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She took a deep breath. After convincing herself that this was the best option, she winced and reached into the man's pockets.

She could feel the strong, lean muscles that coiled beneath the fabric of his pants. He clearly took care of his body—it was no wonder that he survived the lethal effects of the neurotoxin.

Meanwhile, when the man felt a hand pawing through his pockets, he grew alarmed and his eyes flashed open. The fear and shock were registered in his bewildered gaze.

Shadow 1 was taken aback by his abrupt awakening, but she recovered quickly. Her lips tugged upward in a smirk as she said, "You scared the hell out of me—I thought I was going to be scammed."

He pursed his lips as he swatted her hand away from his pocket. His throat felt dry and with some effort, he gritted, "Get away from me."

Peter was revolted at the idea of being touched by a woman who was not Janet. More specifically, he hated being touched by the blue-eyed blonde before him.

There was something unnerving about her. She was a total stranger, but familiar at the same time, which made her all the more despicable.

Meanwhile, Shadow 1 was aggravated by the scorn in his voice. She glowered at him as she seethed, "Bold of you to assume that I'd listen to you. Maybe you should take a long, hard look in the mirror before asking me to get away from you."

She was not expecting any retort from a man who had been poisoned. It seemed as if he was stronger than she thought.

The disgruntled man pursed his lips and asked, "Then, why are you groping me?"

Rummaging through his pocket, Shadow 1 said witheringly, "I need the flashlight on your phone. I'm going to scavenge for food before we starve to death here." As soon as she was done speaking, she pulled out his phone from his pocket and pressed on the buttons that

ran on either side of the phone. The next moment, their faces were illuminated by the light from the phone.

"Call for help," the man said hoarsely.

"Wow, why didn't I think of that?" She drawled sarcastically as she cast him a sideways glance. "There's no signal in this godforsaken place and your phone screen's busted, so I can't press the call button."

Peter's expression hardened as he heard that.

Shadow 1 gave him a look of disdain before pulling herself onto her feet. As she began to move away from him, she said coldly, "I'm going to look for sustenance."

The man stared in silence at her back, the light from his phone flickering in her hand as she started toward the darkness beyond them. He could neither follow her nor make a run for it, given the state that he was in. He had no one else to rely on but her. After a while, he asked in a strained voice, "Will you come back?"

Upon hearing that, Shadow 1 stopped in her tracks and answered plaintively, "If I feel like it."

They were rivals from the beginning and she ought to leave him stranded here on his own, but she would much rather have company at a time like this than to be alone.

Peter did not answer. His eyes were slowly closing and as his body gave in, he fell unconscious once more.

After what felt like an eternity, a light finally shone through the darkness.

The man's eyes fluttered open and he stared as the light approached him.

Peter froze, surprised to see that she had returned for him instead of abandoning him. A wave of helplessness or relief crashed over him.

Shadow 1 was amused at the sight of his flustered look as he lay on the ground. She took a bite of the food in her hand. Then, she shoved the rest to him with a smirk on her lips. "Eat up."

He bridled at the scorn in her voice. She was treating him like he was a weakling.

He kept his eyes on her since her return and his gaze darkened when she threw the food toward him.

When she saw that he did not respond, she crossed over and picked up the food she had thrown before putting it into his hand as she explained flatly, "This is a wild bamboo shoot. It's meant to be rehydrating."

Shadow 1 had searched for a long time in the woods before she came upon the single shoot.

However, Peter did not look convinced. With a sigh, she picked up the bamboo shoot and took another bite. "See? It's not poisoned, if that's what you're worried about."

Peter could hear the crisp and juiciness of the bamboo shoot when she bit into it. He swallowed and his throat ached desperately for water, but he answered through gritted teeth, "I don't share food. It's unsanitary."

Shadow 1's eyes widened at that. She was not sure if she wanted to laugh or to throw a shoe at him. "Are you for real? Fine, then. Don't eat it. I hope you enjoy starving to death."

When she moved to snatch the bamboo shoot away from him, his hands snaked like lightning before he deftly snapped the shoot in half. With a disgruntled look on his face, he bit into the cleaner end of the shoot.

At the sight of that, she let out a small laugh and the disdain in her voice was clear as she teased, "What are you acting all tough for?" Even tough guys need to survive in the wild.

However, Peter did not finish the small bamboo shoot and instead handed it over to her.

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A look of disdain flashed in Shadow 1's eyes as she sneered, "Didn't you say it was unsanitary to share food? You took a bite out of the bamboo shoot and you're giving it to me now. Mr. Peter, haven't you heard of the saying—do not do to others what you don't want to be done to you?"

Upon hearing that, the man let his hand hang in mid-air for a bit before he withdrew his arm and placed the bamboo shoot aside. I'll save it for when I'm hungry, he thought grimly. After all, he was unsure how long he would be trapped here.

She observed his actions and let out a small laugh. "Most people would have died within ten minutes after being exposed to the military's neurotoxin, but you've managed to survive the night. It seems you're stronger than I thought."

He chuckled dryly and made no attempt to deny her statement. He did not have any other symptoms other than fatigue and he was smirking as he mused, "As you can see, the military's so-called neurotoxin is over-glorified."

Shadow 1 pressed her lips into a thin, hard line. "The military's neurotoxin is one of the most poisonous substances in the world. For you to survive its lethal effects would mean that there is something more lethal in your bloodstream."

Peter merely shrugged at that. He then curled his lips into an insouciant smile. "Probably." After all, he had taken dozens of poisons from all over the world. His body was as good as immune to toxic substances. "We should probably get some sleep. We can figure out a way to escape when morning comes."

It was impossible for them to make their way out in the dark of the night and the little light on his mobile phone was too weak to be of any real use. Neither of them broke the silence that ensued. In the quiet of the rubble that surrounded them, they could hear each other's heartbeats.

The next morning, the air was thick with cool morning mist. Peter was asleep when he heard a hissing sound close to him and when he felt a sharp pain on his leg, he opened his eyes. There was a small snake biting his ankle. He pulled out his gun immediately and aimed a shot at the snake's head.

Startled by the gunshot, Shadow 1 bolted upright and looked over at the man next to her, demanding, "What happened?" As soon as she asked, her eyes fell onto the grotesque image of a halved snake on the ground.

Her gaze darkened and flickered over to the wound on Peter's ankle. "Were... you bitten by the snake?" How much bad luck could one man have?

He frowned and lowered his head as he peered at the wound on his ankle. It was oozing blood and he was not sure if the snake was venomous. His vulnerability evoked her sympathy and she leaned closer to him as she offered, "Here, let me take a look. Does it hurt?"

Peter blinked at the gentle tone of her voice. Then, he shook his head slowly. "It doesn't hurt."

The blood was red and the flesh that was left exposed by the wound appeared pinkish. Based on her experience, there was no venom in the snake's bite. She had to admit that she felt a sense of relief, but she maintained a cool and distant tone as she declared, "The snake wasn't venomous. Don't worry."

"Okay," he replied. He was about to follow up with a word of thanks, but when he saw her face at close distance, his eyes darkened. Her face...

Shadow 1 stiffened and backed away from him. She eyed him warily as she asked, "What are you doing?"

Peter was still staring at her with his lips pressed into a hard line. The more he stared at her without him saying or doing anything, the more she wanted to shrink away from him. She felt a shiver run up her spine as she demanded unhappily, "If you have something to say, say it."

Peter looked at her darkly and said in a deep voice, "Your skin is cracking."

Taken aback by his words, Shadow 1 touched her face. A hyper-realistic face mask like this would only last for twenty-four hours, after which it would start to dry and crack around the edges. If her guess was right, her mask was beginning to fall apart and it would only be a matter of time before it peeled off to reveal her true identity.

Meanwhile, Peter could see the panic that flooded her eyes. It was just as he had thought—the woman before him did not really look the way she did. That isn't what she really looks like! Is she using a hyper-realistic face mask?

Peter paused before he asked tentatively, "Are you perhaps using a hyper-realistic face mask, Miss Shadow 1?"

Shadow 1 twitched and she quickly avoided his gaze. She tried to keep her voice even as she answered, "I have no idea what you're talking about, Mr. Peter."

"Is that so?" He let out a dry chuckle.

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As he said that, he bolted upright and reached out to rip her hyper-realistic face mask off.

When Shadow 1 realized what he was trying to do, she backed away warily and blocked his hand, gripping his wrist as she said icily, "Trying to go for an ambush now, are you?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Peter mused with narrowed eyes. "I just want to see who you are behind that mask."

Upon hearing that, she froze and turned away as she hissed, "I told you I have no idea what a hyper-realistic face mask is."

"Is that so?" He smirked. "Then, why did you turn away?"

She licked her lips while ignoring him. After a pause, she turned and assessed him with a bemused look on her face before she asked slowly, "Seeing that you know so much about hyper-realistic face masks, Mr. Peter, could it be that you are wearing one right now?"

Suddenly, he froze and his eyes widened slightly.

She took his silence and discomfort as admission. So he is hiding behind a mask, after all, she concluded.

Shadow 1's eyes brightened as she lunged toward him. Then, she straddled him while holding onto his arms to prevent him from clawing at her.

The position was far too compromising for comfort and the man was clearly displeased as he snapped coldly, "Get off me right now."

She ignored him and reached out to remove his hyper-realistic face mask. He was strong despite his injuries. As a result, she could barely get her fingers close enough to his face to rip off the mask as he struggled beneath her. Before she knew it, she toppled due to her instability and was immediately pinned to the ground by the man.

"Get away from me," Shadow 1 hissed. She was growing hostile now that she was in a compromising position.

However, Peter merely smirked, looking dauntless as his eyes gleamed with bloodlust.

Without much thought, he reached down and found the edge of her face mask. With a loud tearing sound, the mask came off in his hand.

Shadow 1 instantly turned her face away.

Peter stared at the mask in his hand as a dark smile played on his lips. "Didn't you say you have no idea what a hyper-realistic face mask is?" He gazed down at her amusement before he spoke. "Care to tell me what this is then?"

However, the moment his eyes fell on her side profile, his breath hitched. Her side profile...Why does her side profile look exactly the same as Janet's?

Peter's body froze.

No matter how much he scrutinized her side profile, the delicate curve of her jawline and the flawless slope of her nose were all identical to Janet's.

"Are you done—" Shadow 1 began irritably.

She was about to ask him to let her go once he was done staring at her, but before she could finish her words, he interrupted. "Babe."

Janet froze beneath him. How could this be? How could he possibly know who I am? He just called me Babe. Why does he know my name? Her skin prickled as there was only one person who would say her name like that—it was Mason.

"How do you know me? Why did you say my name like that?" she demanded; her voice was crisp and icy, but it was a completely different tone than Shadow 1.

Peter pursed his lips and without another word, he opened his arms to pull her into a tight embrace. She felt air being forced out of her and it was as though he wanted to mold her against himself.

"Babe, Babe, Babe..." he murmured hoarsely close to her ear.

Janet blinked as she stiffened against him. It was as if her blood had gone still.

She could not think and her mind was completely blank. She could not believe how much Peter sounded like Mason, whom she thought about day and night.

Janet suddenly recalled that Mason had left for a business trip today. He only sent her a text before disappearing altogether and now, Peter was with her.

The fact that Peter survived the effects of the neurotoxin indicated he had far more lethal toxins coursing through his veins and Mason had once sampled dozens of poisons from all over the world.

The grim realization dawned upon her. She was wrong to have thought that Mason was looking into the Prime Minister of Hawke Kingdom—the two men were one and the same. He was Peter Welch all along and the office in the basement was where he ran his operations.

Janet's body froze while her thoughts ran wild.