocks off, then find another fucking toy."

Jesus Christ, he was as confounding as his fucking father. He would never accept that he was wrong, and he would continue to twist her words until she tried to put a knife in him. So she shut down, the anger sliding off her face like a poorly-worn mask, and she turned and sat on the edge of her desk, back half to him, and bent to pull a bottle of bourbon out of her desk. "Get out, Sebastian. My Pavlovian response towards fighting with Jim is just building me up to fuck you or roll over like a dog, and you don't want the former and I don't want the latter. I'm going to drink this off and I highly suggest you do the same."

He went quiet at that, disarmed. Part of him did want to fuck her. To just feel this tension, and anger and confusion and humiliation... to feel all of that burn away. He looked at her back for a long moment, then closed his mouth, heading out the door and closing it behind him.

He headed for the lift, riding it up to the holding cells, and walked out. It took five minutes to find a guard and key in. His father wasn't conscious and he didn't bother waking him, just slid his knife behind the man's jugular and sliced outward. He spent less than a minute in the cell, staring at the body, before heading for the lift. He was done.

She spent her time getting smashed in her office, the door locked now, sitting in her chair and trying to sort out her feelings until she was too drunk to care, and then she unlocked the door and headed back to her flat, where she fumbled outside the door with her keys for almost three minutes before giving up and sitting down, leaning back against the door. She would wait until she sobered up a little to get inside.

He came up to his flat, and glanced at Harrison slumped on the floor outside of hers. That gave him pause for a moment, bodyguard instincts kicking in above any personal emotion. "Are you alright, ma'am?" he asked formally.

She gave him a thumbs up before realizing that wasn't really a great answer, and shut her eyes, leaning her head back against the door. "I'm... yup. Just quite sauced. Waiting to sober - hic - up a... a little before trying the keys... again. I'll be fine. You can g.. go."

He sighed, walking over. "Where are your keys, ma'am? I'll help you get inside. It's not secure, being out in the hall like this."

She patted the ground next to her for a moment before she found them, and held them up in his general direction, not arguing and very wisely deciding not to make things difficult for him, or to speak unnecessarily.

He took the keys, unlocking the door without comment and offering her a hand up.

"Thanks," she mumbled, letting him pull her up and moving across the threshold under her own power, determined not to be a burden. Or too much of one, at least.
He walked her into her flat and got her settled on the couch before nodding slightly and putting her keys in plain sight. "Do you need anything?"

"No, thank you," she breathed, melting into the couch, eyes shut. "You can leave me to my own devices.... Thank you."

He nodded a little, heading for the door and then pausing. He closed his eyes, then turned to look at her, expression torn. He opened his mouth for a half a breath, uncertain, but then shook his head and headed out the door.

She was only vaguely conscious for the sound of the door shutting, and then she shifted to lay down and sleep it off.

He headed for his own quarters, closing the door and bolting it behind him. He had very little interest in drinking, so he took a hot shower to scrub the blood off. He stood in front of the mirror when he was done, tracing fingers over the ridged scar on his chest, pink from the hot water.

*Daddy loves you, Sebby. Daddy loves you, so you have to keep our secret. People wouldn't understand...*  
He looked up at his face, and wished he could carve his father's features off of it. He turned suddenly and headed for his room, laying down on his bed and looking up at the ceiling. Everything felt quiet. He hated it.

He eventually fell asleep, exhausted, confused, and feeling very much alone.

At some point, she woke up again, and was disappointed to find herself mostly sober, and got up to turn the radio on, deciding that she needed some coffee and eggs. Without some hydration she would be too hungover tomorrow to function.

She realized halfway through her eggs that she didn't want to be in her flat alone, and she threw the rest of them out and changed into street clothes, working around her sling, and then she headed for the surface.

Chapter End Notes

Who do you guys think was right in that argument? Anyone?

The Killers - Jenny Was A Friend Of Mine
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om_18WhUddY&index=26&list=PLSCvi5dTA1ahDvIwz8x5mRI4kKDxqh4S&t=0s
Their numbers had been dwindling. He considered that from his place at the bar, eyeing the dregs of a beer. This hadn't used to be his bar, but the fellow who had had claim to it a few months ago had come home in a box, and so he supposed it was his bar now. It was good hunting grounds. Busy, plenty of lowlifes that no one looked for, no one missed. Occasionally a good catch. Like the one who had just walked through the door, for example. He eyed her curiously, ordering another beer with a wave of his hand. She had poise, something that was usually overtly lacking in his territory. He smiled.

She went up to the bar and ordered a martini, deciding that she was going to at the very least get drunk again, if not find someone to fuck. As she waited for her drink she leaned back against the bar and considered the people populating the place, and raised her eyebrow imperceptibly as she came across the soldier in the corner. He was watching her, and with more of a look than men usually had. Another like Sebastian? God, did she have some luck.

He raised his beer in her direction, an idle smile on his face, and sat back to watch the show again. She decided not to approach this one, and sat down on the stool next to her to enjoy her martini. He would have to work for it this time.

He let her drink, watching her with interest. She chatted with a few other men, but he bided his time, waiting for her to get a few drinks into her before he approached. They were always more pliable once they were relaxed.

It wasn't long until she was well and truly drunk again, laughing with the bartender and happily taking any free drinks thrown her way, consequences beginning to fade away in the distance.

He counted her drinks as he eased through his beer, and when she started laughing more freely, he stood, walking over. He slid in easily between her and the crowd of men around her, mainly because most of them caught sight of him and sulked back a little. He raised an eyebrow at the man on the stool next to her, and the worker muttered an apology and hopped down. He took the empty seat and flagged the bartender. "Another beer please, and whatever the lady likes."

"I'd say you're generous, but you've waited to take advantage of the others' free drinks, haven't you?" she asked, smirking, her cheeks red with the drink. Still, she turned to the bartender and waved a hand at her half-finished drink to indicate she'd like another. "Smart. What's your name, soldier?"

"Lieutenant George Thompson, ma'am. And you?" he said with a smile. "And I am generous. If I had sidled up right away you would have had only the contents of a poor soldier's pocket. I left you in the hands of the whole bar for a time, and I'd say you've likely fared better for it."
She laughed, genuinely amused by him. "Smart *and* generous, noted. Well, George, my name is Lorna Harrison. And you're well on your way to winning my evening."

He laughed. "I already have. It'll just take you a few minutes to realize it fully," he retorted with a grin, taking his beer as the bartender arrived with their drinks, and raising it in her direction.

She smirked in agreement, raising her glass in tandem with his. He was aggressively charming.

It was a few minutes more into drinking that she leaned forward, putting her hand on his arm, a small grin on her face. "I can tell your secret, George. You're not being subtle."

"Oh, and what is that?" he asked, smiling and reaching up to smooth a hand over hers.

She leaned closer, and winked. "I know you're trying to kill me. I've been in your shoes."

For a moment his eyes flashed dark, but then he was all smiles again. "Kill you? A fellow predator? Never. I've got a sense of kinship with you, ma'am. I'd never tread on that."

"Good. I'm glad you're as wise as the other one. He got a good deal out of it, maybe you'll get one too," she shrugged, smirking, and got off her barstool, a little uncoordinated. "Now come on, take me back to your place. I've had enough chatting."

He smiled, standing and offering her his arm. "That I am happy to do, ma'am," he said pleasantly.

She took his arm and let her guide her drunken steps out of the bar, her vision a little blurry, and she giggled over nothing as they stepped out into the brisk night air.

He wrapped an arm around her waist to help her stay upright, heading down the street. "You'll like my place, I think," he said with a smile. "A predator like yourself. You'll appreciate it."

"I'm sure I will," she hummed, wrapping her good arm around his waist to assist in the endeavor of keeping her standing. She could feel that he was armed, but that didn't alarm her. He was a soldier, and a hunter, and she was armed too. "How... how far is it?"

"Just another few blocks. Don't worry, dear, I'll help you get there. You've had a few too many, I think." He smiled.

"That's q-quite possible," she chuckled, going to kick a piece of rubble out of her path and nearly tripping. "Not that you helped."

"I only bought you the one drink, dear," he chuckled. "Blame the prey trying to ply you for favors." He turned down an alley and leaned her against a porch railing. "Here," he said with a smile, before he walked up the stoop and unlocked the door. He returned a moment later to help her up the stairs. "Welcome to my home."

It was a dark place, with simple furniture. Mostly it was the location that made it a good place for someone like them. Down an alley, not far from the nearby bars, surrounded by what looked like mechanical shops - empty at night, and loud during the day. "Well, isn't this charming?"

He smiled, turning on a light in the sitting room. He guided her over to a chair. "Here. Have a seat. Let me get you some water."

She sat, nodding a little. "Thanks, darling. Rather avoid that hangover."

George smiled, and headed into the kitchen, out of sight, grabbing a glass from the cabinet. He
filled it from the sink, and then set it down, reaching for a small, unlabeled dropper bottle on the shelf beside the sink. He opened it, put three drops into the glass, watching them disappear, before he recapped the bottle and picked up the glass, heading into the living room and handing it to Lorna. "Here."

"Thanks," she smiled, taking it and immediately taking three big gulps. She knew if she tried to sip her body would try to fool her into thinking that she was already hydrated, which was a big fat lie. "So, tell me what you do with your prey. I'm interested in comparing you to the other one I met."

He walked over to sit across from her. "I'm curious about this 'other one' you keep mentioning. I know the turf pretty well. Who'd you pick up?"

"Sebastian Moran. Colonel. Some months ago now," she said, sipping at her water now. "I didn't realize there were more like him."

"Oh, Moran. Yeah, wondered what happened to him. Figured he was just shipping out more than usual." He shrugged. "There's a few of us. We keep tabs. Coppers come down on one of us, makes more of a mess for the rest."

She nodded. "That makes sense. Moran works with me, now. We've made a couple of kills together. A lot of fun doing it with someone else. I didn't expect that," she murmured, distracted. Her eyes felt heavy, and more than just a drunk heavy. She looked down at the water. There was a bitter taste that she had just attributed to the pipes, but.... She looked back up at him. "Is this going to kill me, or are you going to do it?"

"I am," he said calmly, unperturbed. "Moran always does things with so much haste. I prefer to enjoy my meals a bit more slowly."

She stood abruptly, going for the knife in her skirt, but instead abruptly found herself on the floor, her broken arm crying out from where it was pinned beneath her. She swore, trying to look at him and finding her vision blurry. "He'll... He'll....." She passed out.

"He'll do nothing of the sort," he said to the quiet room, smiling from his chair. He watched her sprawled form for a bit, then stood, walking across the room to a large wardrobe. He opened it, pushing coats aside, and pulled on the back panel. It moved out of the way to reveal a door that had been hidden by the case, which he unlocked. It opened on a set of stairs down to a basement. He turned back, walking over to pick Lorna up with little trouble, and headed for the door. "Nothing of the sort at all."

She woke up an indeterminate amount of time later to darkness. She could make out the slightest of shapes, which meant he hadn't buried her alive, but that was it. She attempted to move and found that her hands were chained together, and her legs were definitely bolted to something. A chair, then. Great. Fucking phenomenal.

It wasn't too long later that a door at the top of a wooden staircase opened, shining light down into the room. A moment later a single, bare lightbulb came on, and George came down the stairs, closing the door behind him. "Hello, ma'am. Good to see you awake," he said with a smile.

"Fuck off, George," she said dismissively, rolling her eyes. "You can maim me, rape me, it's nothing I haven't seen before. But know that if you try, you will be killed."

"I can kill you," he pointed out, still calm. "That, clearly, you haven't seen before. The rest isn't for
"Oh, god, are you a fucking necrophiliac? Because that is just gross. Not that I haven't technically fucked a corpse, but it wasn't my proudest moment," she sighed.

"No," he snorted, looking insulted. "I'm not a pervert. I'll just hurt you before you die. But as I said, that's for me, not for you." He walked over to a back wall, digging through a couple of crates.

"Alright, great, don't know why you couldn't have picked somebody else," she said sullenly, shrugging and looking away from him. "Jim is going to be so pissed. This is a stupid way to go."

"It isn't my fault," he said, turning back around with a pipe wrench in hand. "You really expect me to leave a predator, one who had made themselves so very vulnerable, alone? Law of the jungle, ma'am."

"That's idiotic. I'm a woman, which, in this scenario, makes me a plausible mate. Going after Moran or one of your other cohorts would make more sense," she scoffed, then frowned. "Don't tell me I've had the bad luck to run into a homosexual killer."

"I wouldn't say I'm much of an sexual, really," he said, walking over to her. "I just really enjoy the hunt." He knelt behind the chair, examining her damaged arm. He had removed the sling to chain her in place. "What did you do to damage your arm?"

She looked down at it, trying to remember the timeline. "Uhhh. Oh, right. A bomb fell on me. I caught a piece of Buckingham on my arm instead. Also hit my head, you can probably find the mark in my hairline."

He nodded, starting to screw open the pipewrench. "Seems like it's almost healed. Does it ache? I broke my ankle when I was young and it ached for years afterward. My mother always said I was just being dramatic, but I could always tell when weather was coming in."

She didn't like where this was going, not at all. She kept her eyes on the pipe wrench. "Yes, it still aches. It'd be a good place to start. You might even make me scream. Is that your goal?"

He shrugged, smiling a little at her advice. "It might be a good place, but honestly it doesn't seem very sporting. How long did it take you to heal?" He reached out to smooth a hand up her calf. "I took your nylons. I hope you don't mind. I didn't want to rip them. They'll make a good gift for the next girl, to get her interested. You were almost too easy."

"Weeks," she said, getting a little skeeved by his touch. "And actually, I rather you start there. This whole thing wasn't very sporting. You took advantage of a drunk girl. That's pretty cheap. When I get out of here I'd like as few new injuries as possible. Humor me."

"When you get out of here, it will be in a bag," he said conversationally. "That one over there, to be exact." He nodded to a bin bag draped over a chair in the corner. "I'll put as much of your blood and parts in there as I can, and bring you to a bombing site. I've gotten quite good at moving rubble to match injuries. And making injuries that can match rubble. A pipe wrench, for example, with a towel or something between the jaws and the skin, doesn't bruise any particular pattern. It just breaks. Very handy for faking sudden impact wounds." He was speaking as though he were talking shop, perfectly at ease as he took a dish rag from his back pocket and started wrapping it around her calf.

"Oh man, I'm not going to be able to work for months," she sighed, outwardly calm, though her heart was starting to beat faster, anticipating the coming pain. "I just want you to know now I
intend to be as silent as possible. So fuck yourself I guess."

He shrugged. "Be silent, scream, none of that matters to me," he said, looking up at her. "I just like the fact that you can't stop me." He gave her a soft smile, like a child telling her his favorite color, and then put the pipe wrench on her leg, tightening it down.

She was beginning to hate that smile.

Jim found out after three hours that Lorna was missing, and that was very bad news. Fuming, he dialed the phone number for Moran’s apartment.

Moran woke to the harsh ringing of the phone, and picked up on the second ring, rubbing sleep from his eyes. "Hello?"

"Harrison went up to the surface and is missing. Find her," he said harshly, already impatient.

He was instantly alert, sitting up and pushing his hand through his short hair. "How long has she been gone? Where did she go?"

"At least six hours. We're not sure where, she didn't say. Just that she was getting a drink," he replied.

"Christ," he muttered, standing up. "I'll go up after her. I know the city, I'll find her. I'll need people."

"Take whatever you need. It will be highly inconvenient if I have to replace her," he growled.

"Understood, sir. Is that all?" he asked, phone tucked into the crook of his neck as he pulled on trousers.

"Yes. Bring her back," he said sharply, and hung up.

He set the phone down and finished dressing in under a minute, calling down to security and grifting and informing them to start pairing one-to-one and hitting the streets, checking every bar they could find and asking about Harrison.

It was an hour and a half before a source got back to Moran, about a woman matching her description leaving a bar in the correct timeframe with a soldier.

He was at the bar less than twenty minutes later. He entered, with a sinking feeling in his gut. He knew this place. It had been one of the favorite hunting grounds of Russell Karlson, who had gotten killed the month before. He didn't know who had taken over, but he had an unfortunate suspicion that he was going to need to find out. He walked over to the bar, motioning the bartender over.

The bartender came over, a pleasant smile on his face. "How can I help you, sir?"
"I'm looking for a friend of mine," he said, adjusting his jacket. He'd gone for his military uniform. It made people more friendly. "A woman about this high, dark hair, pale skin... I was told you might have seen her."

"Oh, yeah, real looker like her, how could I forget? All the regular boys were over her like dogs on fresh meat. She went home with one of the new guys, though. Lieutenant, something. Greg, or Geoff, or George? I don't know. Real average guy. Smiles a lot," the bartender shrugged. "I never see him with the same girl twice. Guess he's a one-and-done type of guy."

He felt his stomach tighten, and his expression darkened a little. "Military, you said? What branch? Did you see his rank?"

"Yeah, Lieutenant, like I said. I don't know the branch. Why, you think this guy might be shady?" the bartender raised his eyebrows, starting to look a little concerned.

Moran forced his expression to relax. "No, no he's an old friend. Was just making sure it was who I thought it was. Thank you, I appreciate it." He headed for the door before the man could ask any further questions.

Lorna was in the dark again, sitting as still as possible. Her leg was most definitely broken. That had been agonizing. Even if she wasn't shackled in place, there was no way she would be walking anywhere. She was slowly trying to accept the fact that she may very well die in this place, which wasn't going very well. She was unpleasantly damp, which felt like a trip back in time. Ah, Armetti. Things had been so simple.

The door at the top of the stairs opened and George walked down, carrying a bowl. He turned the light on, and smiled pleasantly at her. "Hello, dear. I thought you might be hungry so I made you a snack."

"Yeah? What is it, maggots?" She asked snidely, dark circles under her eyes. "What's the point in feeding me anything else?"

"Oh, I'm still hoping to keep you around for a few days, and you need to keep up your strength," he said, showing her the bowl. "Tomato soup."

She considered the soup, and decided that she was going to be spiteful. "No, thanks."

He sighed, considering her, then nodded. "Alright, I'll give you an option. Drink it, or I'll give it to you the same way I gave you the water."

As much as she wanted to spite him, the thought of inhaling tomato juice was unpleasant. "Fine,"

she said tightly.

He nodded, holding the bowl up to her lips and tipping it until she could drink.

She drank until the bowl was empty, and then gasped for breath. "Going away again or staying for some quality time?"

"Going away. I need to sleep," he said, smiling. "And so do you. Which is why I'm here." He walked over to a corner of the room behind her chair, out of sight, and returned, pulling a large wooden trunk behind him. It was sturdy looking, with holes drilled in the sides and top.
"Oh, come on," she groaned, irritated. "Are you fucking kidding? You're stuffing me in a box? God, I hope Moran keeps you alive so I can kill you myself."

"Just for the night. It's quite comfortable," he said, opening it up to reveal the bare wooden interior and walking over. "Now, we have a few minutes before the paralytic in the soup takes effect, but do you have any questions before then?"

"You fucking..." she growled, hands fisting. "Yeah, actually. Would you prefer to be flayed or to be burned alive?"

"Oh, flayed, I suspect," he said, considering for a moment, then nodding. "Flayed. More intimate. Seems more just, somehow."

"Great, I'll do that for you once Moran breaks me out. How long has it been? Nearing sixteen hours, yet? That's when I'm betting he'll show."

"Only about fourteen at this point. He has time," he says, unconcerned. "But he won't find this place. No one knows where it is."

"That's where you're wrong, but all I have to do is wait," she sighed. "Good luck."

He nodded, counting quietly under his breath, waiting for the drugs to take effect. "To you, as well. I do enjoy a battle of odds."

She opened her mouth to respond, but nothing came out, and then she couldn't move.

He smiled at her gently. "Don't worry. It won't last long. Less than an hour. Just long enough to get you to bed." He reached out, taking a knife and pressing it into her arm slowly, watching her carefully for movement.

She couldn't even grit her teeth, just watch him cut her, pain blossoming.

He looked up, saw the reaction in her eyes, and smiled. "Good, not faking then. I learned that lesson the hard way. I had to break the girl's neck, it was a nightmare." He started untying her. Once she was free, he hoisted her out of the chair with a grunt, walking her over and depositing her as in the box as he well as he could manage. He started to arrange her limbs so that she would fit, in a sort of fetal position. "You know, I do have to thank the army for teaching me to carry someone. It's made this all terribly convenient."

She thought a lot of swears in his general direction, internally screaming as he adjusted her broken leg.

He finally managed to wedge her in place, and smiled. "Just remember. You have plenty of air holes, you're going to be just fine. I'll see you in the morning, ma'am," he said congenially, before shutting the lid. There was the sound of a lock clicking in place, then footsteps up stairs, and the last of the light filtering through the airholes went out.

She just focused on breathing. She wanted to cry, but that was beyond her means at the moment. 

Bloody hell, Moran, you better hurry up.

He had been searching all day. Night was starting to fall again when he finally got it- the one piece of information he had been tearing the town apart looking for. It had taken him beating up six or
seven people, and intimidating quite a few more, but now here he was- fists bloodied, eyes bloodshot, but triumphant. He didn't bother knocking on the door or trying to pick the lock, just kicked it off of its lousy hinges. That was the trouble with having a house down a secluded alley- the neighbors were non-existent. George was going for his gun when the door came crashing in, but his was already raised. "George. Fancy meeting you here."

George gave a tight smile, frozen halfway to his gun. "Moran. And here I thought the dear lady was bluffing."

"Oh, good, has she been telling you about me?" he asked, walking forward, gun trained. "Where is she, please, before I become impatient? I've had a long day."

He sighed, standing up straight up again, and gesturing to his hidden door. "In my basement. May I open the door?"

"You may," he said, nodding. "But if you even look like you might be trying anything, I'll put two bullets through your brain and find myself an ax."

He nodded calmly, moving and opening the door. "She's down there, in a trunk. Light switch to your left."

He nodded a little, before reaching out and slamming the butt of the gun into George's head. The man crumpled, and he took a moment to hog-tie him with the power cable of a nearby lamp before he patted him down. There was a key in his pocket and he took it, before heading down the stairs at a clip, turning the switch on as he passed. The trunk was in the middle of the room and approached it cautiously. He knelt, inspecting the lock for a moment before testing the key and finding- to his relief- that it worked. He shoved the lid open a moment later.

She flinched at the sudden movement, the paralytic having worn off at least a half hour ago, by her reckoning. "Oh, thank fucking Christ," she breathed, looking up at him, appearing quite bedraggled. "I've never been so happy to see you, Moran. I'll warn you immediately to watch the left leg - it's very broken."

He nodded, looking her over. "Alright... Let's get you out of here..." he said, reaching out and carefully easing her torso up and out of the box, arms wrapping around her as soon as they could to support her weight.

She grunted, stiff with being unable to move throughout the majority of her captivity. "How did you find me, out of curiosity?"

"We figured out which bar you had been at, and it was pretty easy to piece together that George had run of the place now... I talked to a few of the blokes in the business and eventually one pointed me here." He looked at her broken leg, and winced. "Once we get you out I'll try and find something to immobilize your leg, but I can't do that until you're out here. Ready?"

"Mmmhm," she said through her lips, already bracing herself for him to move and start jostling her leg.

He shifted his arms into the box, moving one under her legs as gently as he could, the other sliding around her back. He lifted her carefully upward, laying her out on the dirt floor of the basement.

She groaned in pain, her hands clenched, trying to stop herself from screaming, and let out a sharp breath when he laid her out on the floor. "Oh, I'm going to relish flaying that man."

"I figured you might want him. He's tied up upstairs," he said absently as he inspected her leg.
"This is a bad break... It's more shattered than anything. You're going to need surgery. What the fuck did he do?"

She looked around for the pipe wrench, but couldn't find it immediately, so she waved her good hand in the air. "Pipe wrench around a towel. I tried to get him to do my already broken arm, to try to contain the damage in one part of my body, but he didn't go for it. Believe me, it's very painful. It was the first thing he did to me, too."

He muttered something under his breath, and stood. "Give me a minute, I'm going to try to find something to keep it still while I move you. And I'm going to call the network, have them send a car."

"Have them include sedatives with the car," she advised, "It'll be better to get me in a state of near unconsciousness. It's easier to move me if I'm not going to scream."

He hesitated, but nodded just a little. "Understood," he said, standing. "Hang in there."

She raised a hand in thumbs up, a twisted mirror image of the night before, and then she relaxed again, taking deep breaths.

It took him about five minutes to make the call, and when he returned he had a couple of tee shirts. He looked around the basement for a minute before finding a wooden box lid about the right size, bringing it over. "Alright... I'm going to do my best to immobilize your leg. A car is on its way, it should be here in ten minutes or so."

She nodded. "Okay. Try not to linger, huh?" she asked, setting her teeth.

He didn't bother answering. He tore the shirts into wide strips, then lifted her leg just enough to move the strips and the board underneath. He set it down gently, ignoring her pained noises, and then began securing the leg in place as carefully as he could.

She suffered through it as heroically as she could, though her voice broke a couple of times and she was close to tears by the time he finished.

He shifted up to her head once he was done, reaching out to cover the hand that was fisted in her shirt with his own. "Hey. Deep breaths, you're doing well," he said calmly.

"Thanks," she replied in a strained voice, forcibly releasing her shirt. "Thanks for finding me so fast. He had full intent to kill me."

He nodded. "You're lucky Russell died last month. He usually takes less than two hours. George likes a few days."

"Russell I might have been able to charm out of doing this. George was utterly unaffected by my wiles. He took my fucking nylons, though," she muttered.

"I'll buy you new ones," he said with a half smile. "They'll be bringing a stretcher, so I'm not going to carry you up the stairs. Do you have other injuries?"

She lifted her bloody arm, which unfortunately was different from the previously broken one. "This, and some tired lungs from inhaling some water. Oh, and let's not forget my pride."

He inspected her arm carefully, but the wound was superficial. He nodded. "The infirmary will look you over. Don't worry about your pride at the moment, alright? You're alive."
She sighed, closing her eyes. "Jim is going to be very angry with me. This was my fault. I walked right into this."

"Don't worry about it," he repeated. "Not right now." He looked up, hearing voices upstairs, and stood, drawing his gun. He motioned for her to be quiet, and walked slowly to the stairway. A moment later he relaxed. "Alexander. Good timing. Down this way."

"Oh, Alex, you're here? My knight in shining armor," she beamed, as if she wasn't lying on a dirt floor. *Keep up appearances in front of the grunts* - especially the ones she had a chummy relationship with. "When did you get back from Canada? We're due for a game!"

"Last night," Alex chuckled as he came down the steps, another medic in his wake, a stretcher between them. He raised an eyebrow. "Damn, Harrison. Heck of a mess..." He walked over, and they set the stretcher down on the ground beside her.

"You bet. You got my drugs? Otherwise this is going to be very unfun," she added, a little more seriously.

He nodded, reaching into his jacket and pulling out a capped syringe. "Right here, boss. Won't take a minute." He uncapped the needle, prepping the syringe, and gave her a nod. "Ready?"

She nodded. "Please. This hurts quite a lot."

He didn't respond, just found a vein and administered the drug, watching her drift under before he nodded to his partner, and they shifted her onto the stretcher.

Chapter End Notes

What are your guys' thoughts on Harrison getting a taste of her own medicine?
There were two cars, which Sebastian was grateful for. He took one with the unconscious Lorna back to the network, and left the others to gather George and bring him in as well.

Jim was waiting for them in the infirmary, the doctors already prepped for surgery. He pushed off the wall he had been leaning on when they walked in, eyes landing sharp on Lorna's unconscious form. "Broken leg, I heard. How bad?"

"He shattered it with a pipe wrench," Moran said, walking beside the stretcher, but stopping in front of Jim. "I'm not a medic, sir, but she'll likely need some metal in there to hold things together. Other than that, only minor injuries."

He nodded, absently adjusting his wristwatch. "Who's this moron?" he asked, nodding at George.

"That would be the one who shattered her leg with a pipe wrench," Moran said calmly, looking over at the man as he was escorted in. He was handcuffed, a large bruise forming on his head where Moran had hit him.

"Send him to the holding cells. I might have words with him," he said calmly. There was a fire to his eyes. A shattered leg? Harrison would be lucky if she didn't have a limp for the rest of her life.

He nodded a little, motioning to the men escorting George, who changed direction and walked the still-dazed man toward the lift.

"You did well, Moran," Jim said, eyes shifting from the would-be murderer to Sebastian. "Congratulations. None of this was your fault." He reached out and clapped Moran on the shoulder.

He eyed the boss with uncertainty, but then nodded just a little. "Thank you, sir," he said after a moment.

He nodded, hand falling back to his side, eyes on Lorna as they wheeled her off into the infirmary. "What did you fight about? I assume that's why she lost her head. She's usually more careful."

He hesitated, then straightened a little. "She chose to interrogate my father first, without my knowledge, about certain matters of my personal life," he said evenly, eyes on the gurney. "I objected."

"Hm," he said, as the gurney was wheeled out of sight between two doors. "She should have known better than to go out and get trashed. I'll deal with that if she makes it through the surgery, I suppose. Won't be much point to her if they have to amputate." He sighed, checking his watch.
He grit his teeth, but nodded slightly. "I don't think they'll have to, sir. The bone felt like it was in several large pieces. But we'll have to see."

He nodded, looking up from his watch. "You're off duty for twelve hours. Get some sleep. You look like shit. I'll take over her duties."

He nodded slightly, grateful for the break. "Thank you, sir. I appreciate it." He headed for the lift, exhausted.

He watched Sebastian go, then looked at the doors Harrison had disappeared through, face impassive, before he turned and headed after Moran. Time to get to work.

Moran stumbled into his flat, shedding clothing as he went. He considered showering, but then decided he didn't have the energy. He set his alarm and collapsed into bed in nothing but his pants. He was out in less than a minute.

Lorna woke up feeling very floaty. That was odd, considering she had gone out in so much pain, and she opened her eyes to try and find the source of the floatiness. Her bleary eyes landed on the IV in her arm, and she made an educated guess. Morphine, probably. So this was morphine. Very nice.

Jim had been sitting beside Harrison's bed for the last fifteen minutes. He had gotten word that she was waking up, and he wanted to be there when she came to. He watched as she opened her eyes. She was strapped down across her chest under the blankets to prevent her from sitting up, at his request, and he was anticipating the blur of the drugs in his favor. "Good morning, sunshine..." he crooned.

"Hi, Jim," she rasped, a little disoriented. The room seemed to be... slowly.. tilting... "What's the prognosis?"

"Oh, it's fabulous," he said acidly. "Would you like to see what they took of your leg before they throw it away? It's about the knee down. I had them put it on ice, thought that might be a fun moment. The two of us, looking at the end of your career together."

Her stomach twisted unpleasantly, and she tried to sit up, only to find that she couldn't. "What? What? Jim, tell me they didn't. They didn't."

"Don't come sobbing to me," he snarled, standing. "You're the idiot that has cost me one of my best assets. I'm not even going to enjoy shooting you, Harrison, because it's going to be such a goddamned pain to replace you. You fucking imbecile."

She was hyperventilating, less because he had a gun and more because she couldn't see for herself, and it was fucking killing her. She tensed up all over, trying to fight whatever was keeping her down, and her gaze snapped to Jim. "You fucker. I just wiggled my toes, Jim."

He relaxed, smirked, shrugged and tucked the gun away. "Fun while it lasted," he said, unashamed. "Just be glad I didn't tell them to take it anyway."
She relaxed, a huff of air leaving her, her eyes falling shut. Already she was exhausted, and she'd barely been awake for five minutes. She didn't grace his comment with a reply.

He watched her eyes close, then drew the gun again, and struck her across the face with it, holding the blow just enough to not break anything.

She didn't even make a noise, just jumped as best as she was able, blood spurting from her nose, her chest seizing in alarm, dull pain radiating through her skull. Her eyes were wide open again, staring at Jim, fearing another blow, fearing something worse. This would hurt like a bastard later. Right now, her body was trying to cry, and she was not letting it.

"Did I say we were done, poppet?" he asks sweetly, ramming the gun into her throat, pressing her down against the mattress. "No no. We have a lot to discuss. Do I have your attention?"

She gasped helplessly for breath, and nodded as best as she was able, her chest already beginning to ache. Of course he got her on an exhale.

He let her suffer for another moment, then lifted the gun and freed her airway. "Now. I don't care how fucking high you are right now. Tell me what happened. In detail."

She sucked in a breath before answering, and when she did her voice was fighting against the pain in her throat. "Okay. Where do you want me to start?"

"The beginning, Harrison," he said sweetly, pulling up his chair and sitting again. "Wherever the beginning happens to be."

She took another deep breath. "I... I got angry. I never got revenge on the men in Italy, or on you, no offense, and suddenly Riordan Moran was in front of me and he'd done something similar to his son. So I tried to make him see what he'd done, with a knife at his throat and a hand on his dick, which I still regret, if only for the fact that it made me feel disgusting," she muttered, sighing. "Sebastian, obviously, took umbrage with that. Came into my office, to which a shouting match ensued. It reached the point where I was either going to hate fuck him or put a knife in him, so I shut it down and told him to get out. Then I got drunk. I didn't feel like being angry, and I just... I went back to my flat at first. Took a nap. Woke up, felt restless, decided to go to a bar." She looked up at the ceiling, looking exhausted. "I saw George Thompson at the first bar I went to. Knew immediately he was like Sebastian, and he made me for what I was, too. I was well and truly drunk by the time he started talking to me, courtesy of the other men in the bar. I told him I knew he was trying to kill me, and he assuaged my fears. I thought he was another Moran. Willing to see where I might get him. Instead he took me home and drugged me with a glass of water."

He ran his thumb along the grip of his gun. "And you didn't think that the least bit moronic?"

"Of course I did," she sighed. "I knew immediately it was a mistake. I know this is all my fault."

"Good. Saves me the trouble of piecing that together for you," he said sarcastically. "You've got seven plates of metal in your leg, and thirty-eight screws. Your tibia was shattered, and your fibula has stress fractures running through it. You'll be in a cast for the next three months, if you're lucky."

She closed her eyes for a moment, absorbing that, then opened them again, going to him. "I'm sorry, Jim," she said quietly.

He looked at her for a long time. "You would have died," he said, tone level. "Had we not happened to adopt a serial killer from the same puppy farm as this one. Don't ever get that close to
death because of abject stupidity again, or I will make sure you wish I'd shot you just now. Am I clear?"

"Yes, you are clear," she replied, voice quiet. "Let me know if there's anything I can do to make it up to you."

"Believe me, I will," he said calmly. Then he smiled. "Get well soon!" He gave a cheery wave, and left, closing the door behind him.

She sighed, closing her eyes again.

Soon, she drifted off into a drugged haze.

When she next woke, Moran was sitting in the chair, reading through a thick folder in his lap, occasionally jotting down a note. There was a box of similar folders by his feet.

"Moran, didn't expect you here," she said quietly, her voice hoarse. She had a mottled bruise on her face, and one across her throat.

He shrugged a little, looking up. "I had work to do, so I figured I'd keep an eye on you. How are you feeling?"

She snorted, and then regretted it, because it hurt. "Awful. Thanks for asking, though."

He nodded a little, looking back at his file. "You're alive, so that's something."

"We'll see if that stays true," she sighed. "Jim already pistol whipped me. If I don't heal well he'll do worse."

"Then heal well," he suggested, eyeing the bruise on her face. "I wondered what that was from."

"Great suggestion," she sighed, closing her eyes momentarily. "Are you still angry with me?"

"Yes," he admitted. "But honestly at this point, I think I'll get over it. You've had a rough day."

"Alright, well, if you wouldn't mind, could you help me sit up? Something is holding me down and I have an itch on my nose that I'm dying to get to," she asked, looking very put upon. "Jim tried to trick me into thinking they'd amputated, and I think this was part of it."

He raised an eyebrow, but didn't comment, setting his file aside and standing, walking over and pulling the blanket back. "Ah, yeah, straps," he said, working to undo the buckles.

"That would explain it," she agreed, stretching as he released her and lifting a hand to rub the aforementioned itch. "Thank you very much."

He shrugged a little, and stepped back, sitting down again. "Can I ask something a bit rude?"

She waved her hand a little. "Propriety is not my main concern at the moment. Ask me."

"What the fuck were you thinking?" he sighed, reaching up to rub at his close-shorn head.

"Which time, exactly?"
"Any of them," he said, shrugging. "Mainly why you went home with him."

"I thought it went so well the last time," she rolled her eyes, mostly at herself. "At the basest level, I just wanted a simple fuck, alright? I thought he was like you. Instead he didn't care about what I had to offer."

He reached up to rub at his eyes. "You know I almost killed you myself, right? That it is only by some random providence that I didn't throw you in the Thames that night?"

"I was really drunk, Moran," she groaned, sighing hard. "The only reason I don't feel hungover right now is I'm pretty sure there's morphine in my IV."

He nodded just a little, sitting back. "Why were you that drunk? I'm just trying to understand what happened. Because ideally, I shouldn't let you fall into the hands of a serial killer again."

"I haven't really relaxed since we got home from Italy, Sebastian, I don't know about you," she said, looking at him tiredly. "I just wanted to not care about anything for a little while."

He didn't have a decent response to that, and just nodded a little. "Alright," he agreed. He understood that sentiment completely.

She fell silent, unsure what else there was to say. It was kind of hard to speak, anyway.

He sat back, and then picked up his file again. He didn't know what to say either. He was conflicted. Eventually her question about his anger worked its way to the top of his thought process again, and he set the file down after a moment and looked over at her. "On an unrelated note, my father is dead. It's done. So I'd appreciate it if we just left the subject in the past." He returned to his file without waiting for a response.

She nodded a little. It was the least she could do to listen to his feelings about that. She'd already trespassed enough.

They released Harrison from the infirmary two days later. Moran had come down to collect her, and stood leaning against the wall in the waiting room as she was rolled out in a wheelchair.

She looked annoyed. "Moran, what are you doing here?" She asked, though the annoyance wasn't directed at him.

"I'm here to escort you to your room, ma'am," he said calmly, walking over and taking the handles of her chair from the nurse.

"Did Jim put you up to this, or are you planning on bumping me into every obstacle in our path in vengeance for my idiotic decisions?" She asked wearily, waving absently at the nurse in thanks.

"I considered it, but I think it would be a bit uncreative," he said, heading for the lift. "Instead I'm going to make sure you don't starve to death because you fall out of your chair and can't get up."

"Kind of you," she sighed. "The first one, then? I'm surprised he wasn't satisfied with a nurse."

He shrugged. "Something about extreme incompetence bordering on dangerous idiocy. I'm not certain, he was muttering."

She made a slightly alarmed face. "If that's the way he feels why hasn't he told me? I'll hire new
ones, for Christ's sake. If he gets injured they're going to be taking care of him!"

"Not to concern you ma'am," he said gently as he pushed her onto the elevator, "But he wasn't referring to the nurses. He's cooled off significantly since then."

She sighed heavily. The bruises on her face and neck ached. "Of course. I'm sure that's not the last I'll hear of it. In fact I'm almost certain he promised me it wasn't."

He nodded just a bit as the lift cage opened for them, and he pushed her out and toward her apartment. "He isn't thrilled with the whole situation, I'll give you that."

She nodded, closing her eyes briefly. "I can survive whatever he will punish me with. Nothing will be as bad as the last time. Emotionally, at least. Christ, I'm just glad this one didn't get his rocks off that way. Was even disgusted when I insinuated that he was a necrophiliac. A decent fellow, besides the fact he shattered my leg."

"Yeah, not a bad one. Of the murderers around, he was one with more morals than less." He stopped in front of her door. "You have a key?"

She patted herself down, coming up with it in an extraneous pocket and handing it over. "We should probably scoop up the others. I don't want any of our people running into them. Recruit the agreeable ones into hits; kill the others. Once was enough."

"I would actually object to that," he said as he pushed the door open and rolled her in. "We can make an example of George. One to be feared. But they're damned useful as a group for information, and for fall people if we need someone to take a hit."

"So how do we protect our people? Enough of them leave the bunker on a regular basis to have fun, and I don't want anybody vaguely important ending up somebody's lunch meat," she replied, gritting her teeth slightly as the wheelchair bumped over the threshold to the apartment.

"Like I said. We'll make an example of George. Make sure they're a little more cautious about who they pick up." He closed the door behind them and headed for her bedroom.

She nodded a little. "Fine. But put out word that if anybody touches one of my people, I'll drown them in sulfuric acid."

"I'll be sure to inform them," he said with a nod. "We'll leave George alive for a while... Bring them each in to chat with him, to personally illustrate the point."

She made a sound of agreement, tapping her fingers against the arm of her chair. "Well, Moran," she said, looking at her bed. "Are you going to ravish me or what?" She smirked.

He stopped, raising an eyebrow, though his face flushed slightly. "I... What are you talking about?"

"I'm joking, Moran, relax," she chuckled, and gestured to her various injuries. "I'm obviously in no condition, and you're angry with me, but we're standing around my bedroom, twiddling our thumbs."

He shook his head a little at that, clearing it of stray thoughts. "You should rest," he said, releasing the handles of her chair and walking over to pull the blankets back.

She sighed but didn't protest. "Fine. Could you at least grab me a book from my shelf? And have the wheelchair nearby, in case I need to visit the restroom."
He nodded slightly, returning to push the chair over to the bed. He eyed her up and down, then reached out and lifted her carefully up, turning to set her on the mattress.

She grit her teeth as she was jostled a little, knowing that it was unavoidable and staying silent because of it. Not to mention that she owed him right now, and she didn't intend on making his life any more difficult than it had to be. She'd never been in this position before, really. Needing to apologize but being unable to do so in a way that helped. Vince had never needed a real apology from her, and Jim always knew what he wanted done to make up for her transgressions. None of her other underlings would ever refuse an apology from her. She didn't know what to do, what to say. She was stumped.

He settled her into the cot and then walked over to get her the book she had asked for. He set it on the table beside her. "Do you need anything else at the moment?"

No, her brain tried to make her mouth say, but that was stupid and would only inconvenience them both later on. "Water, please," she said, somewhat close to meekly. "Apologies. I just don't think we should let me get dehydrated. I know that if you leave I won't call you back and I'm going to head the largest problem with that off at the pass."

He nodded, heading for her kitchen to get water. He ended up filling a pitcher and bringing that and a glass, setting them on her bedside table near the book. "I'll be checking in regularly, anyway. The boss has instructed me to keep a careful eye on you."

"Great," she sighed. "I don't know what he's punishing you for, but I'm sorry."

He shrugged, straightening his shirt. "I've learned not to question the boss's preferences. Unless there's anything else?"

"No," she shook her head, "You can go. Sorry."

He glanced at her again, turned for the door, and then turned back. "Why are you apologizing?"

She sighed, looking away from him. "I made a stupid decision that rightfully angered you, and then went and did something just as stupid that put me further in your debt. And now you're stuck caring for me. In your shoes, I would be the last person I would want to see right now."

He considered that for a moment, then shrugged. "You aren't me," he said simply, before leaving the room, shutting the door quietly behind him.

She tried to take that positively and only managed to come up neutral, and so instead tried to forget about it for the moment, adjusting herself to be a little more comfortable and then dropping off to sleep, exhausted just from talking for a few minutes.

Moran sat down in her living room. He wanted to go home and sleep, but Moriarty had been explicitly clear. So instead he shifted around on the couch a bit before finding a position that was marginally comfortable, and drifting into a doze, hand on his gun.

She woke up to pain. The painkillers they had given her must have worn off. She groaned, shifting carefully, and hissed as a spike of pain went up her leg, and then groaned again as her small jerk lit up her bruised face. She stilled, and tried to see what time it was by the clock on her night stand without moving her head. It wasn't working. She was just going to have to suck it up and try to find her pain meds, then.
He woke to the sounds of her fidgeting, and then a loud thud. He swore softly and stood quickly, gun in hand as he approached the room with caution. Odds were it was just her moving around, but no need to alert an intruder if there was one.

She was half standing on her good leg, biting back a scream of pain from her jostled bad leg, hands braced behind her to support the rest of her weight.

He walked over quickly, hands carefully finding uninjured places to brace her. "Something I can help you with?"

She took a deep breath, looking very pale even in the dim light. "Where's- where's the morphine gotten to? I'm in a quite distressing amount of pain."

"Lay back down," he said firmly, helping to ease her onto the mattress. "I have your morphine in my bag."

She nodded a little, letting him steer her back into a horizontal position. "This is possibly the worst pain I've ever experienced. Funny how shattering a leg and then bolting it back together will do that," she said tensely.

"Yeah, I imagine," he said with a touch of irony. He moved once she was laid back, walking quickly into the next room and grabbing his bag before returning, pulling the brown paper packet out of it and opening it up to reveal two small glass vials of morphine, and a syringe. He prepared the needle quickly, opening one of the vials and drawing the instructed amount into the syringe, tapping it carefully to clear any air. He turned to her and showed her the needle, before pushing up her sleeve and sticking the needle carefully into her arm, dispensing the contents.

She'd gotten used to the cold feeling crawling up her arm while she was in the infirmary, and she sighed as it dispersed, the placebo just from the injection itself giving her relief. "Thank you, Moran. You, and your sleeping habits, I suppose."

"You weren't as quiet as you seem to think," he quipped, stowing the syringe and bottles carefully in their packaging and returning it to his bag.

"I wasn't as quiet as I was intending, certainly," she murmured, closing her eyes wearily. A few days ago she'd put her hand on his cheek in comfort. Really, her comforting him was the reason she was in this bed, looking down the barrel of a possible ruined leg. If she had treated him like a normal employee, had never offered such a limitless wish, she never would have intruded in his affairs with his father, and never would have gone to the surface to drink away her problems, to meet George. Maybe Jim was right. He was a weakness for her. An odd one; one she couldn't entirely explain. But still, it was there, and she would have to find a way to manage it. Her head swam a little. The morphine must have started kicking in. "If it makes you feel any better, Sebastian... you can consider what happened to be direct karmic payback for interfering in your affairs."

He raised an eyebrow at that, considering her. "My affairs are yours to meddle in, ma'am, if you choose. You're my superior. I don't have much say in the matter."

She shook her head a little, taking a deep breath. She was really starting to feel the morphine. "No, Moran, I'm not Jim. I don't want to fuck you over for the hell of it. It's just... I'm sorry."

He shrugged, turned to go, then turned back. He'd been doing that a lot lately. "Permission to ask an impertinent question, ma'am?"
"Of course," she nodded, opening her eyes. "You've earned that."

"Why did you interfere?" he asked, posture relaxed but eyes tight. "What benefit did you gain?"

"It wasn't... For advantage, Moran," she sighed. "I did it because I... I was desperate for a sense of control. For a sense that I'd gotten revenge on someone who deserved it."

"What did it matter to you?" he pressed. "He'd never done anything to you."

She shook her head absently, lifting a hand to her face to press against her eyes. "But he'd done things to you. Sickening things. I just- I wanted him to understand. We both survived Italy, but, fuck... Seb'astian, we lost a piece of ourselves we're never gonna get back...." Words were becoming a little harder to enunciate, but she had to say them. Had to explain herself. She struggled to keep herself on track. "I thought that if he understood it would solve something. That you'd get some sort of closure. Somethin' we'll never get for Italy, somethin' we'll never truly get from Jim.... It mattered because you matter."

He watched her in silence, uncertain how to respond to that. Then he reached out to pull the blankets up over her. "You should sleep, ma'am," was all he said, before turning quickly to leave, her words ringing in his ears.

She turned her face away from the door and let a few feverish tears roll down her cheeks as he turned the lights off, but didn't have it in her to cry any more than that, the morphine taking over and soothing her to sleep without any more fussing.

He returned to his place on the couch, but though it was the middle of the night, he had no interest in sleeping. What she'd said kept turning over and over in his mind. He trusted that she was telling the truth- it was difficult to be much but genuine on that much morphine, he'd seen the effects on plenty of his fellow soldiers. But that was a complete reversal from what he'd been thinking up to this point- that she was just snooping out of curiosity, or possibly a desire to humiliate him.

She had sweet dreams, for once in her life. They were dreams about Sebastian, and she would never admit to having them. Least of all to Jim.

He must have drifted off at some point, because he woke from a dreamless, shallow sleep to the sound of the morning alarm on his watch. He silenced it, and sat up, rubbing at his eyes. He glanced at Harrison's bedroom door, and eventually stood, straightening his uniform before walking over and knocking quietly on the door.

She shifted, brain foggy from sleep, and groaned. She could feel the edges of pain beginning to wander back in, but she had some time before she needed another dose of morphine. It was impossible to tell what time it was, dark as it was in her room, and she was disoriented. Her dreams seemed close to reality, and the conversation from last night was standing in a haze between truth and fiction.

He stepped inside a moment later. "Good morning," he said quietly. The cool 'ma'am' stuck on his tongue for some reason, her earnest expression from last night still stark in his memory. "How are you feeling?"

"Far away," she muttered, then took a deep breath and tried to pull her thoughts together a little. "But good, I suppose. The pain is beginning to return, but it's not agonizing yet. God, my mouth is dry. Though it's a wonder I can breathe with my mouth shut at all, considering the pistol whip to
the face James gave me," she sighed, sitting up with a bit of a grunt and reaching over to grab the glass of water on the nightstand.

He grimaced slightly in sympathy. "The swelling does seem a little better today, at least. Do you want some ice for that?"

"No, thank you. I don't think I have the patience to keep half of my face under ice for a half hour or so," she shook her head. "Thank you, though." Silently, she tried to assess his behavior. Had their conversation last night really happened, or had it been a trick of the painkillers?

He nodded just a little. "If it's alright with you, then, I'm going to go shower and change into fresh clothes. I won't be gone longer than a quarter of an hour. If you think you'll need morphine before then, I can wait."

She shook her head. "No, go ahead. Get something to eat while you're at it. I'll survive."

He nodded. "I'll bring you something as well. Any requests?"

She shook her head again. "No, I'm not hungry. I'll wait until I feel like eating. My pantry is stocked, and so is my fridge. You won't have to go far."

He nodded just a little. "I'll be back shortly." He took his leave.

She relaxed slightly as he left, wishing that she could just ask him about the previous night without bringing up bad feelings for the both of them.

Chapter End Notes

Panic! At The Disco - Hey Look Ma I Made It
https://youtu.be/GXPRTZoIU1w
He showered, shaved, and changed quickly. Despite her assurances, he was reluctant to leave her for too long. He'd seen morphine wear off quickly, and as appealing as her spending a few minutes in agony should be, after the last few days, the idea left a sour taste in his mouth now.

He wasn't misremembering. The morphine wore off faster than she was expecting. Maybe it was her metabolism moving faster now that she'd woken up, but very suddenly she was finding the growing pain harder to bear, and lay awaiting his return with her teeth grinding together.

He was back in less than ten minutes, a shaving nick at the corner of his jaw still oozing slightly, but otherwise crisp in uniform. He saw her pained expression and didn't bother asking, retrieving his bag and removing the package of morphine, starting to prepare a dose.

"You make a surprisingly good nurse, Moran," she joked weakly as he came over, eyes locked on the syringe. "Did you eat anything? Feel free to raid my kitchen."

"Got a bit of experience on the front," he said conversationally, tapping the syringe as he walked over and choosing a place lower on her arm, making the injection. "And I might do that. You really should eat something. Did George feed you at all? This is a lighter dose, it shouldn't knock you out completely."

"George fed me so that he could get paralytics and sedatives into me, otherwise, no," she replied, fighting the urge to shrug to remain still for him. "The infirmary fed me a little, but mostly I've been on IV. My stomach has been too sensitive from the multitudes of drugs they've given me. The antibiotics for the leg, the morphine, the anesthetic for surgery... it's all been rough on my system. I'll eat something bland, later, just.. Not yet."

He glanced up at her, but nodded. "You need to eat something at some point today. Not much. Some toast or some oatmeal. You decide when. But this stuff will play havoc with your system if you don't keep a little fuel down."

"Anything you say, Moran. My decision-making is taking a sabbatical until it can prove it makes sense again," she said, shifting her arms back under the covers and pulling them up to her chin. She was cold.

He bit back a laugh, and nodded instead. "Whatever you say. I'm going to make some food. Let me know if it smells good and you change your mind."

She nodded. "I'll shout. Thank you."

He ended up making himself a cheese toastie, not in the mood for anything more complex. He ate the sandwich in silence, before filling a small glass of milk and bringing it with him into Harrison's room. "Here. Drink this slowly. Get something in your stomach at least," he said as he walked over.

She nodded, sitting up with a slight grimace to take it from him. "Thanks. You give the men from
"It'll coat your stomach a little," he said with a shrug. "Make eating easier later."

"That wasn't an answer," she chuckled, then coughed. "Sorry..... I.. Did I make up a conversation last night or did that really happen?"

He raised an eyebrow, debating how to respond. "No, no, you were quite talkative," he said finally. "To be perfectly honest I'm not quite sure what to make of much of what you said."

She sighed, nodding a little. She wasn't sure what to say, now, and kind of regretted asking. "Can I.... Can I clear anything up?"

He was a quiet man by nature, and never jumped to answer a question immediately unless he had to. He turned hers over, in no particular rush. "What did you say to him?"

"I tried to make him understand what he'd done to you. I don't.. remember specifics. Especially not now," she sighed, looking down at her arm.

"And what could you possibly know about that?" he pressed, a small flame kindling now. "You don't even understand. What makes you think you could make him?"

"I was an arrogant fool," she replied quietly. "I'm sorry. I know it doesn't mean much."

"Do you want to know?" he pressed on, angry now. "Do you want to know what he did to me? Is that what this is all about?"

She flinched slightly, looking away from him; a habit she'd learned from angering Jim. "If you want to tell me, I'll listen, but that wasn't what this was about. My motivations... weren't complicated, Moran, I swear. I figured out what he'd done to you and I saw red. I wanted revenge for you, I wanted to feel like I could do that for you, for myself. I was sick of feeling helpless."

"Moran, I came back from Italy, from that dungeon, and Jim punished me for surviving by doing to me exactly what they had done to us in there. I trusted him, and he took advantage of me; made me relive it, on purpose, mocked me for it, said he wished he'd seen it. And I told you, and you martyred yourself for me, but because I didn't know I couldn't tell you that he'd promised not to do it again, and that makes it my fault. I'm so sorry, Sebastian. And then your father was in headquarters, and suddenly I could make someone pay. I thought if I did it to him he would make the connection. He didn't. I lost my nerve. I shouldn't have in the first place."

He opened and closed his mouth a few times in the minutes that followed, trying to find a way to respond, but he didn't have one, so he just stayed silent. Finally he said, "It was never my intent to indebt you in any way."

"I know it wasn't," she said quietly. Mournfully. "But that makes it all the more compelling."

He considered her a moment, then walked to the corner of the room, grabbing a wooden chair and bringing it over, setting it down next to the bed and sitting in it a touch uncomfortably. "Ma'am, I was doing my job. If you're going to feel guilty about me doing my job, this whole thing isn't going to work out very well."

She took a deep breath. Her head was beginning to swim rather badly. "I'm not made to have a bodyguard. Not like Jim. Loyalty beyond money... It weakens me."

"I don't know what that means," he admitted, but he could see the glazed frustration in her eyes as
the morphine started to take a firmer hold. He reached out to pick up the glass of milk where she had set it aside, mostly untouched. His expression softened a little. "Here. Finish this and then get some sleep," he suggested quietly.

She nodded a little, very quickly losing her executive functions and becoming much more pliable to his nursely suggestions, and took the glass, sipping it with a slightly shaking hand.

He sat back and studied her quietly. To his confusion, his anger was fading away. It was rare that a superior officer would ever regain his trust after they had lost it. He could learn to work under them again quite easily, but never again for their motives- only his. But here he was, with the woman who had slighted him perhaps most grievously of all his superiors, and he was finding himself sympathetic. Then again, he had been through more with her than any of his others superiors, as well. Italy had changed them both. She hadn't been branded physically, it was true, but they had marked her just as harshly as they had him, and he and she both knew it.

He reached out to take the glass once it was empty. "Sleep now," he said, his voice soft, but clearly an order. "You need it."

She nodded blearily and settled down into bed, eyes slipping shut.

He watched her fall asleep, and then walked out of the room to sit on her couch again, and think.

She had restless sleep. It wasn't long before she started to dream, half in, half out of consciousness. It only made the nightmare more terrifying. The feeling of a hand on the back of her neck, a blade against her arm, laughter in her ear. She remained stuck in the twilight zone, beginning to sob in her sleep, tangled up in the strangling sheets, Jim's taunting voice too close.

He heard her movements from where he had settled back to read, and stood, setting the newspaper aside as he went to check on her. He opened the door to her bedroom, and frowned when he saw her thrashing. He walked over quickly, disentangling the sheet from around her neck and speaking quietly but firmly. "Ma'am... wake up. You're dreaming."

She snapped awake, unsure where she was for a moment, her hair stuck to her sweaty skin. Then she registered that she was in her own bed, Moran standing above her, and she began to cry in earnest, curling in on herself as much as she could, head swimming too much to worry about what she looked like to him.

He looked down at her as she seemed to compress, arms held tightly to her chest as she shook, sobs occasionally forcing their way through her chest. It was visceral. She looked how he had felt, so many times. She looked like Italy. Like the pain and terror they had both barely survived. In that moment, he realized that nothing else mattered as much. Fights could wait, anger and revenge could wait. At the bottom of it all she was his comrade. They were fellow soldiers. He couldn't leave her behind. He walked around to the side of the bed, and after a moment he sat down. "I'm going to touch you," he warned quietly, his hand reaching out to rest on her arm.

She nearly fought him. Would have, if she'd been any less weighed down by the grief and the drugs, and they kept her docile long enough to melt into his touch, relief flooding her chest, and she cried harder. "I trusted him," she got out, face so wet she might as well have been swimming. "And he- and he-" she broke off, voice ragged, her eyes screwing shut.

He lay down next to her slowly, but didn't move any closer. "I know," he said quietly.
She'd never been this vulnerable before in front of anybody; not Jim, not Vince, not even her own parents, once she'd reached a certain age. And here she was, falling to pieces in front of an inferior officer. Except he wasn't. He'd been with her through the worst of it, had tried to stop it from happening again. She felt the bed dip beside her and rolled over to cry into his shoulder.

He wrapped his arms around her without really thinking about it. It felt so natural now, to hold her close, to watch her back. This was familiarity, safety. The wall that had grown up between them since Italy seemed to crumble away, and he closed his eyes, just waiting her out.

Eventually, she started to wind down, soothed by his calm silence, a few of her aches eased by his warmth. She didn't say anything for a long time, the quiet broken only by her occasional sniffle. Finally, she felt she had to say something. "Thank you," she whispered, voice hoarse from sobs.

"It's fine..." he said, his voice soft. "You should try to sleep."

She swallowed hard. "I'm... afraid I'll dream, again."

He didn't have a response to that, just nodded a little bit. He knew the feeling. "I used to think the front was bad," he admitted. "But it never affected me like this."

She nodded a little, though she was maybe a little surprised. Or was she? Was it so surprising that being a prisoner had affected them this badly? Were they that much different than prisoners of war? She was silent for a minute, just absorbing that. Reminding herself that she wasn't exaggerating this trauma. Italy had been truly awful, and so had Jim. She shut her eyes. "There's no distancing yourself from this."

He shrugged. "There is, but it involves methods that are a touch drastic," he sighed. He reached up absentely to rub at his chest, the ridge of the brand rough beneath his shirt.

"The morphine feels good, at least," she sighed, ignoring that it would sound slightly concerning to anybody sober. "It's only when I try to sleep that things go wrong."

He nodded a little, giving a wry smile. "I understand that sentiment." He looked over at her. "Don't get too happy on the morphine... Seen that go south for a few blokes. It isn't pretty."

"I'll keep that in mind," she murmured, forcing her eyes open (at least part of the way) so she wouldn't fall asleep. "I'm surprised that they prescribed it for me. Must be easiest to get our hands on at this point in time."

"All of us? No. Sure, I'd grab a drink with someone every once in a while, for the thrill of it," he admitted. "But there's risk being seen together. You have to trust the other one not to f*ck up, and no one trusts anyone not to f*ck up. Mostly we just watched each other in the papers. Sent each
other notes every once in a while. That sort of thing. You could always tell who was who, or almost always. People have signatures."

"Did yours even show up in the papers? Hiding them in rubble like you did, masking murder; those would, if anything, just be hidden in the obituaries, wouldn't they?"

He nodded. "Mine rarely did, but they would have eventually if it wasn't for the war, I'm certain," he said with a shrug. "Once you've been doing it for a while you get... bored. You want a bit more of a thrill, a touch more risk, so you start being more brazen. Seen it happen over and over. I could feel the itch starting too, and I'd only been at it a few years."

"And then I came along, and ruined your life," she sighed, letting her eyes drift shut again.

"Or made it more interesting. Depends on the perspective," he pointed out. "Certainly have more artistic license now."

"Well, good, I'm glad you're not utterly miserable. I'd feel bad." She murmured, completely sincere.

"If I were utterly miserable, I wouldn't be here," he replied easily.

She made a doubtful noise. "Would you have killed yourself, then? You can't resign."

He laughed. "I'm familiar with the extent of Jim's network now... I could go to ground if I wanted to. Something which- I will point out- I would never say if I actually intended to do it. Moriarty is powerful, certainly. I'd always have to sleep with one eye open. But it's a big world out there."

"It's a big world out there, but Moriarty is a mad man. He'd find you," she sighed. "Sometimes I wish I could leave. Certainly now."

He looked down at her, a bit surprised at that, but the more he thought about it, the more sense it made. "That's fair, I suppose."

She didn't know what she was doing, but she couldn't shut up now that the floodgates had opened. "I wonder what ever happened to Vincent, now and then," she murmured, eyes shut. She could hear his heart beat in this position. "I left him in a cruel way, but it felt like my only option at the time. Looking back, I wonder if I would have made a different choice, now that I know what was ahead of me. Was it worth it?"

He shrugged. "Who knows. Not much point in asking that though, really. Is anything worth it? What's 'it' worth, anyway? Who cares whether life looks like it balances out? It's never going to. There's a war on. Life is going to be fucking us in the ass."

She nodded slightly. It was hard to imagine a world that wasn't at war, now. A London that wasn't half destroyed. At least she knew that this world didn't deserve her kindness. There was no need to make herself vulnerable.

He stared into the darkness of the room, his eyes straining to see anything and creating random shapes when they failed. After a moment he said, "I'm glad you ended up here."

She laughed weakly. "You might need to elaborate, or I might take offense."

"Not... here, obviously. But with Moriarty. I don't think anyone else could have gotten us through Italy." His voice was quiet.
She felt warmth stir in her chest that hadn't touched her cold dead heart in years. She slipped an arm around him, letting out a stuttering breath. "I appreciate that. Really."

He shrugged. "For the moment just focus on getting your feet back under you. Literally."

She nodded, swallowing hard. Her conversation with Jim about Moran rose in her mind, and she allowed herself to consider something happening here. Who else, if anyone? Jim had broken her trust, and it would take him a long time to get it back. She had no excuse save for the drugs about what she said next. "Jim said I'm falling for you. We... shouldn't do this. I'm afraid he'd kill you if he found out."

He sat in surprised silenced for a moment that she would say that aloud, but then morphine was morphine. He shook his head just a little. "No..." How to explain his bargain? "Suffice it to say I've had indication from him that he wouldn't stop.... this."

She was silent for a minute, unsure how to take that. Jim really was playing games with them, then. After telling her that he would make her kill him if her fondness became troublesome, he'd pulled Sebastian aside to encourage him? If not encourage, at least give permission? "Christ, he's a mystery," she muttered, half to herself.

He shrugged a little. "You told me in the beginning not to try and understand him."

She chuckled a little. "I did, didn't I. I suppose I ought to listen to my own advice."

He smiled just slightly. "It's fine. You're a tough person to listen to."

She laughed softly. "Yes, I am. Apologies."

He rolled his eyes. "Go to sleep. You're high as hell."

"Mmmhm," she mumbled, turning her face into his chest more and then slowly drifting off.

They spent the next couple of days like that, cautiously intimate, and on the third day, Jim summoned Moran for an update.

"Moran," he said, as soon as the door opened. "Come. Tell me how your charge is."

He stepped inside, closing the door behind him and nodding to his superior. "She's recovering, sir. Slowly, but that's to be expected. The swelling has gone down in most places."

"Good. I was careful, but I was wondering whether or not I'd actually broken something in her face. That's the problem with pistol whips, hm?" He tapped his fingers on his desk a few times, then shrugged. "Oh wellll. How's the morphine treating the both of you? I've put the doctor who prescribed them on... probation. He should have prescribed meperidine. Less addictive."

"I haven't touched it, sir. As for Harrison... I've been doing my best to keep the dosages minimal and spaced. We'll see what happens. I'm aware of the addiction risks. I've seen them on the front."
He ignored the part about the pistol whip. He didn't agree with it. Not that Harrison didn't deserve to be punished - that was Jim's prerogative. But if he had disfigured Harrison, she would be significantly less useful in her field.

"I hadn't expected you to touch it. You're not that idiotic, you've shown that," he rolled his eyes. "You also drink significantly less than Harrison. She uses it to cover up her fears. You're more the repressing kind. As a bodyguard should be."

He nodded slightly, uncertain if that was a compliment. "I imagine she has significantly more stress in her work than I do at the moment, sir," he said diplomatically.

Jim smiled his shark smile. "And why do you think that is?"

"She's my superior officer, sir. I've found that the further up the chain of command one gets, the higher the stress involved." He kept his tone neutral.

"Good answer," he grinned, lacing his fingers together on the desk in front of him. "Now... About our bargain. You've been spending enough time with her; do you have anything to give me?"

He straightened slightly, subconsciously. This was an uncomfortable duty, and he fell more firmly into his military training. "I do, sir. Though I preface this with the fact that she has been high on morphine, and therefore nothing is guaranteed to be true."

"Oh, so it's juicy, is it?" He smirked, leaning forward in his seat. "Come now, daddy wants to hear."

He nearly flinched at the name, a flicker of tension crossing his face despite his efforts. He took a slow breath through his nostrils. "She said that she wonders how Armetti is these days, sir. She wondered if things would have been different if she had stayed with him. If leaving him was worth what came afterward. Worth the pain she has experienced since then."

Jim didn't expect to be so... angry, with this information. The smile twisted on his face, becoming more of a grimace. For a split second, he considered, once again, whether he had pushed her too far. She had always been disgusted with Armetti, for the two-odd years he had known her. It had been one of her personality characteristics; a young woman fleeing attachment, marriage, children, looking for simple, unadulterated chaos to replace it. He had given that to her, not so much on purpose as that was just who he was. She had been the first person to accept that for what it was, to even enjoy his unpredictable madness, and now she was having doubts. And confiding in the bodyguard. Had he made a mistake? Was this worth it? He squared his jaw, placing his hands flat on the table. "You're dismissed, Moran."

To his surprise, he saw a touch of uncontrolled emotion on his employer's face, and it certainly wasn't good. He accepted the escape route for what it was, nodding quickly. "Thank you, sir." He left.

It was another two weeks before Lorna stopped waking up in agony in the middle of the night. Even then, she still needed some help getting to and from the bathroom, which was embarrassing, even with - maybe even because of - their newfound intimacy.

They never talked about it. About how he climbed into her bed at night now without asking, about
how she curled up next to him. About the way his hands wandered her body and vice versa, touching and teasing and stopping when her injuries kept it from going any further. He helped her throughout the day, gave her morphine when she needed it, cooked and cleaned and brought her work. He became... attached. In ways he wasn't expecting. Part of him was restless, but the rest reveled in the quiet ease of those few weeks. Weeks without pain or anger or confusion. Weeks of simplicity.

She knew that this was different, new, to whatever they'd both had in the past. They'd gone through hell together, had come out of it broken shells of human beings, and now they had the opportunity to help put each other back together. Now that he was here, warming her bed at night, sitting beside her as they listened to the radio and did paperwork, she didn't know how she had done it without him. He was a balm to her newfound fear of trust. Some part of her still nagged, still asked what was the catch, but she did her best to ignore it, to just live how she wanted to live for a while.

It wasn't long before she realized she was addicted to him, and the morphine. The times between doses was getting harder and harder to bear. It wasn't even the pain, anymore, it was the absence of it. The absence of the majority of her worries, floating away on a cloud. There was no keeping it from Sebastian; not for long, anyway.

Chapter End Notes

Lady Gaga - Judas
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wagn8Wrmzuc&t=0s&list=PLSCvi5dTA1ahDvIwz8x5mRI4kKDxqhd4S&index=26
A Soft Touch

Chapter Summary

Plot-sex :)

Chapter Notes

Sorry for such a long pause between updates - if you're a follower of the original story, you know what's up - but if you're not, just know we're trying! Thanks for sticking with us! If you like it please comment/kudos!

Denny - Girls Like You
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jou6kjfCYK4&list=PLSCvi5dTA1ahDvIwz8x5mRI4kKDoxd4S&index=31&t=0s

He knew. Had known before she did, he suspected. He could see the tremors in her hands, the way she practically melted when she took a dose. He did his best to be the only one administering it, but that became more and more difficult as she recovered her strength. He wasn't at all surprised the day he walked in early after a meeting-cut-short, and found her, bottle in hand, almost an hour before she was due for another dose. He raised an eyebrow, said nothing, and waited.

She froze for a second, surprised to see him, and then she knew the gig was up, and she sagged slightly, holding out the bottle for him to take. "I may have a problem."

He walked over to remove it from her hand. "Well, you can still give it to me, so that's a good sign," he pointed out, tucking it into his pocket. "But yes. I'd say you do."

"I can give it to you, but this isn't the first time I've fudged the times a little," she sighed, looking away from him, ashamed. "It's... hard to describe."

He leaned against the wall, waiting. He had seen this before, but it was different with everyone. He was lucky he'd never taken much more damage than that piece of rebar to his leg when he was in the service. He could just as easily have gotten hooked.

She was almost disappointed he didn't say anything. It meant she had to speak. She took a breath, shutting her eyes briefly. "After... everything that's happened... I just.. Want to not feel, as much. Understand?"

He nodded, arms crossed loosely, eyes on her, calm. "Of course I do," he said quietly. He had been right beside her for most of it. He understood completely. "But you can't get out of it with morphine. It's a foul way to end up."

She rubbed her eyes. "What am I supposed to do instead?"

"Deal with it like an adult," he said bluntly. "I went through the same shit, I'm younger than you by
a fair bit, and I'm not high on morphine. It's possible. We'll get you there too."

"Ouch," she muttered, increasingly embarrassed, avoiding looking at him. She didn't know what to say in response to that.

He sighed, pushing his irritation aside for now. "I'll lock up the morphine, give you doses when you're supposed to take them. And we'll start easing you off of it. I'll be here to help. Alright?"

She nodded, arms crossed over her chest. She cleared her throat, awkwardly. She wasn't skilled at resolving conflict like this. Armetti had always let her do what she wished, and she rolled over belly up for Jim most the time, for lack of other options. "Thanks."

He nodded, and walked into the next room. He had moved his gun locker there a week or so ago- it made more sense than going back and forth between their flats constantly, when he was supposed to remain with Harrison as much as possible. He unlocked the safe and set the bottle inside next to his bullets, before closing it again.

She wheeled herself over to the radio and turned it on, desperate for some sort of white noise to fill the silence. She didn't like silence anymore. It left too much room for her thoughts, of which she was trying to avoid having. She was tired of second-guessing everything. Of even second-guessing him.

He came back in a few minutes later, and walked over to where she was sitting by the radio. "Are you hungry?" He knew he had been harsh just then. She needed care right now. His disappointment could wait until later.

She glanced up at him, startled, then shook her head. "No. Thank you. You should eat, though."

"Sorry if you misunderstood that question," he said, heading for the kitchen. "What I actually meant was 'what do you want to eat'?"

She sighed, shrugging slightly. "Whatever you make is fine. Thank you."

He rolled his eyes but headed into the kitchen, pulling potatoes out of a bottom cabinet and starting to wash them very deliberately.

She never would have thought being taken care of would be so taxing. Her parents had been comfortable enough to afford a servant or two as she grew up, but those had listened to her desires, not forced her to take care of herself. She couldn't complain, but she could chafe at the lead.

He prepared pork chops and potatoes, making her a mid-sized plate and bringing it in to her. "Here. You don't have to eat it all, but eat something."

She nodded, taking it and setting it on the coffee table in front of her so she didn't burn her legs on the hot plate. "Thank you. Really."

He nodded just a little, sitting on the sofa that he'd been sleeping on lately and starting to eat his own food. He didn't know why he was so frustrated with her. He had known that her getting addicted wasn't just a possibility, but a likelihood.

Still, it felt like a betrayal. His first response, however harsh, had been truthful. He was doing his best to hold himself together, and it seemed like all she was doing was falling apart.

She ate in silence, dutifully, not hungry but unable to really resist. She knew that he was disappointed in her, but she couldn't help it. Italy, plus the ultimate betrayal of her trust by Jim, had
broken something integral in her. Hell, she was disappointed in herself, too, knowing that he had
gone through similar circumstances and yet had come out a functioning human being. Was she just
weaker than him, at her core? She couldn't tell.

It was later that day that the summons came from Jim. He hadn't had much contact with Lorna
since the day she'd been recovered, and he decided it was about time they have a bit of a chat.

She knew better than to put off responding, though her stomach twisted unpleasantly in trepidation,
unsure what kind of a meeting this would be. Had he decided what punishment he would enact on
her? She could roll herself to the lift, but it would be difficult to operate it without leverage, so she
looked to Moran, sighing, as the intercom went silent. "Sebastian, would you mind helping me to
Jim's office?"

He looked over at her from where he was reading through security updates. "I've hired a man for
the lift. I figured it would make getting around easier. He's got full security clearance."

She nodded a little. "Alright. Makes our life easier. See you later, then." She gave a half-hearted
wave and turned to wheel herself out.

James was waiting for her, and answered immediately as she knocks. "Come in, Lorna," he called
casually, leaning back in his chair.

She rolled herself in, keeping her posture as straight as she was able, determined not to show
weakness. "You called for me, sir?"

"I did, yes. Shut the door." He waited for her to do so, then smiled. "How goes your recovery? I see
your face is fully recovered. How relieving."

She gave him a purposefully tight smile. He knew exactly the risk he'd taken, and she wanted him
to know she hadn't forgotten. "Yes, it is. I'm recovering. Slowly."

"Are you enjoying my get well present?" He picked up a nail file, cleaning a speck from under his
thumbnail.

She raised her eyebrows slightly, surprised. "What? What get well present?"

"I did, yes. Shut the door." He waited for her to do so, then smiled. "How goes your recovery? I see
your face is fully recovered. How relieving."

She gave him a purposefully tight smile. He knew exactly the risk he'd taken, and she wanted him
to know she hadn't forgotten. "Yes, it is. I'm recovering. Slowly."

"Are you enjoying my get well present?" He picked up a nail file, cleaning a speck from under his
thumbnail.

She raised her eyebrows slightly, surprised. "What? What get well present?"

"I... did wonder what the catch was," she said cautiously, rubbing her thumb across the wheel of
her chair, eyes on him warily. "What is the catch?"

"The catch is that you improve," he said languidly. "And I thought it was amusing to tell you not to
touch, and watch the two of you dance around each other." He eyed her. "And get clean of the
morphine."

She ignored the part about the morphine except for a slight nod, her cheeks a little pinker than
normal. "Improve how, sir?"

"Well, don't wander off with any more murderers, for starters," he said with a glint of teeth that
could have been a smile or a grimace. "I'll need you to be smarter than that for what is coming."

Her eyebrows rose further. "What's to come, sir?"

"The next stage in our expansion." He leaned forward now, elbows on his desk. "We've stagnated, Harrison. That's unacceptable."

She shifted slightly in her chair, unsure what to make of this. "What kind of expansion are we talking about, sir?"

"Global, first and foremost." He smiled, entertained by her discomfort. "The world is in turmoil. Desperation and distraction are rampant in equal quantities. Now is the perfect time to plant seeds wherever we choose. By the time the world is rebuilt, we will have established ourselves in the soil, and within a few months we will be the deep-rooted weed breaking through their marble flagstones."

She nodded slightly, trying to take this in stride. "Any place you're planning on starting?"

"I've asked Moran to compile some suggestions, but my plan is to have at least one stronghold on every inhabited continent within three years." He watched her quietly.

"Alright. So where does that leave us? We'll have to dramatically increase staff, yes? That will be a nightmare for me and Moran, I'm sure," she muttered, closing her eyes for a second.

"Yes," he agreed. "But it may not need to be as extensive as you think. I'm not looking to replicate the network, merely expand it. A simple team of four or five at each base to start will be sufficient, and at least one should be someone already under our employ."

She nodded again. "Are you planning on absorbing any other networks, or organizations?" She asked, digging a little. *Are you going to bring Armetti into this?*

He nodded. "I think that will be wise, but not overmuch. Our people will need to outnumber theirs in most situations."

She would have let out a sigh of relief, had she been alone. As it was, she nodded, once again. "Well, point me where you want me, and I'll charm where I can, boss."

He nodded slightly. "I'll be informing you of your new posting over the next few weeks. For the moment, I want our departments preparing to be mobile at a moment's notice. We may need to send out agents quickly."

"Okay. I'll visit the office, start putting the fear of god in them. Anything else, sir?"

"Yes. Remind the boy that I'm due for an update. He'll know what I mean. Dismissed." He returned to his folders.

She paused for a split second, wondering what that meant, then nodded and wheeled herself out. Well, that had gone shockingly well.

Over the course of the next few weeks, the network prepared. Moriarty had frequent conversations with both of his lieutenants, though rarely at the same time, planning the expansion.

As she healed further, the relationship between her and Moran became more uncertain. She'd
started her physical therapy, and was no longer quite as dependent on him, but that only served to complicate things. The morphine was an ever-present temptation, one that was easiest to resist with him around, but he had work to do that wasn't her, and her own work didn't involve her like he did. Their bond was still the closest in bed, after nightmares.

He took to keeping the morphine in his pockets, stopping by to give her doses when she needed it, and no more. He was under strict orders from Jim to be vigilant, and ensure that she got no closer to a dependency.

It was one of the longest periods of celibacy in her life since she'd started fucking. The longer it went, the more she healed, the more she wondered if it mattered who broke the streak first; Jim or Sebastian.

It was inevitable, really. They spent so much time in the same bed, to the point where it had become routine. And while his sleep was generally better than hers, nothing could erase Italy, and the nightmares came regularly. He was still and silent, generally, even during a nightmare- a habit learned from years of light sleep and dangerous situations, both at home and in the service. But when he woke that night, in pitch blackness, he could feel the brand searing into him, and the strangled noise of pain and fear was reflexive, as was the startled movement away from whatever was hurting him.

She startled awake, sucking in a breath as she jolted her sore leg a bit, and it took her a second to fully understand why she had woken. When she did she rolled onto her side, reaching for him carefully. "Sebastian? Are you alright?"

He jolted away from her, but then forced himself to remain still. If there is a threat, loud movement will not help. He didn't respond, listening to the room, straining to hear movement, waiting for an attack.

"Sebastian.... It's me," she said quietly, not reaching out for him again. "Did you have a bad dream?"

Her words were a secondary sound, a low blur beneath the oppressive silence of the room and the thundering of his heartbeat. His breath rasped in his ears. Was that a floorboard creaking? He reached for the knife under his pillow, gripping the handle, waiting...

She waited for a moment, trying to assess what to do, and then she slowly reached out to place her hand on his bare shoulder. Not moving any further.

He tensed again, but his senses cataloged the touch and decided it wasn't a threat, and proceeded to ignore it, attention still on the room.

She stayed like that for a minute or two, then slid her hand carefully across his skin, rubbing back and forth.

He started again, but then relaxed a little under the rhythm. Parts of his mind were starting to conflict now. Lorna wasn't concerned. She was smart enough to know if there was danger. But so was he, and he had felt.... Had seen... Lorna's hand brushed over his arm again, and he took a shaky breath. Where were they? They were in a bed. A soft bed, in her flat, in the network... The Network. London. Not Italy.

"It's alright, Sebastian," she whispered, lips brushing his bare shoulder. "It's okay. We're not there. We're alone."
He closed his eyes for a moment, the thunder of his heartbeat slowing just slightly. His mouth was dry. The knife felt hot in his hand. Her lips brushed his shoulder... *Alone. We’re not there. This is not Italy...*

She kissed his shoulder, fingers tracing his clavicle. "It's okay. It's okay...."

He relaxed into her touch slowly, trying to focus on the way her fingers felt against his skin and not the imposing darkness, the must and burning flesh he swore he could still smell.

"How can I help?" she whispered, his skin hot under her touch. "Who do you need me to be?"

It took him a moment to get the word out, but when it escaped it was a thrown lifeline. "Distraction," he said, the word tripping off of his tongue.

She nodded, not sure for a second what to do. He was fragile at the moment, just like she was. Fragile in a different way. She shifted over to kiss his cheek, hand cupping the other, her thumb rubbing across his skin.

He leaned into her touch, his free hand reaching up to cover hers, feeling the warmth of her skin and trying to lose himself in it.

She leaned up more and kissed him softly on the lips, hand lifting up to card gently through his hair.

He kissed her back, his muscles slowly beginning to relax, blood flowing in cool waves across his skin. He released the knife under his pillow, and reached out to place it on her hip, tugging her a little closer.

"Is this what you want?" She murmured, shifting her leg over his, kissing him again. "I don't want to make it worse."

He nodded, the taste of her lips against his exactly what he needed to keep him distracted.

She took that for what it was and fell silent, tucking up closer against him as they kissed. They usually stopped soon after this point, when her body gave out, but she was willing to push it this time. She wanted to help him, and she was well enough to do so.

He wrapped his arms around her waist, expecting no more than she was giving but content enough with that. His tongue tangled with hers, her taste familiar and warm.

He was so safe. Not like Jim, and different than Vincent. She felt special, to be kissed by him. To be sharing her bed with him. After their differences and the mistakes she had made, after the way he had remained steadfast but never cruel, she couldn't help herself. She was infatuated with him.

She trailed a finger down his chest, over his abs, down the line of his hip, and to his waistband.

He was very interested in where this was going, now. He had shared her bed for weeks now, but that meant her celibacy had been his as well. He'd been busy enough to be tired most nights, but there had been a fair few uncomfortable nights. Now, however, her hand was very much closer to where he wanted it than it had been in a while, and he took a small breath, fully distracted.

She smirked in triumph at his short breath, glad that she could still affect him that way. She hadn't lost her touch. Then again, it had been weeks since he'd received any attention of this sort; she couldn't claim too much. She kissed him harder, hand wandering further south over his clothes.

He relaxed under her touch, his own hands wandering to her body with a gentleness that was
usually completely out of character for him. However, the last thing he wanted was for this to stop because he damaged her.

His hands left trails of tingling warmth. She wondered, suddenly, if this was what they had been truly needing, since returning from Italy. Kindness, a gentle hand, soft words. After all the harsh treatment at the hands of their captors and then Jim, maybe they needed a nice, vanilla fuck. She shifted away for a second to pull off her sleeping gown over her head before returning to kiss him again, tucked up against his hot side.

He pulled her into his lap, careful of her injuries, his hands caressing her hips as he kissed her again. Any thoughts of his dreams were out of his mind, his attention entirely on her warm body against his.

She'd never kissed someone so sweetly and meant it. He didn't deserve all the things that had happened to him, not like her. She didn't deserve him, but for some reason he'd taken up residence in her bed, and she wasn't going to argue.

He shifted his thigh up between hers, slowly, testing the waters. The shift from panic to pleasure left him in an odd high of adrenaline and endorphins. He felt emboldened by it. He wanted her. And, if he wasn't wrong, she wasn't complaining.

She made a soft sound against his lips, settling down on his leg, grateful for the warm pressure at her core, where she was beginning to need it. She kissed him a little harder, her hand shifting up to card through his hair.

He leaned into her touch, finding, to his surprise, that he craved it in ways that were entirely non-sexual. Desire was there, absolutely, but also, forming a tight hitch in his chest, the need to just be touched without anger. Soft fingers through his hair made his breath catch, and he kissed her harder to cover why.

She'd never felt this way before; safe, even without being in complete control. She could relax, here in this bed with him. Not that she necessarily wanted to, not at this moment, with his thigh pressing against her heat and their lips entangled.

He rolled his hips upward, thigh rubbing between her legs, a teasing motion. He wanted her, wanted to lose himself in this moment and forget everything else about his life, about the world.

She let out another soft moan against his lips, encouraging, her hand sliding down his abdomen to trace over the bulge in his pajama bottoms, her touch careful, ready to pull away at the first sign that she'd gone too far too fast.

He was eager, though, smiling and nipping encouragingly at her lip, his own hands gripping her arse and pulling her further into his lap.

She grinned, grinding down on his thigh and gripping him through his pajamas, a shiver sent up her spine at his hands on her rear. "Think you can fuck me without hurting my leg?" She asked softly, shifting her kisses to his jaw.

He snorted derisively, tilting his head back. "I'm sure I can find a way, properly motivated as I am," he shot back, groaning softly at her grip.

"Good, because I'm sure you're just as wound up as me after that dry spell we had," she whispered, breath tickling his ear before she sank her teeth into the corner of his jaw, her hand gripping him a little tighter.
He jolted under the sudden onslaught of sensation. She was right. It had been a hell of a dry spell and his body was aching for her, very physically. He shifted his hands with sudden, trembling urgency to push her shift up, rough palms finding soft, bed-warmed skin and smoothing upward.

She shifted to press his thigh down so she could fully straddle his waist, removing her hand from him so she could grind on him instead, very carefully keeping her hurt leg weight free, leaving a red mark on his neck with her teeth before she settled back again to capture his lips.

He lifted at her waist, helping her keep her weight off of the leg. She ground down on him and he let out a pleased sound. "Fuck... I am looking forward to when I can pin you against a wall."

She smirked between kisses, fingers tracing the muscles that lined his rib cage. "You can probably get away with other forms of a rough fuck, so long as you're careful about my most pressing injury."

"Your most pressing injury is in a very inconvenient place," he retorted against her lips, one hand sliding between her thighs from behind. His fingers spread over her heat through her knickers, probing.

"Could have been worse," she shot back, breathier than before, a shiver traveling up her spine, nipping at his lip. "Could have been my face..." she kissed him again, "Could have been my throat..." she shifted to nip his throat, "Could have been my ribs," she hummed, kissing and biting a trail down his chest; more on a quest to tease him than anything else.

"Was your face," he retorted, though he was grinning, eyes closed. "You lead. I'm in no mood to hurt you and have to stop proceedings halfway through. I might kill myself."

She smirked, licking a stripe up his abdomen. "My face doesn't hurt much anymore. You can be rough with that part of me," she hummed, a hand sliding down his thigh. "You can just ask before you do anything...."

His breath hitched and he reached out, pushing her gently backwards onto the bed letting her move to accommodate the movement however was best for her. He reached down to pull her knickers down her legs, his whole body hot and straining.

She felt herself flush, swallowing hard, her shift pulled up at the hem to just barely cover her, legs bared in the dim light emanating from the nightlight in the bathroom. Her eyes ran over him, her chest tightening in anticipation. Fuck, he was so handsome.

He sat back to pull his shirt over his head. The darkness hid the ugly mass of scar tissue on his chest and he could almost forget it was there. He was full of urges and desire, screaming for attention. He seized on one and didn't hesitate to shift down between her legs, his tongue, unpracticed but urgent, diving between her legs.

She gasped, a shuddering breath, hand falling to slide into his hair. What he lacked in practical knowledge he made up for in eagerness, and that was something she could work with; letting out a soft moan when he was doing well.

He listened for the moans, gradually honing his actions. She was hot and salty on his tongue, the smell of her overwhelming his senses and fueling the burning hunger building in him.

Eventually, as pleasant a way to spend the time it was, it wasn't enough, and she tugged gently on his hair, silently asking to kiss him again, to get on with the show.

He came up, kissing her slowly, the taste of her tongue cool and mild in comparison to where he
had been moments before. He didn't wait any longer, as eager as she was, reaching down to hitch her good leg up around his waist and then positioning himself, entering her slowly.

She groaned, hooking her fingers in the waistband of his pants that he had just barely bothered to shove down and pulling them further off herself to get a handful of his ass, pulling him tighter against her.

He felt her envelop him, and groaned, too, panting softly, his breath warm against her skin as he took a moment. It had been so long... He rocked his hips against hers, slowly, as if testing the motion, and then again a little more firmly, body quivering with restraint.

Her fingers pressed hard into his skin, her legs shaking, and she kissed him hard, wordlessly begging him to move.

He did, then.

They both needed gentleness, both craved more, and the combination of their movements was a straining tangle of passion and restraint, harsh energy and tenderness. It suited them.

There was nothing about this that was like her anger-filled fuck with Jim, the one they'd had after Lorna had discovered his treatment of Sebastian. She realized, mid-kiss, her leg hiched around his waist, her hand clutching his back as restrained as she could manage, that she truly did have feelings for him. And maybe that wasn't such a bad thing.

He chased his pleasure, and it wasn't far from him, not with how long it had been. Her body trembled under him with the effort of keeping herself contained, and it translated through her body into his, repressed energy building and compounding.

She came quietly, with a shudder and a sobbed gasp into his neck, fisting a hand in the sheets to avoid hurting him.

He came a half a breath after she did, letting himself go, pressing tight against her and holding her close to him.

She caught her breath with her eyes shut, cheek pressed against his neck. Her leg ached from tensing up, but that was a worthy exchange; the rest of her felt great. She slowly relaxed her grip in the sheets, her other hand tracing patterns on his back. Her mind wandered in the in-between, wondering what exactly Jim was getting out of letting her have this. He must have been getting something.

He eventually shifted to lay down beside her, sated and relaxed, his body thrumming with the relief after so long. "Christ..."

She chuckled breathlessly. "Yeah..." She stretched out, yawning, then sighed and shifted towards the edge of the bed, before realizing that her current course of going to get cleaned up would make her wheelchair very unsavory to sit in. "Once you're up to it, mind getting me something to clean up with?"

He nodded, taking just a moment to gather himself before standing, navigating the dark room with practiced ease as he went to the toilet. He cleaned up himself, then brought her a warm damp cloth, handing it to her and climbing back into bed.

She cleaned up and then tossed the rag onto the floor to deal with tomorrow, curling up and burrowing into the pillows and blankets with a content groan, very carefully stretching her injured leg in the process. "Well, thank you for that."
"Thank you," he said quietly, laying out next to her and pulling the blankets over them both. "You... got me out of my head."

"Any time," she murmured, adjusting her head on the pillow and looking at him in the darkness. Doubtful that he could see whether or not her eyes were open. She considered the fact that she'd realized she had feelings for him. Had anything changed? Why him? She sighed, silently. Why couldn't it have been Jim?

He lay in the darkness for a while, thinking about her body, the warmth of her skin on his... He fell asleep shortly after, smiling.

She fell asleep sometime after his breathing evened out, conflicted and confused.
Sebastian fell into a manageable pattern over the next few months. James had sent other agents to Greece in the wake of Harrison's injury, which had left Moran disappointed and itching to travel.

He soon discovered that he was far better off at home. Moriarty began sending him on almost nightly missions into the city, removing target after target in whatever way he saw fit, so long as each death could not be linked to the others. He took a thrilled joy in perfecting his art, changing the way he killed and disposed of bodies, trying new methods, always pushing the lines. He had not felt so sated in years.

The days he spent with a still-recovering Harrison, finding satisfaction in other ways. The price—her secrets, paid to Jim in weekly reports—was well worth it. He would have paid far more to spend his days wrapped in the arms of a beautiful goddess of sex, and his nights painted in blood.

He felt the fear of Italy fading at each death, as he found his sense of power and control once more. For the first time in what felt like an eternity, he was happy.

Lorna returned to work, first with the support of a waiting wheelchair, then with a crutch, and finally on her own two feet, though she had an almost imperceptible limp.

Her nights, she spent basking in the simplicity of Moran's company. After two years of being at Jim's beck and call, it was a relief she hadn't known she'd needed, to be free of some of the games and tribulations. The longer she spent with him, the more she was sure of her feelings, and the more sure she was that she could never tell him.

It was the first night in a week he didn't have a mission file waiting on his desk. Instead, there was a note about a meeting with James, and a thick folder on the current political situation in Germany. He took a slow breath, and sat down to read.

Lorna came home while he was still reading, and glanced over his shoulder as she pulled off her shoes. "Germany? Jesus. There's a bag of cats."

"Mm... A bag of cats with an odd obsession with the occult." He set the file aside. "You're supposed to read this too, by the way."

She raised her eyebrows slightly, coming around the couch to sit down next to him. "Is he finally sending us on assignment, then?"

"You're better," he pointed out. "Able to walk. And he can't have me do much more in the city
right now without starting to draw suspicion."

"Germany, though... That will be interesting," she sighed. Her eyes were tight. There was a lot happening in Germany that she didn't agree with, and after their experience with Italy, she was a naturally more anxious person.

"Mmm..." He stood, straightening his uniform. "I'll be back. He called me in for a meeting."

She nodded, pulling the file off his lap and into hers, getting down to reading.

Moran headed out into the hallway, and for the elevator, tipping his hat to the attendant, Rita. He had chosen a woman for the post, which was unusual, but men were hard to find these days, and her background check was acceptable. Not to mention it gave his men something to admire. He rode down to Jim's floor and stepped out, walking through the drab waiting room to knock on the door.

"Come in," Jim called, sorting through files on his desk.

He walked through the heavy wooden door, closing it behind him. "Evening, sir," he said levelly as he fell into parade rest. "You sent for me?"

"Yes, I did. I have a new assignment for you. One I will be accompanying you both on. We're visiting lovely Germany."

The location, he had expected. The company, less so. "Sir, I must recommend strongly against your accompanying us. Germany is unstable at best at the moment..."

"I was invited, Moran. It's your door in, and it's foolish to waste it," he returned, drumming his fingers on the desk.

"What are the details of that invitation, sir?" he asked, eyebrows wrinkling slightly.

"They want my advice on gathering information. Specifically, blackmail. Ironic, considering that that's exactly your lovely little mission. I want their dirt, Moran. Every juicy little tidbit, every tiny morsel. And this time, no need for decipherable long-distance communication. We can simply have a little chat."

"Frankly, sir, this feels like a discussion you should be having with Harrison." He straightened his shirt habitually. "I'll need to be focussing on keeping the two of you safe."

"And now you know what we're planning, in order to do so," he shrugged, leaning back in his chair. "You had objections, Harrison will not. But yes, send her down when you see her next."

He sighed. "Sir, I really must object. Germany is incredibly unstable and unpredictable. Their government is fickle in their loyalty at best. The whole country is a witch hunt for the unusual."

"The whole world is unstable at the moment, darling Sebastian," he snorted, rolling his eyes. "As for the unusual, they invited me to help them blackmail various peoples for knowledge on the occult. Ironic, considering what I'll be bringing you both for. Don't fuck any men while you're there, and don't take off your shirt in front of anybody. Lorna should know better than to attach herself to any women while she's there."

He bit back a retort, and nodded sharply, standing. "Very well. If that will be all, sir," he said, his tone completely neutral.
"You can go. Next time you report to me I expect a report on Harrison's status as well," he replied, and nodded towards the door.

Moran sighed, but nodded obediently and turned to leave, heading for the flat. May as well send Harrison to him now.

She was having a lunch break and a cup of tea, reading a newspaper and listening to the radio. The signal was too weak for traditional antenna, and so throughout the building were wires that led from antennas above the bunker.

He walked in with a casual knock on the door as he passed. "The boss wants to see you," he said, hanging his hat by the door.

She muttered a swear under her breath, shoveling a few more forkfuls of food into her mouth before she stood, stiffly, and took the plate to the sink to deal with later. "Alright, heading down," she said over her shoulder, heading for the door. "Thanks."

Five minutes later she was knocking on his door, and entered as he called her in.

He looked up as she came in, absentmindedly evaluating her stride. She had come a long way in the past few weeks, her limp barely noticeable to an untrained eye. To his eye, it was a blazing beacon, but that didn't matter overmuch. "Good evening, Lorna, dear."

"Good evening, Jim," she nodded, where once she might have smiled. Things had been slightly repaired between them after he'd assaulted her, but the trust between them was still splintered, much in the same way her leg had been. "You sent for me?"

"Yes," he said with a nod, motioning her forward. "We'll be leaving for Germany tomorrow evening. I've apprised Moran of the situation."

She sighed. "Goddamnit. My German is rusty as hell."

"Clearly your French is well polished," James retorted sarcastically. He leaned his elbow on the desk, setting his chin in his hand. "It needn't be perfect. You two will be posing as my retainers, nothing more than servants in the background. No one will expect you to be well educated. You might find it to your advantage if they think you speak little or no German, in fact."

She nodded a little, quirking her eyebrows in agreement. "Alright, good points. What's the mission?"

"I have been invited to consult for the Nazi party regarding blackmail. While we are there, you and Moran will be doing practical application of the same," he said with a small smirk.

"Delightful," she said, with an amused snort. "Always enjoy those assignments. A pity the last one went so poorly. Though I do suppose that it wasn't at its core a blackmail mission..." she trailed off, troubled, then cleared her throat, focusing on him again. "Sorry."

He raised an eyebrow, but for once did not comment. She was... sensitive... about her time in Italy.

"Moran seems very disgruntled about his assignment. Do your best to win him over, or I'll take it upon myself to remind him who is in control."

She nodded, though had to stop herself from flexing her fingers defensively. Jim had done enough to them. "Yes, sir. Do you want to forward the details to me so I can look over them in my office or do you want to go through it all here?"
"A file is already waiting for you," he said, waving his hand dismissively. "That will be all. Oh, except-" He looked back up, and gave her a grin. "Rather hypocritical for you to scold me for fucking him, wouldn't you say?"

She raised her eyebrows, startled. "What do you mean, sir?"

He kicked his feet up on his desk, leather shoes gleaming. He was fond of these shoes. They were french. Or the woman who they were made out of had been, anyway. "Don't give me that look. It wasn't long ago you came in here and berated me for regularly fucking the boy. For becoming involved. How long has he been sleeping in your bed now?"

She set her teeth, eyes hardening slightly. "Jim, I was angry at you for two things. One - leaving yourself open to danger, two - allowing him to damage himself on you. You can't tell me you didn't know what that was doing to him. He was already unstable! The last thing you need is a unstable bodyguard! You were the one who told me not to get involved with him, and then you sent him directly to me! For fuck's sake, Jim, make up your goddamn mind, please. I believe we've established there's only so much I can take from you."

He eyed her, and shook his head, expression shifting quickly to annoyance. "Out, poppet. You're irking me."

She thought about staying and risking his anger, and then had a flashback of his pistol whip to her face and turned on her heel and left without another word, fists clenched.

Moran was re-reading the file on Germany, trying to turn the rather dry political update into faces and figures that he could predict.

She came back into the flat a little more violently than she normally did, though she tried to take care not to slam the door shut behind her. "Moran? We need to talk."

He looked up, and at her expression immediately closed the folder, and stood. "What's wrong?" he asked, hand drifting toward his gun on instinct

She shook her head a little, raising a hand to calm him. "No threat. You can relax, for the most part. Look, I just had an unpleasant conversation with Jim, and the question crossed my mind that I'd like you to answer. Why are you still here? In my flat? In my bed? I'm not evicting you, don't think that, I just... Don't understand."

He frowned, wishing suddenly that there was some sort of threat, but he lowered his hand and then shifted into very barely more relaxed position. "I was under the impression that you wanted me here."

"I do," she said candidly, not looking away from him, gaze unwavering. "But that's not a good enough reason. Why have you stayed? Truly?"

He grit his teeth slightly. "It seemed to be a mutually beneficial arrangement."

She sighed, now turning away a little, running a hand over her face. He was being difficult, but could she really expect any different? Would she have been forthcoming? "Sebastian... Please. What do you get out of this arrangement? I know what I get. But God... I won't take advantage of you like Jim did."

His neutral expression slipped for a moment, flickering surprise. "You aren't."
She nodded a little, working her jaw a little. So he wouldn't say anything. Wouldn't answer her question. She looked back at him again. "Are you taking advantage of me?"

He stiffened at that. "I don't intend to, ma'am." He looked her in the eyes. "I enjoy being here. I enjoy your company. Is that enough?"

It was a long moment before she nodded, and another before she hesitantly stepped over to him and put a hand on his cheek, softly, and leaned up to kiss him chastely. What she couldn't say she could show, if only in this apartment.

He relaxed just slightly, bending to meet her halfway, kissing her back. He was glad the conversation was over.

She kissed him for a few moments and then drew back, hand slipping from his cheek to his chest, and she sighed. "We ought to start working on the mission. I hear you are reluctant."

He wasn't quite sure what had just happened between them, but he was sure it was significant. "I feel it's an incredible risk for questionable gain."

She snorted, stepping away a few paces and heading for the coffee table, aiming for her silver cigarette case. "Couldn't you say that about any war-time mission?"

"It isn't any wartime mission that goes into Germany to meddle with the Nazi party. These people have an undercurrent of insanity that rivals Moriarty's." He snorted and tossed the folder down.

She sighed, rubbing a hand over her forehead. "We agree there. But this is something that needs to be done, and we can't necessarily trust anyone else to do it right."

"I understand that. It doesn't mean I need to be cheerful about it." He crossed his arms. "My job is to counter the boss's tendency to throw himself into danger. I'm doing that."

She chuckled. "Yes, alright, so you are. Jim asked me to get you out of it, but that's probably a lost cause, and I don't care enough to continue it."

He nodded a little. "Sounds fine to me. I need to begin preparing, then."

"Yeah, I should too," she sighed, and headed for the phone on the wall. "I'm going to call the kitchen, see if we can't get some dinner. In the mood for anything in particular?"

"Scotch," he muttered, picking up the file from where he'd dropped it with a weary sigh, and sitting to it again.

She rolled her eyes, picking up the phone and ordering a substantial spread to account for his appetite. They had enough scotch in the flat already.

He stopped when the food arrived to eat as quickly as he could, scarfing down several plates of food without really tasting it before returning to his work. He was angry, and driven by it. He was responsible for protecting Moriarty and Harrison in one of the most politically unstable and dangerous countries in the modern world with very little prep time, and a failure would end his life.

She let him stew in silence during the meal, taking her time during it, unlike him. She started preparing once she cleaned up, reading over profiles and such. When it was time for bed she put away everything and headed for the bedroom, changing into her night dress and climbing into bed, letting out a quiet breath. She understood why he was upset, but there wasn't much to do about it.
He noticed her go to bed only in an absent way, a guard marking the presence of his charge. He worked into the early hours of the morning, time passing unheeded in the unchanging electric light.

She woke up in the early morning, surprised to find him still gone, and got up blearily, walking out to the living room. "What are you doing up?" She asked, squinting at the light.

"What are you doing up?" he countered, looking up with dry, red eyes and a raised eyebrow. "Weren't you sleeping?" He was surrounded by reports and notepads covered in his blocky writing.

"I woke up. You weren't there. I was... Concerned." She said, rubbing her eyes. "Come to bed."

The request felt odd, but he couldn't ignore it once she asked. His eyes felt full of sand, and he had been staring at the same page of notes for the last ten minutes. He sighed, and stood. "Very well."

"Thank you," she murmured, turning and heading back to the bedroom to crawl beneath the covers. He followed after her, removing his wrinkled uniform and folding it absently, setting it on a chair before pulling on sleep trousers and falling into bed half clad and exhausted. He was asleep before he had a chance to get under the blankets.

She fell asleep as soon as she heard his breathing change, a sound that she now found comforting, familiar. A speck of fear made its way into her dreams that night. What if Germany really did hurt them beyond repair?

Moran slept fitfully as well. The politics of Germany that he had just spent hours pouring over mingled in his dreams with their time in Italy. He tossed in his sleep, hand occasionally pressing against his brand.

She woke up around 11, and sat up slowly, taking a deep breath. The sheets stuck to her where her cold sweat had wet them. She peeled them off, looking over at the sleeping Moran, considering him in silence for a moment before getting out of bed and heading for the bathroom to relieve herself and shower off the nightmares vestiges. If Moran didn't relax a little, she was worried Jim would take it upon himself to beat him back into submission again. She didn't know if she could stand to see that happen one more time.

Moran woke when she rose, but remained still until she was in the water closet. He had learned she preferred a minute's privacy in the morning, and it was a simple way to keep her from stressing overmuch. He donned a shirt once he heard her start the shower, and headed back for his notes. He needed to read everything with a fresh mind, and then begin practical preparations.

She came out about twenty minutes later, naked and toweling off her hair, and walked out into the living room to grab her dressing gown she had forgotten out there the night before, treating him to an eyeful in the process. "Just a heads up not to bring up your... Distress? About this mission to Jim. He might react in a volatile manner."

He bit back a retort that was inappropriate in front of the fairer sex, especially one as declotted and luxuriant as she was. She was just trying to keep his nose out of the dirt. It wasn't her fault the boss was raving. "I'll keep that in mind."
She gave a slight smile and set about making breakfast after slipping on the silk gown, trying not to think about the fact that they were headed for Germany soon.

The next week was a blur of preparation. Moran read through every German political docket he could get his hands on, sketching out cramped maps of key players and their allegiances and motivations, trying to build a reliable risk analysis for political navigation. He studied the geography and infrastructure, compiled architectural data and blueprints of government buildings to have on hand for reference, and oversaw the preparation of an assortment of weaponry and gadgets for transport. Anything they might need.

Lorna spent that week doing her best to relieve Sebastian's stress, prepare for Germany, and manage Jim all at once, and sleeping like the dead at night, trying to keep herself well rested for the trip.

Moran slept beside her for a few hours at a time. The military had taught him how to operate with little sleep, and he put it to good practice now. There was too much to be done to do otherwise.

Finally they were almost ready. The night before they were supposed to leave, Moran was going over the flight plans that had been proposed by the aviation department, reviewing the course for risks. Jim had kept to himself the last few days, but his excitement and energy had been filtering down through the ranks, creating a stir of motivation and healthy fear.

Sebastian sat back and rubbed at his eyes, setting the flight plan down. It was as safe as he could make it. Although, if they altered course to the south... he picked it up again.

Lorna had been practicing her German with an effort she hadn't quite put in for a while, and while it improved immensely there wasn't much she could do on such short notice about her accent. It would be obvious that she was an outsider - just another barrier to deal with. Her wardrobe she chose carefully; materials were becoming scarcer in Germany, and it wouldn't do to stand out too much with her black-market nylons and fine clothing. Even in Britain she occasionally got the odd glance, but here at least there was little they could do to her.

The day they were due to leave, she got out of bed early, her nerves acting up, and spent almost an hour in a hot shower, just sitting under the spray, trying not to think about Italy.

Moran had already been up for hours by the time Lorna rose, going over the adjusted flight plan with their pilots. He returned just as she was getting out of the shower, his uniform crisper even than usual, the only sign of his nerves. "Ma'am. Ready to go?"

He had told Jim about her nightmares, last night. The boss had called him in to demand payment for his continued pursuit of her, and he had tendered stories of her restless nights- her muttered pleas in Italian, begging for her life, his life, freedom... he told himself he didn't feel dirty.

She smiled a little, drying off her hair in the doorway to the bedroom. "You don't have to call me ma'am while I'm naked unless I have a hand 'round your throat, Sebastian," she said quietly, subdued. Trying to keep her mind quiet, away from the possibilities. Trying not to relive the worst
month of her life. Trying not to imagine it happening again. She slipped past him, heading for the
dresser. "Just let me get dressed and grab a bagel, and then I'm ready."

"Breakfast will be served in the plane," he offered, adjusting his jacket. "If that will be suitable."

She sighed imperceptibly, tossing the towel to the side, onto the bed, and pulling a dress out of the
dresser to pull on. "Yes, that will be fine. Thank you, Moran."

He nodded, adjusting his jacket again. It was a touch snug at the shoulders. He needed to get a new
one. "An escort is waiting to take you to the plane at your convenience."

She looked over at him, surprised. "Not you?"

He raised an eyebrow. "I'll be escorting Moriarty. You're my secondary charge," he reminded her
politely.

Both eyebrows rose. "Are we not taking the same plane?"

He shook his head. "Too great a risk to put the first and second-in-command on the same flight.
You'll be meeting us in Germany."

"That's a reasonable train of thought," she sighed, nodding once and then pulling out underwear to
slip into, which she promptly did. "Have fun trapped in an enclosed space with Jim for an hour. It's
your turn, anyway, after the bomb incident."

He managed a grim smirk. "I'll do my best. In the event our plane is shot down, there is a briefcase
on your plane with everything the boss feels you will need to continue the network. The
combination is here." He handed her a slip of paper. "Destroy it once you remember."

She read it twice and then ripped it up, handing it back to him to dispose of. "Alright." She didn't
say that if both him and Jim died she might let the network burn.

He gave her a lazy salute. "See you in Germany, ma'am."

She smiled a little. "Have a safe flight, Colonel," she said, and then headed for the door.

He followed her out, leaving her in the care of the waiting escort and taking the lift one level down
to meet the boss.

Chapter End Notes

Hey y'all! I miss your comments! I crave validation! If you like the story please let us
know ^>^ I'm dying here!
Also - would any of y'all be interested in a playlist for this AU like we have going for
the main story? I have a proto one in development but I wanna know if anybody would
be interested in me sharing it.
Jim was waiting, leaning against his desk, door to the waiting room wide open, with a full view of the elevator. He pushed off the desk as the lift opened up to reveal Sebastian, heading to meet him halfway. "I assume the plane is ready and waiting?"

He nodded. "It is, sir. We're prepared to leave as soon as you are."

"I've been ready for several hours. Let's go visit our encroaching friend Germany, shall we?"

He nodded, and waited for James to exit, falling into step just behind him as they headed for street level.

Lorna boarded the plane with her escort, who made himself scarce in the captain's quarters (to her relief), and she sat down with a sigh in the nearest chair. Across from her on the wall, was the briefcase. She supposed it was there to tempt her - remind her that she could never disobey him. Him. Jim. She pursed her lips, considering the case.

It glinted dully, vibrating as the engines started and the plane began to coast down the runway.

She lasted ten minutes.

Then she stood from her seat and pulled the case off its hook before backing up and taking her seat again, fingers quickly unlatching the buckles and the combination keeping the case closed. She didn't hesitate opening it. When she did, she stared. There were two folders, sitting side by side. Each appeared to have only one piece of paper in it. The first was labeled "Succession," and the second "Destruction." She was slightly confused. Destruction? Wasn't that what Jim wanted to avoid? She reached for it, hesitantly at first, and then grabbed it and tore it open.

In the center of the page were three sentences in clean black type.

It seems I am dead. You have chosen destruction. Sebastian Moran was spying on you since the beginning, trading your secrets for the right to your bed.

She felt something funny happen to her stomach, though she remained externally calm. She very carefully folded the paper back up and slid it back into the envelope, and then considered how it would go unnoticed that she'd broken the seal of glue. That had been rash of her. He would check, certainly, wouldn't he? Well, she hadn't ripped the envelope itself - she lifted it to her face and licked the glue remnants, and then sealed it back up. Alright, it stood up to her eyes. If she was lucky, it would stand up to his, or he would be too arrogant to check. She sighed and sat back, and put her head in her hands. There was no time to freak out now. If she cried, it would be obvious when they landed. She had to keep this held down until she figured out what to do about it.
Sebastian didn't remember breathing between the time the planes took off and when they landed. His whole body was tense, knots working themselves gleefully into his muscles. Were they to be attacked in the air, there was nothing he could do to stop it. Flying fighter planes posed more risk of drawing fire than protection, so stealth had been the best option. As it was, it was still a monumental risk.

Moran didn't relax until both planes were on the ground, which Jim found endlessly amusing. He watched the young buck pace back and forth across the small aircraft before finally settling into a tense stance with the over-stillness of a distance shooter. It was satisfying to watch the affection he had cultured in the boy so carefully finally bear some enjoyable fruit. When their plane landed, it barely made a difference. He was still twisted tighter than a pressed spring until eighteen minutes later- Harrison's plane landed. Only then did his muscles seem to remember they could move.

When she landed, Lorna was... Tired. That was all she allowed herself to feel, for the moment. She didn't doubt that she could lie to Jim - she could, if pressed - but the more she hid her feelings, the less she would have to.

She got off the plane with luggage in hand and smiled as she saw them waiting on the runway. Nothing was wrong, she told herself. That was how she would get through this without breaking. "Good!" she called as she approached them, "I was worried you got shot out of the sky. Dark joke, maybe, but we all made it safe and sound."

Jim rolled his eyes, and gave her a smirk. "Our poor pup didn't stop whinging the whole trip. He likes you better, it seems, dear."

She winked at Jim. "I'm just more likable, that's all. That's why I'm the grifter, right?" She smiled, though she set down her luggage next to theirs and took a few steps to give Sebastian a kiss, twining one of her arms around his neck and not thinking about what he'd been doing to her all this time.

Moran was a touch surprised by the forward show of affection, but didn't mind, just kissed her back briefly and then nodded. "There's a car waiting."

She drew back without looking at Jim, already feeling his eyes on her. She knew that he was counting on her affection for Moran being unwavering, and it wouldn't hurt to remind him that she was indeed in deep. "Let's go."

Moran bowed slightly and released her arm, before motioning to her security and beginning to move toward the waiting car.

Jim and Lorna followed, Jim with his eyes on her. She seemed normal. Unburdened. There were no signs that she'd opened the briefcase.

It was evening by the time they were settled. Moran had performed a full security sweep of their lodgings- removing several bugs- before he was satisfied that all was as it should be.

She unpacked in their quarters - Jim had reserved a house with only two bedrooms, probably to keep her and Moran close together - and then sat on the bed for a while, staring off into empty space, while she had the time to herself. She kept an open book in her lap, in order to have a cover once someone walked in, but for the moment, she just tried to understand what had been happening.
behind her back. How many things had she let slip while in Sebastian's arms? How many of her sleep-addled thoughts had he passed to Jim? She needed to come up with a plan to stop it.

Moran entered a few minutes later, setting his rucksack down and beginning to unpack neatly into the bureau she had not taken. He glanced at her. "I spoke to the pilots. They said your flight was uneventful?"

She closed the book in her lap and set it aside on the bed, shrugging a little. "Occupied myself reading. Did my best to ignore the very obviously placed briefcase on the wall. If he wants me to open it he can just tell me what he wants for me to do if he dies," she snorted, rolling her eyes a little.

Moran smirked. "He's always going to want to play games. I'm beginning to understand that. At least he didn't seem displeased with you for leaving it be."

She snorted. "I expect it was somewhat a test of my will. Or defiance. I'm not sure which."

He shrugged. "Both, maybe." He closed the drawer and folded his bag, sliding it under the bureau for easy access. He looked over at her and took a breath. "I'm just glad we're all intact. Bloody mad, flying from London to Germany, now of all times."

"As mad as flying from London to Italy, but I guess there's an argument to be made it's a tad madder," she returned, a slight smirk on her face. "We're fine. Things will be easier from here on out. What's a little blackmail among fascists, right?" She wasn't completely convinced of her own words, and she doubted he would be either, but she needed to fill the silence with something.

He sighed, but nodded, setting his bag aside and walking over to her, reaching out to touch her cheek. "Still. I'm glad you're safe."

She smiled softly, raising a hand to touch his over her cheek for a moment, her heart twisting unpleasantly in her chest. How had he done this to her? For so long? "I feel the same about you. Jim, eh," she shrugged, smirking.

He laughed, genuine and warm. "Shush, he'll hear you," he protested, leaning down and kissing her gently.

She kissed him back, hand cupping his jaw. Oh Sebastian. I hope it was worth it.

He pulled back after a moment. "If you're tired, I can let you sleep," he said quietly.

She shook her head a little, thumb caressing his jawline. "No," she said softly, "Wasn't a strenuous day, not really."

He nodded, leaning in to kiss her again, letting himself tumble into the relief that they were both alive and well.

Her fingers flexed against his cheek, the other hand rising to curl into the front of his shirt and pull him down to the bed beside her, twisting as she did so as not to break the kiss.

He hummed against her lips, pleased, pulling her against him, boots still on, but he didn't care.

This would be the last time in a while she touched Sebastian like this, she knew. When they were done, in post-orgasm bliss, she would 'let slip.' She would confront Jim, and that would be it. Maybe forever. So for now, she indulged, let herself enjoy this perhaps-last-time with a man she maybe could have loved, and she unbuttoned his shirt one-handed, her other winding around his
neck, and she let out a soft moan against his lips. "Seb... I need you."

He reached around her to the buttons of her dress, unbuttoning with practiced movements. "Good," he murmured. "Because I need you too."

She shivered, kissing him again, harder this time, the hand in his shirt pulling the hem loose from his trousers and rucking up his undershirt so she could touch his skin, and then used both hands to pushed his button-up off his shoulders.

He pulled her dress down her arms, a large hand sliding under her brassiere to palm her breast. He slid his tongue past her lips, mingling with hers.

She let out a soft gasp, and redoubled her efforts to rid him of his shirt as soon as her hands were free from her sleeves, pulling his button-up off and then peeling off his undershirt, immediately running her hands down his abs to hook in his waistband, her heart beating a little harder in her chest. The cynical part of her, the part that was already prepared for this eventuality, the catch, thought that it was a real shame of the waste it was to give up a lover like this.

Sebastian lost himself in her over the next hour or so, letting the tension of the day slough off of him, worshipping her body and enjoying every moment.

Lying in the afterglow, her head pillowed on her chest, she let out a quiet breath, steeling herself for what was to come. Idly, she traced her fingers over his skin, in aimless patterns, and told herself it meant nothing. "Sometimes..." she said suddenly, though softly, looking off at the far side of the room, "Sometimes I miss having this with... with Jim. Don't get me wrong, you... are all I've ever wanted in a lover. But I suppose I had something with Jim that I can't make myself forget. I miss when things were easy with him. Maybe, before it all, I loved him. Maybe I still do. I don't know anymore. It's all become so... so muddled."

He was surprised by the topic, but let her speak, trying to relax under her touch, though her words stung a little. "He's a difficult man to keep happy. I thought after the bombing..."

"After the bombing... Things never became the same. I suppose that there's no turning back in that situation," she sighed, shaking her head a little.

He nodded just a little. "I'm sorry that you miss him." He shifted, uncertain why they were talking about this, but knowing in his gut that Jim would want to know.

She nodded a little, silent for a minute. How could she repay Sebastian for the betrayal he had given her? What would hurt him, without making it obvious that that was her goal? Or... was guilt enough? "There's one thing I don't miss," she said, after a long time, almost in a whisper. "The lies."

He felt like he'd taken a blow to the sternum, and it took him a second to get his breath back. "Yeah, I can't imagine he was the forthcoming sort."

She laughed quietly, fingers dancing across his skin for a second. "Your imagination is right. Now I'm going the fuck to bed, and you should too, yeah?" She smirked, and leaned up to kiss his cheek.

Across the room, tucked into the closet, was a small bug-out bag. Whenever Sebastian told Jim, she knew he wouldn't be able to resist saying something, and she knew she would snap.
"Yes..." he said quietly, shifting slightly and trying to ignore the sinking feeling in his gut.

She'd gotten to him. Good. She felt a sense of vindication, of revenge, and she yawned and turned over to bury herself into her own pillow, eyes closing.

He lay there as her breathing settled out, but eventually decided that he wasn't going to sleep, and got up, pulling on his clothes and heading out into the rest of the house in search of a drink.

Jim was sitting in the living room, a glass of scotch in his hands, reading over a file. He looked up as Sebastian entered the room, a smirk spreading on his face. "You lovebirds have fun?"

He resisted the urge to flip the man off. "Where's the liquor cabinet in this place?" he said instead.

Jim jacked a thumb over his shoulder at the cocktail trolley in the corner. "Don't get hungover."

"I'm not stupid," he muttered, walking over to fix himself a drink. He felt like he was chafing raw under the collar Jim had snared him with.

"These days, I might agree with you. Maybe someday I won't feel the need to remind you of past indiscretions. Has Lorna said anything interesting in the past week, by the way?" He tacked on, eyes following Sebastian until he went behind him.

He poured himself a generous serving of scotch, and didn’t answer. That was answer enough and they both knew it.

Jim cocked an eyebrow, closing the file and setting it aside on the coffee table. "Moran..."

He considered the glass, then downed the whole thing and poured himself another few fingers. "How long does this deal go on, sir? What happens when I tell you all the secrets she has? When you know everything there is to know?"

Jim was quiet for a moment, his expression unchanging. "There will always be new secrets, Moran. Eventually, I will have to extend the period in-between reports. She will have less, yes, but the well will never run dry. That is a woman who holds a lot of things close to her chest. Things she never told me, she's comfortable telling you." He finally twisted in his seat to look at Moran. "Now stop stalling, tiger. Don't make this unpleasant."

He bristled under the pressure. "I got you here safely, James. Your madcap plan to get to Germany by plane when there's a war on, and here you are, alive and well. That doesn't buy me one night?"

"Oh, it's that good, is it?" Jim purred, though there was a dangerous tint to his voice. "You didn't fly the plane, Moran. You barely had any say in the course. Give me the information, Moran. Now."

"I charted the course," he retorted, snarling. "I spent three days agonizing over every detail to ensure we stayed clear of military bases and combat zones, and suspected bases and zones." He took another deep sip of scotch. "I hand picked those pilots and those planes out of dozens of potentials, and we're on the ground safely."

Jim stood, then, his stare intense. "If you don't tell me what it is you're trying to keep a secret, I will maim you and dump you shirtless by the side of the road for the Germans to find, and then I will find a more obedient bodyguard. Is that fucking clear?"

He raised his chin, staring Jim down for a long few seconds. "She misses you," he spit finally. "Hell knows why. Misses sex with you. Misses having your closeness."
Jim laughed, throwing his head back with the force of it, and it took him over for a few seconds, then he focused again. "That's all, Moran? That's what you wouldn't tell me? Ooo, too hurt, are we?" Glee was on his face. "Tell me, tell me; did she throw the L word around?"

He flushed an angry red from cheeks to ears, blue eyes blazing. "Yes," he said shortly, resisting the urge to go after the smaller man.

If possible, the utter glee on his face only brightened. "Thank you, Moran, that will be all for tonight," he said cheerfully, and without further ado turned and headed for his and Lorna's room.

She was awake in the dark. It had been hard to sleep through his exuberant laughter, and as soon as she heard his first step on the creaky hardwood floors, she opened the nightstand drawer and pulled out the knife within, tucking it under her pillow, and then slid it under her pillow, feigning sleep once again.

Jim opened the door, entering, and closing it behind him. "Are we a child, Lorna, that we pretend to sleep when daddy comes up to check?" he asked mockingly.

"I guess so, because that's what I was doing," she said simply, sitting up a little and rubbing her eyes with a yawn. "Maybe it was just wishful thinking. What do you want, Jim?"

"Sebby was in a horrible mood just now, and do you know what I pried out of him?" he asked, flopping onto her bed.

She sighed, running a hand over her face. "Not quite in the mood for games right now, Jim. What did he tell you?"

"He told me you said you missed me, darling," he purred. "That you might love me. He seemed quite upset, our pup."

She sat up straighter then, the visible vestiges of weariness melting off of her in an instant, and her eyes locked onto Jim's with a dangerous gleam. "Finally giving up the game? Oh, Jim... you should never start a game you can't win." And then she was across the bed, the knife in her hand, and she struck him in the face with the hilt of the blade with a savage snarl, her hand slamming into his throat, and in the next instant she was completely on top of him, holding him pinned to the bed. She leaned closer to him, to his ear. "You shouldn't have told me on the plane."

James Moriarty was- for one very rare instant in his life- very confused. The pain helped, radiating through his skull, as did the egg now forming on his temple. But then he connected the pieces. He saw his own flaws, accepted them, and pushed past them for a moment, reframing his plan. "Naughty, peeking while I was still alive. Was it wishful thinking?" If he could get Moran here, the boy would defend him. He was loyal, if nothing else.

She didn't respond immediately, just punched him with her non-armed hand, ignoring the ache in her knuckles and punching him again. "You'll be quiet, if you know what's good for you, James," she hissed, her hand grabbing his jaw and digging in. "If you scream, I will kill you. If you fight too much, I will kill you. I'm done, James. I've had it." She punched him again.

He shifted, trying to get a hand up to grab at the one with the knife. "Then do it. Kill me, and Moran too, while you're at it. Your little revenge kick is boring."

She moaned, then, trying to buy herself time before Sebastian arrived to stop this, and got a fistful of Jim's hair as she swiftly smacked away his hand and then got off of him to force him onto his
side, if not his stomach. She pinned him again, glad that she had been keeping up her strength after her rehab, and the knife cut at the collar off his shirt.

"What the fuck are you doing, Harrison?" Jim snarled, reaching backwards to try and grapple the knife from her, and failing horribly.

She caught his hand and stuffed it under her knee, and in the next moment the knife was carving into the base of his neck, over the spine, a quick but skilled few slashes, and left behind LH.

Chapter End Notes

Bear Attack! - Carnivore
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBFY8ACI3SM&index=32&list=PLSCvi5dTAlahDvIwz8x5mRI4kKDxqhd4S&t=0s
Jim didn't bother to swallow his howl of pain, knowing he could let it out without her killing him, and it might be his last chance to signal Moran. He could hear the man's boots on the stairs, and shifted under Lorna angrily.

She was up as soon as she was finished, half across the other side of the room, pulling out her bag and grabbing the first change of clothes on the top and putting them on at breakneck speed, the knife on the floor at her feet for a brief moment. Moran came into the room as she finished buttoning her shirt, her eyes still glued to Jim, trying to pin him in place with her angry gaze. "Don't interfere, Moran. I'm done here."

Moran looked startled, trying to place what was going on, but then he turned to Harrison, taking a guarded stance. "Drop the knife, Harrison. I don't want to hurt you, but I will."

She shook her head shortly, pulling the bag's strap up onto her shoulder, knife held out in front of her defensively, eyes now on the bigger threat in the room. "No. Get away from the door and it won't be an issue. I'm leaving."

He stayed where he was, blocking the door and keeping himself between her and Jim. "Put it down, Harrison, and this will go better for you."

She bared her teeth at him, hand readjusting on the handle of the knife. "If you think I'm going to let myself be handcuffed and trundled home to be dealt with on his return, you're fucking insane. I'm done, Sebastian. I'll take what time I have before you both find me again. Get out of my way, and this won't end badly for one of us."

He sighed, then stepped forward in a blink, hand snapping to grab at the wrist of her armed hand. She didn't manage to get her arm out of the way in time, but she did manage to drop the knife directly into her other hand, and she sliced at his arm in the next moment, aiming for a superficial hit, stupid as she was. "Back OFF!"

He dodged it, though a bit slowly, the sting giving him an excuse to lose his grip on her arm. Instead he grabbed her around the waist and wrestled for control of her knife-hand again, taking staggering steps moving them ever toward the door.

She grunted as she tried to keep control, tripping slightly as they reached the threshold and taking the momentum right into the edge of the door, where she took advantage of the leverage enough to push back, wrenching her arm free of his hand and elbowing him in the side of the head before throwing a blow at his stomach with her other fist.

He grunted as she punched his gut, throwing her off of him into the hall and heading after her.
again. Jim hadn't moved off of the bed, and if he could just get her away from the door... He grabbed onto her and shoved her against the wall, sliding her down it slightly out of view. He braced her knife arm with his elbow, but left it slightly off-center. It wouldn't be hard for her to break free.

She took the opening he gave her, slipping loose of his grasp and pushing past, slicing a line across the round of his shoulder, trying to wriggle free from him enough to try and push him against the other wall so she could make a run for it, her bag squished between her back and the wall.

She dug the knife into his shoulder, carving a line, and he grit his teeth and shoved into it, making a far deeper gash than she intended. He let out a cry of pain, and kicked the wall, making a loud noise as he released her, slamming himself against the far wall and meeting her eyes, then glancing at the door.

She met his eyes, understood, and then she leaped down the stairs, ricocheting off the wall at the bottom and disappearing around the corner and out the front door.

He gave her a three-count, the most he could, and then he was thundering after her, holding his bleeding shoulder.

She ran about as hard as she ever had, pushing through the ache in her bad leg and her burning lungs and just fled, trying to outpace him for as long as possible. They needed her escape to be believable, and it wouldn't be if he returned too soon, too recovered from his run.

He kept within sight of her for a while, but he intentionally tripped when he needed to give her room, or stopped to catch his breath. When it became clear that the blood seeping down his back now would begin making a scene, he stopped, letting her disappear, and began his slow trek back. He wasn't eager to face Jim's fury.

Jim was waiting for him in the kitchen when he returned, holding a hand towel to his neck over the sink, face furious. He looked up as Moran walked in, his eyes hardening as he saw that Harrison was missing. "She got away?"

He nodded, his own teeth grit in fury. "She drew me into a crowded part of town and then started screaming for help. When a bunch of men detained me she disappeared into the crowd. I couldn't risk police getting involved."

Jim turned on him, seething. "And they just let you go?"

"Of course they did, when I explained in my limited german that she was a crazy drug-addled woman who'd half stabbed me," he shot back, gesturing to his shoulder. "But by the time I could go after her she was long gone."

Jim thwacked the hand towel onto the kitchen counter, looking like steam was about to start pouring out of his ears at any second. He was silent for a minute, his jaw working. "I will inform you tomorrow how I want to proceed here, Moran," he said after a long time, looking off into empty space. "Take care of that shoulder. I have a feeling I'll need it healed soon enough."

He nodded without responding. He didn't want to risk saying anything that would tip the precariously balanced man over the edge.

Jim picked the towel back up and retreated with it, stepping around Moran and disappearing into
his bedroom with a slam of the door. This trip was not going as planned.

He headed for his own room, eyeing the bloody sheets tiredly before stripping the bed and tossing everything in the laundry hamper. His ruined shirt went into the trash, and he spent the next hour cleaning and stitching the laceration across his back as best he could. It was rough, it would scar, but it would heal.

Lorna spent the night in a small, dumpy hotel room she paid in cash for. She showered, to get the flecks of blood off her hands, and climbed into bed fully clothed. She needed to be ready to move.

Sebastian woke in the morning to Jim entering his room. He sat up quickly, hand on the knife under his pillow just in case. "Sir. Is something wrong?"

"Besides the fact my second-in-command has made a mad dash for it? Or the fact that you failed to stop her? With her memory, the kind of information she's carrying around could strike a blow to the organization we would be hard-fought to recover from." Jim leaned against the door frame, squarely in the doorway itself. Keeping Moran feeling trapped. "There is little we can do about it immediately. I simply don't have the manpower without German support. So for now, we ingratiate ourselves, and," he said the last part with no small bitterness, "lick our wounds."

He sat up, leaving the knife under his pillow. "What do you want me to do, sir?"

"Get dressed into something decent. We have an appointment to keep," he said simply, and turned to walk down the stairs again.

Moran got out of bed quickly, showered and shaved, and then got into his network uniform, smoothing it in the mirror and checking over his reflection before going down to meet Jim.

Jim was waiting at the door, in a casual suit, his face stony, unreadable. "Are you ready?"

"Ready, sir. Unless being armed is a problem. If it is, I'll need to rethink my weapons choices for something more subtle." He touched his shoulder holster through his jacket.

Jim eyed him. "Rethink, then. The Nazis won't put their officers at risk."

"Of course, sir. If you will excuse me for five minutes..." He turned and went quickly back upstairs, leaving the holster so that the Germans would have something to confiscate, but switching to a pair of boots with a built in knife in each, and a garot tied un place underneath his belt. He headed back down the stairs at a trot, and with a nod from James, they exited to the street.

Lorna found, rather quickly, that stealing was her best option, and so perfected her pickpocketing skills at an unprecedented rate to keep her room paid for. It was a terrible place, with more than a few rats and some extremely loud neighbors, but nobody looked too closely at her.
It was a week and a half in before she found the two men in the alley, one kicking the other in the stomach as he lay curled on the alley floor. He was shouting slurs at the other man, that much she could tell, but her German wasn't good enough to know the truly awful words yet. "Hey!" She shouted in German, "What's your problem?!"

The attacker looked up to catch her gaze. "Move on, ma'am. Just some jew trash."

Her gaze hardened instantly. Another Nazi, or at least a sympathizer. One of those assholes. "I think that you might be the one moving on. Soon," she added, voice firm, and a knife appearing in her hand from the back of her trousers.

He had turned his attention back to his quarry, and now looked up again, annoyed, and then amused. "Go home, sweetie. He doesn't deserve your pity, and you should put your husband's knife back."

She smirked, but, truly, she did not want to come to blows with this man. She hadn't eaten today and was weaker for it, and he wasn't exactly a stick of a man. "My husband's knife, hm? What do you think caused these, then?" She asked smugly, flicking up her sleeves and turning out her wrists to show the scars gouged into her forearms and disappearing up under clothes. "Simple practice," she chuckled, flicking her sleeves back down and taking a step closer, the knife held at an angle by her side. A threatening move. "I guess I'll get some more today. Shame... I liked these clothes..."

He tensed, but she was a small thing and he evidently weighed the odds in his favor. "I don't want to hurt you, honey, but you're being awfully rude. All for a jew, nonetheless. Seems a bit disloyal."

She dug her tongue into her cheek in thought for a second, then pursed her lips, clicked her tongue, and didn't hesitate any longer. In an instant she had reared back and thrown, and the knife sank deep into the flesh of his thigh, and she lunged to the side, ripping the metal lid off an overflowing trash can against the alley wall, and ran three steps forward to bash him in the face with it as he dropped to his knees.

He didn't have time to make more than a choked cry before contact with the metal lid sent his consciousness rocketing down the alley without him. He slumped awkwardly back over his bent legs, and his victim on the ground eyed Lorna uncertainly through bruised and swelling eyelids.

She didn't pay attention to the man on the ground until she'd ripped the knife from his attacker, and then she looked down on him with something slightly softer than a blank stare. "Do you know this man?" She asked, gesturing down to the unconscious man. Will anybody look at you if his body is found dead here?

He shook his head jerkily, eyes still fearful and uncertain, flickering to the knife in her hand.

She nodded, attention returning to the man under her feet, and without ceremony she knelt, turned her soon-to-be victim onto his stomach, and plunged her knife into the back of his skull, glad she was wearing a dark shirt - there was some light spattering. She pulled loose her blade with a squelch and wiped it on the handkerchief she found in the man's pocket, then stood, sheathed the knife, and offered the trembling man a hand up.

He eyed her hand with the same trepidation he had given her knife, but then reached out to take it, levering himself slowly to his feet. "Th-thank you..."

"Don't sweat it," she said, letting her British accent come through a little, and gave him a slightly tight smile. "They've been fucking with us, too." She patted him on the shoulder, then nodded to the exit to the alley. "Get out of here. Get out of the city, if you can. I'll hide him to buy everyone a
few days before they react."

He nodded without arguing, and- after one more moment's pause- left quickly the way she had pointed.

She watched him go, then looked down at the body on the pavement, and sighed.

That unnamed man she scattered through the alleys of the city was not the first. She got stronger, faster, mostly as a consequence of the amount of work it was to kill a man without a gun or a poison needle. It wasn't that she didn't have a gun - she'd picked one up off the body of the third man she killed - but it was a dangerously loud weapon to use. Knives and speed it was, and a healthy dose of surprise.

She hunted. She hunted like it was her job, and in some ways, it was. She stole what she could from their apartments and their bodies when she was done with them, and lived off it for as long as she could while she found the next. She wasn't exactly sure why she was doing it. Was it a sense of righteousness she'd rarely felt before? Was it to spite Jim's mission? Was it in revenge for her country, or was it just a need to kill that had found a worthy purpose? Whatever it was, it didn't matter. It was happening, and it wasn't worth stopping.

Weeks went by in a tired, dogged march. If it wasn't his job to know such things, Moran would have lost track of the hands Jim shook, the elbows brushed. He almost did anyway. The more he observed the more his German improved. And the more his German improved, the more reticent he was about Jim's plan.

"Wallop him down, Karl. Give it to him good. That's the way little fags like it, isn't it, fag?"

"Give the punk what's coming, Karl! Ralph, help me hold him- fuck- He bit me! Fucking pervert!"

The sounds of the struggle and laughter easily carried onto the street from the alleyway behind the bar, but the people on the street glanced up, saw the uniforms, and either smiled or remained expressionless and walked quickly onward.

Lorna was on her way to the apartment she'd been squatting in, tired after a kill earlier, when two blocks from the place she heard the sounds of a losing fight. She passed the man standing guard at the entrance to the alley without giving him more than a glance, but turned into the bar that made one of its walls. She didn't pause inside, slipping along the walls as invisibly as she could manage, finding the restrooms and then the back door. She stepped out, directly into the back of a large soldier, standing over someone on the ground. She didn't wait. She didn't say hello, or ask what was happening - she was tired, and she needed to kill four men before they could kill her.

She dropped the bag on her shoulder, drew her knife, and stabbed the man in the kidney as he was turning to hear what was behind him.
The man made a wet sound, and fell to a knee, trying to turn further. His blind punch crossed above Lorna's head, and then he slumped. The others in the alley turned at the noise, and the guard near the street made a startled noise and started toward them as the other two dropped their limp, battered quarry and turned their attentions to her.

She gave the first soldier a savage kick to get him out of the way and then leaped over him, dodging the first blow from the man on the right and leaving the knife in his eye socket for the moment while she danced out of reach of the one on the left. He came at her unarmed, but with a heavy punch that made contact with an already bruised rib, and she snarled, grappling with him as he pushed her towards the alley wall. He was stronger than her - most of her quarry was - but there was no reason to panic, not yet, not as long as she got rid of him before the second one made it to her. Right now, he was too startled by the knife in his friend's brain to join his comrade's struggle. Her main assailant pinned her to the wall with his hands on her shoulders, and she took the immediate opportunity to wrap her hands around the back of her neck and lift her legs off the ground, using her weight to slam his head into the wall above her own.

The man didn't lose consciousness, but he was stunned enough to loosen his grip. His compatriot composed himself enough to go for his own knife. It was a long dirk, lovingly cared for, and he held it with an experienced grip, eyes on her.

She let her current main attacker know she was displeased with his not passing out by bashing his head again and fully slipping out of his grip to elbow him in the temple and then put her weight into a punch that crunched something on his face and made her knuckles cry out in pain, and when he hit the ground she turned and squared off against the last one, her breath coming hard, a bead of sweat rolling down from her hairline and under her shirt. "Come on, then," she said to him in German, giving him a grin, and he looked at her for a long moment before he exploded forward towards her, and she barely managed to get out of the way of a knife strike that would have sliced her across the side - a winning blow, if he was fast enough to finish it. She didn't want to give him the chance. Her assailant cut into the space she had been in, going for the hamstring. The tip of his blade left a deep but paper-thin cut in the back of her thigh as she pulled clear. She grunted in pain but didn't flinch, but tripped over the victim, stepping once on their hand before she got clear and ripped the knife out of its new fleshy sheath, the man's head bouncing as it hit the cobblestone again. Then she whipped back around to fling herself at him, slipping around his knife arm and burying her blade into his gut, her head knocking against his chin painfully, and she brought him crashing to the ground with her on top of him, and she stabbed him again, and then again and again, and when he stopped moving she stood up and walked over to the unconscious soldier to finish him off.

Blood seeped out of bodies and mixed into the dampness of the street, and for a moment the world was silent. Then one of the bodies - the only one not in a soldier's uniform - made a pained noise and did its dogged best to push itself upright.

She turned to the person, and stopped dead. "You're fucking kidding me," she deadpanned.

Moran looked up slowly, still trying to shift himself upward with his good arm. The other was almost certainly dislocated at the elbow, if not broken, the whole thing laying at a horrid angle. He was naked from the waist up - or, more accurately, the knees up, as that was where his trousers had been hauled down to. His eyes peered out of a face that was malformed from abuse, and settled on one that was far too familiar for comfort. He considered trying to get up and fight, but he was in no state. It would have been difficult even without the fresh pain pressed between his chest and the pavement, where the knife had laid him open again. With that sitting like lead in him... He settled his head back onto the pavement and did his best to pull his trousers back up with his good hand and keep at least a touch of dignity, waiting for her to choose what she would and trying to keep his
mind empty. The pavement smelled like Italy.

She stared at him for a long minute, the knife in her hand heavy, and she deeply considered killing him. But truly, if she had ever wanted to... It would have been a fight to the death in that hallway, with Jim in the next room. He had let her go, she knew that too. He knew where she was now, and that also was a consideration, but not one that she thought about too long.

She tucked the knife back into its spot at the back of her trousers and stepped forward, righting his clothes first and then sitting back on her heels. How was she going to get him out of this alley? It led to a couple doors into the buildings nearby, and hopefully they were unlocked and led to a quiet street closer to 'her' apartment, but that wasn't concrete. She rubbed at her eyes, wearily. "Where's Jim? Do you have a phone number?"

He was losing focus, his vision clouding and shifting between a dark alley and a closed cell, and he wasn't precisely sure which was the illusion. Lorna was standing over him - focus on that, Moran -

But she was asking questions, ones he knew he couldn't answer.

He shook his head slowly, and waited for his surroundings to stop spinning. "No."

The sound of his own voice seemed to shock something awake in him, and he worked his good arm under him again and worked to get off of the cell floor. His chest burned and he felt sick, but they needed to leave.

"Moran, I don't know how to take care of a dislocated elbow, nor do I have the supplies to clean your wounds," she said firmly, grabbing his good arm and helping him stand anyway. "I'm not going to kill Jim. If I'd wanted to I would have done it. I had the opportunity. Don't be stupid."

She hauled him to his feet with surprising strength, which only put into perspective the difficulty he'd been having. He shook his head again, and regretted it as he swayed, his good hand coming up to shield the wound on his chest from view as best he could, where the brand had been carved into. "Not worth my life..."

She shook her head, mystified. "What's not worth your life? God, you idiot. One second, we need to get you a shirt." She turned, looking over the bodies at their feet and picking the man she'd stabbed through the eye, wrestling his jacket off him enough to get the unstained dark shirt beneath, and pressed it to Sebastian's hand.

He was reluctant to take it, but he was freezing, his whole body shaking. He eventually reached out with his good hand and took it, slinging it awkwardly around his bad shoulder and on. "Jim... Would not like it if I... if I brought you..." Why was his fucking voice shaking?

"Fine. Alright, here's what we'll do. You're going to come back with me to the place I'm squatting in, I'm going to go out to the payphone with the number you give me, I'm not negotiating on that, and I'm going to call for Jim to come and take you. Then I'm leaving. You need help, I need stitches, and you're right - it's better that I avoid Jim. So I'll... go to a small doctor, or something," she muttered, adjusting her stance so she put less weight on the bad leg, which was starting to hurt very badly now that the adrenaline was wearing off.

He resisted the urge to shake his head again. "I'm... Fine. I can get where I need to go. Thank you for helping, but if you aren't going to kill me-" He took a step toward the alley entrance and careened sideways as the world seemed to shift under him. He fell into a rubbish bin, jarring his arm and whitening out for a moment.

"You fucking-" she growled, grabbing his good arm again and hauling him up. "Stop! Idiot! How
many fucking times are you going to ignore me when I advise you about your fucking health?" She snapped, leaning him against the wall for a second and then going back to grab her bag from the ground by the door to the bar and trotted back with it over her shoulder and retrieved him, starting to walk him back to the street. "Stop limping so much. You're going to attract attention."

He didn't bother responding, just turned his focus to walking as normally as he could, doing his best to measure his balance off of her rather than his failing sense of equilibrium. "Jim will kill you," he pointed out, pulling the coat around himself a little more tightly and resisting the urge to look over his shoulder for pursuers, Italian or otherwise.

"He can fucking try," she snorted, leading him down the street as quickly as she could make him go. "If that's what he wants to try, he's welcome to it. He's just going to be knocked unconscious and his men killed if he does it," she continued. "Somehow, though, I don't think he's going to."

Sebastian didn't respond, focusing on putting one foot in front of the other. Her grip was hot against his arm, and he watched the world from his own personal muted darkness.

By some miracle, she got him into the apartment without anybody seeing them, and she sat him down on the bed and gripped his shoulder hard. "Moran. I need that number."

He focused on her slowly. He could feel his heart thundering under the brand on his chest. They needed to keep moving- why had they stopped? He reached out to put pressure on her forearms absentely as he looked around and tried to evaluate where they needed to go. He hadn't said anything that was true. He'd lied to them and kept Harrison alive, mostly, but they needed to move...

"Hey!" She said loudly, shaking him a little. "Phone number! Now, Colonel!"

His pupils shrank down slightly, and he forced himself to focus on what she was saying. His grip on her arms eased slightly as he struggled for what she was asking. Apparently someone in his mind was following more closely than he was, because the numbers spilled off of his tongue without him knowing what they were or where they'd come from. He decided that should settle things, however, and closed his eyes again, trying to ignore the sound of boots approaching. *It isn't there*....

She pushed him into lying down, and then turned and left the apartment again, walking down to the payphone outside on the street, where she dialed the number and waited for the other line to pick up. As soon as it did, she said, "Jim? If you're missing a blond idiot, I have him."

If Moriarty was surprised, he didn't show it. "I was wondering where he would wash up," he drawled. "I don't suppose you'd bring him by?"

"Not sure how I would move him. He's visibly very injured, and I don't have a car. Found some soldiers attacking him - they reopened the brand on his chest. They're dead, so no witnesses. I'll give you the address. Send some medical professionals; I need stitches. If you come yourself, I will kill you. If you send men to take me, I will kill them. I'm not playing today, is that clear?" She said calmly, knowing that he would be insufferable anyway but at the very least making a stand.

There was a soft sniffle on the other end of the line. "You've grown up so quickly. Daddy's proud. Now stop this little game and come home when I send a car, or you're going to find out what happens when I stop being amused by your little tantrum."

"I'll come back on the condition that you don't retaliate for my actions. I think we both know you
"deserved what I gave you," she stated, looking down the street absently. "I assume if you wanted me dead you'd do me the favor of letting me know."

"Now, see, here is the thing, pet," he sighed, and there was the sound of fingernails drumming against wood. "You peeked on the plane. I can accept that. But I would like to you to tell me this- What was in the other folder?"

"Why would I double the risk that you would punish me for looking?" She snorted, then closed her eyes. "What was in it?"

"Nothing important." His tone was bored. "I merely wished to confirm that- in the face of a choice between succession and destruction- your first and only choice was destruction. It confirms a myriad of suspicions I've long held about your character. You're welcome home whenever you like, little runaway... You needn't be concerned. Of course I'll always love my little girl," he sneered, and the line went dead.

She stood there for a minute, still holding the receiver, and then hung it up and stared at it for a long time. She cursed herself vaguely - what had been in the other envelope? Somehow, she suspected it was empty. That seemed to be in Jim's wheelhouse. She walked back up to the apartment and closed the door behind her to lean against it, getting weight off her leg. Her trouser leg was becoming soaked.

Moran was still lying on the bed, eyes shut and face pale beneath the bruises. He was shaking, but it was hard to tell if it was from cold, shock, or fear. His good hand was pressed against his chest again. He started awake when the door opened, eyes locking on her, before he seemed to decide she wasn't a threat and his gaze wandered off again, eyes slipping shut.

She pushed off the door after a second, drawn to him by an invisible string that she was having trouble cutting. She sat on the bed beside him, and reached out to carefully touch the hand on his chest. "What happened?" She said, calmly. It would probably be best for him if he remained conscience.

He jerked away from her touch like it was electrified, and opened his eyes again. His pupils were wrong, one quite a bit more dilated than the other. "Lorna..." He breathed. "It's fine. Just a burn... Your arms...." He reached out to touch her forearm gingerly.

She turned over her arms for him to see, rolling up her sleeves and exposing the lines of scars beneath. "It's fine, Sebastian. I'm healed." She looked down at him for a moment. "You're not there. It's not Italy."

He studied the scars with clear distress and confusion, before closing his eyes again and curling up a bit tighter around his wounded chest and closing off again.

She sighed, withdrawing her hand and just waiting for Jim's men to arrive.

They came within ten minutes, a shockingly fast response time, and they didn't point their guns at her, just ushered her with them into their car, and then they were off, back to Jim, back to a life that she had so desperately wanted to escape.

Jim was waiting at the house they had been provided. He wasn't outside when the car pulled up-
that would indicate far too much investment- but he sent word that as soon as the physician he'd hired had cleared Harrison, she was to be sent to his office.

Getting stitches sucked, especially without painkillers, but she suffered through it without a scream, though from the sounds in the other room, Sebastian was too out of it to put a lid on it. Her physician (an old woman with remarkably steady hands) nodded, and she was directed up the stairs before she knew what was happening.
There Won't Be A Twice

Chapter Notes

Florence + The Machine - Kiss With A Fist
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=br5xBGZNLA8&list=PLSCvi5dTA1ahDvIwz8x5mRI4kKDxqhd4S&index=38&t=0s

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jim looked up at the knock, and stood, walking around the marble-top desk to lean against the front. "Come in," he said, just loud enough to be heard through the heavy door.

She took a deep breath, swallowed, and entered, heavily favoring her hurt leg. The same as the one that had been shattered. At least the damage was contained, she supposed. "Jim," she said calmly.

"Lorna," he greeted. He eyed her bad leg, and sighed. "Come here," he said, with a tone that verged on exasperated gentleness. "Let me see what happened."

She didn't move for a moment, suspicion rising in her. But she'd committed, now, hadn't she. She'd had her window and she'd missed it. She walked forward, but she stopped in front of the desk, reluctant to both strip enough for him to see it, and to give him easy access to the wound. "It's bandaged, you're not going to see much."

He waved a hand dismissively, already looking her over head to toe. "I see plenty already. Was it pride or distraction that kept you from informing them about your bruised ribs?"

Her hand strayed to her side without her asking for it to, and she grimaced. "Distraction. Nothing they could do for it, I don't think." She fell silent for a moment. "Sebastian is in bad shape."

He nodded, unaffected. "I know. I imagine something went wrong and they saw his brand. It's unfortunate, but likely unavoidable." He reached out to touch her cheek, the touch gentle. "I'm pleased that you've made your way back."

She stared at him, not sure how to feel, not sure when the blow was coming. It would be so easy for him to put on this veneer, to lie until she put her guard down. "I thought you would want me dead," she said carefully, looking just to the left of his eyes.

"If I wanted you dead I would have killed you at any time during your little excursion," he said, his thumb brushing across her cheekbone before he dropped his hand. "It occurred to me that you needed some time to burn off excess... Energy. So I allowed you the space to play. I enjoyed your vigilante work. Very noble." He gave her a smile and turned to round the desk.

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Her cheek burned where he'd touched it. She didn't know what to do here. Was she getting a freebie? After cutting into him? It seemed too good to be true, and the last time that had happened, it had been too good to be true. "Is this your apology, then? Letting me off the hook?"

"Apology?" he asked, looking up with quiet interest. "What was I apologizing for, precisely?"

She met his eyes finally, a hard iron in them. "You used someone I... I cared for to spy on me. I don't even know how long. I assume since the beginning of my relationship with him, correct?"
He nodded, his expression neutral. "You didn't think I would let him do that for free, did you?"

She flexed her hands. "No, I didn't think it was for free. I knew there was a catch. But I should have looked for the fine print, shouldn't I? But no, I trusted that you wouldn't take advantage of me like that. I put my faith in you."

"An error you undoubtedly have recognized by this point," he conceded. "I am not about to apologize for who I am. You will note, however, that I allowed you time to cool off."

A muscle in her jaw jumped. "Jim, you're lucky I haven't killed you, the shit you've put me through." She stated, unmoving. "I have forgiven many things, Jim, but I've never forgotten any of them. I am not built that way. I am not here because I have to be, Jim. I could have accepted the death that would have followed me. You aren't dead from your violences against me because I haven't decided you're too much a pain in my ass to do it yet. I won't lie down and take punishments and your random whims if I don't deserve them."

He raised an eyebrow. "Describe the punishment you are referring to," he suggested, voice still level. "Is it the one where I allowed you to fuck my bodyguard, despite my notorious jealous streak? Or perhaps when I allowed you to walk away unscathed when you carved your initials into me. Or, perhaps, you are referring to now, when I have allowed you to roam the city and return at your leisure, despite the fact that I could have reclaimed you for your duties to me at any point I chose? Or were you too distracted this morning to note that you never got around to giving me your address?"

"Punishment? You want an example of punishment?" She hissed, taking a step forward, fists clenched. "I never forgot the worst one, and you shouldn't have either," she snarled, taking another step. "You- you raped me, Jim, and carved your initials into me for the second time." She took another step, an old tension back in her limbs. This time, she knew that she could kill him. She'd spent weeks fighting soldiers in peak fighting condition.

He didn't move, or react. "Something for which I apologized, and you suggested we leave in the past. I'm uncertain as to why you're picking a fight."

"I'm not the one who picked a fight, Jim," she snapped back, taking another step, close enough now to put her hands on the table. "You decided to send him my way. Remember, telling me about your little get better present? In the form of him. Only it wasn't - it was an unprovoked betrayal. It was the first blow in this fight. You cast it. And then you told me. What did you think was going to happen?"

Jim remained unprovoked, mainly because he knew she would be expecting fireworks and it was far more fun to watch her try to strike them in the rain. "Lorna, dear, this conversation we seem to keep having is getting abysmally dull. Would you prefer to leave my service?"

"Would you let me?" She scoffed angrily. "But you know what? I do, Jim. I want out. I want to go back to my parents, join their tiny operation, maybe meet a nice boy I can trust."

He nodded just a little. "Why did you start working for me, Lorna? Please sit." He nodded to the chair across from him.

"I needed a place to go." She sat, though it was more because she knew she could only keep up this tension for so long before it started to become humorous. "I didn't want to return to my old life. You sought me out. I'm not in the habit of turning down opportunities that fall into my lap, so I took your offer. And for almost three years, I've done as I was told and accepted the consequences for when I didn't. Fucking with me? That wasn't part of the contract. I signed up to be your right
hand, to serve and protect your interests and to tear as much fucking meat off the carcasses of our enemies as we could. This? This bullshit? This whimsical infighting? That's not how empires are made. That's how I kill you."

He shrugged. "I'm not in it for the empire, Lorna. Empires rise and fall against any choice made by their rulers. Oh yes, I'm far better at it than they are, and I will have an empire, but I'm doing it for the fun of it." He considered her. "You rankle too easily," he sighed, suddenly sounding a touch annoyed.

She rankled even harder, with renewed energy. "Stuff it up your ass, Jim," she hissed, standing again without thought. "I'm leaving."

He stood, too, then, reaching across the desk with a deft hand and grabbing her collar. He used the moment of surprise to haul her across the desk and kiss her, hard.

She stiffened for a brief instant, and then the conditioning she'd given herself to solve anger with sex snapped itself awake and she knocked over a few trinkets she knew he kept only for display as she climbed over the desk. Her fingers curled themselves into the collar of his shirt, leaving them both pulling each other in harder, the kiss rough and angry and just about the only thing that would have solved this problem without blood. "I hate you," she growled against his lips during an instant of taking a breath.

"Good, I was worried," he retorted, hauling her fully across the desk and then pushing her back against it, pinning her with his hips as his tongue invaded her mouth.

"You were worried that I didn't hate you?" she huffed, hands dropping from his collar to yank his shirt free of his trousers, sliding her hands under to skim across his skin. It occurred to her she'd had a lot of dry spells this year, and this had been one of them - now that the momentum was rolling this way she was eager to break it.

"Yes. That would have been exceptionally boring of you." He grabbed a letter opener and started working through her clothes.

She made a light noise of protest - she didn't exactly have a ton of clothes at the moment - but pushed through it, undoing his shirt buttons at a brisk pace, beginning to kiss down the line of his jaw.

He set the blade aside when he finished and shoved the remains of her clothes off of her, leaving her naked in a pile of material as he shoved her back and flipped her to be stomach down against the wood.

She felt heat rush to her cheeks, hands flattening on the cool wood. The last time he had had her this way had been traumatic and relationship-breaking, but she stuffed that memory down, determined to enjoy this, and pushed her ass back into his hips.

He slid a hand up her spine, ignoring the twinge from her still-healing initials in his skin. "I've always liked this angle."

"I know," she chuckled, grinding back into him with a slight sigh. "I'm not unfamiliar with it by any stretch of the imagination."

"I meant the view," he retorted, pressing a hand against her ass to hold her down and sliding a finger into her.

She gasped, shifting a little, resisting the urge to push back into his hand - he liked to take control,
and she was inclined to let him. "I figured that was most of it, yeah, considering touching you isn't exactly easy like this," she said breathily.

"Were you born this impatient or did you have to work at it?" he retorted, curling his finger slowly and watching a shiver travel up her spine.

"Born this way, I think," she chuckled a little, though fidgeting a little again, her shoulders tense with anticipation.

He smiled, and began thrusting slowly with his fingers. "You've made this whole escapade rather complex, do you know?"

"I- I hope you're not looking for an apology," she replied breathlessly, in a sentence that could have come out of his mouth.

He laughed. "I really should teach you manners, you know... But it would unbalance things too much here. Here, of all places." He added a finger and a bit more gusto to his movements, punctuating his words.

She buried her face in her hand and gasped into it, her other hand pressed hard into the wood. "I- I know manners, I just- hate them," she got out, and shifted impatiently. "Jim..."

"Oh, fine," he muttered, removing his fingers and replacing them with his cock a moment later, pushing into her with no small amount of impatience himself.

She moaned, pushing back against him again with a roll of her hips, losing interest in speaking for a moment. Oh, she'd missed sex.

The nice thing about carnal pleasures was that it allowed him to quiet his mind slightly, if only for a few minutes. He bent himself over Lorna, one hand snarling in her hair, the other spread flat on the smooth wood of the desk to brace them up.

Her breath came hard and deep (like him) and she pushed back against him harder, asking for more, not in the mood to draw anything out; she wanted it hard and fast and satisfying.

The desk- which was not nearly as heavy as his desk back home- protested mightily against their movements, skidding slightly on the carpet, but he didn't bother slowing or gentling. His thighs hit her ass with the sting of repeated abuse, the position familiar to them both. They always seemed to end up here, bent over his desk, scraping their frustrations into the floorboards.

She came with more of a sudden gentle slope than any sort of jagged cliff, but still shivered through it, her moans reduced to gasps, reaching back to grab his side with her hand.

She tightened around him and he let out a short breath, and the pain of her nails digging into his side was enough of a jolt to send him rolling over the edge after her, his body pressed against hers and the desk, sweat-slick.

She slowly relaxed, her breathing still a little unsteady, a flush on her cheeks, a light sheen of sweat on her forehead. The deadly anger that had been coiling up in her chest like a venomous snake preparing to strike was gone now, vented out through the power of sex, and she shut her eyes for a moment, just coming to terms with knowingly rejoining the spider's web. Somewhere downstairs, Moran groaned loud enough to be heard. A fraction of the tension from earlier returned to her.

"You're bleeding," Jim sighed, touching the bandages over her wounded thigh where red was staining them. "To be expected, I suppose." He stepped away from her, pulling his trousers into
place and adjusting them. "How badly off is our little Aryan?"

She let out a breath, shifting and turning so she could sit on the desk, nude and without any clothes to change into. Inconvenient, but not the worst thing. "He's definitely got some broken bones, and that's ignoring anything that was dislocated that will need time to heal, and the cuts and bruises. They cut open his chest again. I killed the men involved - hopefully nobody else knows. I doubt they had the time for it, but..." She shrugged, and pressed on her wound a little, encouraging it to stop bleeding. "You don't happen to have any clothes in my size here, do you?"

"There's a blanket on the chair," he said dismissively. "What about before you found them? Is it possible anyone else saw?"

She leaned forward to grab the blanket with a roll of her eyes. "No, I doubt it," she said with a shrug. "No one wants to look too closely these days."

He nodded his agreement. "Excellent. Pass the word on to the ward that they are to keep Moran for as long as possible. He has a terrible habit of trying to kill himself through neglect."

She snorted in agreement. "Yes, he does. I'll pass it on. What are you going to tell the Germans?"

"About what?" He asked, returning to his seat.

"Your aid who has presumably been following you so closely for weeks has suddenly disappeared in a hospital. They might ask questions," she pointed out.

"Oh that," he said, nodding. "That I've dismissed him and sent him packing."

She nodded a little and adjusted the blanket a little to tuck it up her neck. She was a little chilly. She glanced towards the door. "I should check on the idiot in question."

He nodded. "Inform him if he's conscious that he'll be on his way back to London as soon as he can travel," he drawled as he returned to his papers.

She made a noise of confirmation and slid off the desk, giving one last reluctant look at the clothes ruined on the floor and slipped out the door, heavily favoring her injured leg. The stairs were a bit of a challenge but she managed them, and started the search through the large house for Moran. She found him on the ground floor, in the fourth room she looked in. The woman who had been patching him up glanced up as she entered (still clad in only her blanket) and then continued packing up her supplies before standing and walking around Lorna to exit, leaving her alone with Moran.

Moran was laying under a pile of blankets, an attempt to stave off the worst of the shock. His left arm was laid out carefully on top, splinted and wrapped. His face was badly swollen, and there was a damp cloth set over one eye, trying to keep the worst of the swelling down. His eyes were closed, face pale where it wasn't bruised and veined with broken blood vessels.

"You conscious?" She asked, no-nonsense, with an arched eyebrow.

"Reluctantly," he said hoarsely, opening the eye that wasn't swollen shut, though it was bloodshot. He regarded her with a mix of uncertainty, suspicion, and relief. "You're not dead."

"No," she agreed, and sat down on the chair by his bed, putting her leg out with a mostly-stifled grunt. She looked down at him impassively, and examined what she felt about him. She'd had feelings for him, before she'd known he'd been betraying her the whole time. He'd saved her life, of course, but they were even on that count - she might have even been one over on him. "You're to be
sent back to London. Soon as you won't break in a stiff wind."

He grit his teeth, but had no argument against that. With his arm the way it was he wouldn't be defending anyone for a few weeks, at the least. "He needs to bring someone else in for security," he pointed out.

"He will. And he'll have me again," she said simply, and shrugged. She was silent for a minute, just looking down at him. "So what happened?" She asked, finally. "You lean over too far? Someone see down your shirt? Or did you disobey orders?"

"One of them didn't like my accent... Picked a fight," he said with a wince as his chest moved when he took too deep of a breath. "It was going fine, a fair square-off, I was letting him tire out... Then he got a handle on my shirt and it ripped. His buddies joined in after that." He closed his eyes, not wanting to think about it any more than he had to.

She nodded a little. "I'll tell Jim it wasn't your fault, then," she replied, and it was implied by the tone of her voice that, had it been his fault, she would not have stood in the way of his punishment. Some part of her winced to see the marks of such ugly violence on his skin, but the rest of her hardened to it, had stepped back from the weakness that she had indulged in for so long.

He nodded just a little, and regretted it. "I appreciate that," he said quietly. He could see the frosty edges, and knew to toe the line. "I appreciate you not killing me."

Her mouth twisted into a slightly bitter smile. "If I had wanted you dead, you would have died after I hurt Jim. If I'd wanted Jim dead, he would have died then. But here you are, alive. I'm stupid that way," she said, and looked away for a moment, into blank space, before her eyes returned to him, steely grey. "You betrayed my trust, Moran. You took advantage of me. You used me. What we had - if it was ever anything besides sex to you - is over. Fool me once, shame on you. Twice?" She stood, body still relaxed, hands loose at her sides, but there was a tightness in her throat she was ignoring with all her might. "Well, there won't be a twice."

He followed her movement with his eyes, and took a slow breath, easing into the pain-physical and otherwise- and accepting that she was leaving his life. She was far from the first, far from the last, and he had learned to accept it. He nodded. "I understand, ma'am. I won't press anything."

Some part of her wished desperately for him to make some sort of last effort, to try and reassure her that it hadn't all been just a farce. That he'd cared, that he'd just made a bad decision. Would she accept an apology? Probably not. But she wanted one.

She just looked at him for another moment before turning and walking out, still only wrapped in her blanket, and went to search for some clothes.

He closed his eyes, then, willing himself to fall asleep. Fucking Nazis. Fucking Jim. Fucking me.

Chapter End Notes

That's a weird instinct Lorna has in regards to fighting huh? very "don't look at my boner when we fight" huh?

MARINA - No More Suckers (Acoustic)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSw1ab7KG-
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