

I never got the chance to track down Erwin Tees. He and the surviving gang members were quickly apprehended and forced to surrender to the police once they stormed the building. The sounds of gunfire coming from inside, and the prospect of parliament members and their families being harmed was enough reason for them to move fast. No matter how tough Erwin thought he was – he didn't possess the numbers or the firepower to fight back against that kind of unified response. I walked out of the washroom after cleaning myself only to find that the entire thing was over and done with.

It was probably for the best anyway. I was almost completely dry on my own ammunition and two steps away from falling over and passing out on the spot. The mystery spell I cast during the fight in the office wrecked me. I'd be sleeping like a log once we got back to the dorms.

Sam and I reunited with the rest of the hostages and pleaded ignorance about what was going on. I wasn't worried about what Samantha or Felipe said to the detectives. Both of them would come to understand that the credulity the officers felt would preclude them from telling the truth. If I was in their shoes I wouldn't believe it either. A small, pretty thing like me, shooting two dozen men dead with a gun smuggled into the building? Ridiculous, beyond consideration.

Eidos and the rest of the bodies were covered and removed from the building, while witness statements were taken from the students and teachers who were involved. I caught a glimpse of Claude being carted away into a carriage so that he could be taken to the nearest hospital. Max and Samantha were left standing in the front courtyard as they rounded the corner and moved out of sight.

"I'm never going to let him forget this one," Max complained.

Samantha frowned, "Shouldn't we be sending him well-wishes for his recovery?"

"He's pretty durable. He'll be fine."

Samantha found that statement entirely unconvincing. The boy looked like he was about to burst into tears while watching over him during the fighting. Not that there

was anything wrong with being concerned about his best friend, it was cover up at issue, not the crime.

She stared at me from across the yard as I leaned against a wall and collected my thoughts. If only I'd been granted the power to read minds upon my arrival. I always struggled to get a read on what she was thinking. I was fairly confident that her seeing my murderous side would be the end of her silly attempts to befriend me. That tended to be a big negative to most normal, well-adjusted people. My other big hope was for some peace and quiet. With Erwin arrested, most of his gang killed, and the scheme dismantled from the foundation, it was only a matter of time until the finger was pointed at the person writing the checks. Criminals weren't the trustworthy sort, and they'd do anything to cut a few years from a potential jail sentence.

He'd crack like an egg with a little pressure.

With the Escobarus and Booker families both wanting some justice in return for the offences committed – it was also likely that their benefactor wouldn't be allowed to walk. If he'd chosen a less significant target, perhaps he would, but not those two families. It was depressing that this would only be the case because of who they targeted and not the actual actions they took.

I was being a hypocrite, but who wasn't willing to make exceptions for themselves when it was convenient? Now that the main issue was dealt with I could conclude that what I'd done was technically a good deed. Though some would argue that the damage I caused and the body count accumulated was worse than what would have come about otherwise. There was no way to put a firm number on how many lives were potentially saved by Erwin's gang going down. It was simple. The sum total of bad people in the world dropped. That was my perspective. There was no need to run myself into a frenzy getting caught up in questions about morality or the collective good.

Hopefully, whatever mad God brought me here agreed. I was not expecting to live a leisurely life in the first place, but getting to experience it and then having it disrupted with such pitched violence reminded me of how nice it was to go about my

days normally. They were hitting me with a stick after dangling the carrot. Wouldn't it be lovely to enjoy a mostly normal life with all this newfound wealth?

I watched the media and police circus as they cleaned up the site and got everyone's statements about the events of the day. It looked as if our first school trip was to end in a cancellation. Most of the students were probably over the moon about escaping from the building without having to endure any more dry legislative debate.

Samantha was waiting for a gap in the crowds to come and speak with me. She willingly took that chance and slipped between them as the number of people started to drop and the commotion died down. She walked straight up to me, opened her mouth, and then closed it again without making a sound.

"What?" I asked, "Something to share?"

Samantha couldn't say exactly what she wanted to say with so many open ears around. She worded her statements carefully to avoid incurring my wrath.

"Do you do this often?"

I snorted, "Often? I don't believe that 'often' is an appropriate description. This incident and the one at the party are the only times this has happened to me."

Samantha's brow furrowed, "So why were you so confident with... fighting them?"

I replied under my breath, "You wouldn't believe me if I told you the truth. Let's split it halfway and say that I learned it all at those shooting competitions. Happy?"

She shook her head, "Not really, no."

"The real answer will only arouse more questions, questions that I don't feel like answering. You saw it with your own eyes, what I'm capable of, and the kind of dangers that seem to accumulate around me without my input. Having seen all of that, do you still want to be my friend? You were so confident when you declared so a few weeks ago. I'm a bad person."

Samantha hesitated to restate her intentions, but I was surprised to hear her response.

“I don’t think that you’re a bad person. After all, you protected Felipe. Would a bad person do all of that for someone else? I don’t think they would.”

I laughed, “You have a lot to learn, Samantha. Bad people can be motivated to do good things if they think that there’s something in it for them. It’d be easier for all of us if you respect my original answer and leave me alone.”

“I don’t think that you believe that horse manure either,” Samantha retaliated, “There isn’t a person on this planet who’d like to be alone for their entire life. Are you going to go through your time at the academy without ever making a real friend? Don’t tell me that you don’t enjoy spending time with other people. You’re a completely different person when Talia is around.”

“That’s not true.”

Samantha frowned, “The only person you’re hurting with those lies is yourself. I guess it doesn’t matter so much if you’re just unwilling to recognise it.”

I closed my eyes and tried to reset the conversation to something more familiar. Samantha was strong-willed, like most visual novel protagonists, but this was a display of resilience and bravery that exceeded my expectations. She was standing up to me in a small way. It was more than most were willing to try in my presence; everyone else was too interested in sucking up to me or talking about me like I was some kind of monster.

“When I said that I wanted to be your friend – I accepted that there would be sides to you that you didn’t want anyone else to see. This may be more extreme than I was thinking, but that isn’t going to stop me. I’ll take on whatever risks come with it!”

Those earnest, puppy-dog eyes she was using were pure evil. Samantha was a character archetype that I liked. I wouldn’t play so many similar games if I didn’t. There was something appealing to me about a straightforward and noble character, in the literal sense of the word, who always tried to do the right thing. A part of me wanted to be like them, but I was a creature of habit. It would take more than good intentions for a monster like me to change.

“I doubt that you’re ready to endure events like this over and over again, but if that’s the way you want to play it...”

Samantha was stubborn, “I’m sure that this was just a one-off! Now that the gang’s leader is arrested, Felipe won’t be in danger anymore.”

“Samantha – as much as I wish to share in your optimism, the noble class is nothing if not malicious. There’ll come a time where violent action like this arises once again, it’s natural given the amount of money and power they play with.”

“I’m not changing my mind. Prepare to be befriended.”

I glared, but even that well-tested method was ineffective. How was it that finding out I was a merciless killer only hardened her resolve? She was the one girl I was trying to keep it a secret from!

“You know, to be friends both parties must agree to regard each other as such. I have not yet made any affirmative statements based on your proposal.”

“Talia says that you do the same thing with her, but everyone else thinks that she’s your only friend anyway. If you spend time with them, and have fun with them, isn’t that what a friend really is?”

There was no need to tell me. I’d realised that after the attack at the party. I couldn’t assume that my own internal logic and designations held any sway over the course of events that seemed designed to force me into awkward situations. I was being hoisted by my own petard. Getting so close to Talia showed Samantha that it was possible to break through my frosty outer layer.

“And if I start avoiding you?”

Samantha smirked, “I’ve been keeping a close eye on you. I already know all of your hiding spots and escape routes!”

This argument was going nowhere fast, and I was still trying to cool down after all of the drama of our school trip. This could wait for another time. I waved her off and responded simply, “I’ll take that under consideration.”

I walked away to signal the end of our discussion.

With statements taken and the mess cleaned up, it seemed as if I'd gotten away with murder again. I hadn't been pulled aside by the police thanks to Felipe blabbing about my involvement, and Samantha was her usual peppy self towards me. I couldn't judge whether she was being sincere or not. Samantha wasn't the sort to put on a false impression with other people, but I could tell that my secret identity was a cause for concern.

There were more than a few vultures at the gates of the building trying to get a look at what was going on. An attack on the parliament building was going to be big news, and would also lead to the institution of new security policies to prevent anything similar from happening again. People assumed the best until glaring weaknesses were exposed like this – and now every revolutionary the country over had an example to follow and the motivation to try. Whoever paid for the hit had unwillingly thrown a lit match into the powder keg.

Though unless they came for me with a guillotine, it wasn't my problem.

I'd keep my ear to the ground and hope that the culprit was caught soon so I could relax a little. As for the academy, I had no idea what the staff would do. They were likely of the same mind as me, hoping that the culprit being caught would be enough justification to keep the campus open. There was going to be a lot of trouble still, with questions asked and answers demanded.

I slipped away from the commotion and headed off to reunite with the class.

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“Roderro Arrested on Conspiracy Charges! Gang of Killers Tells All.”

There was no missing the headlines plastered across the front page of the newspapers in the days after the attack. Amazingly, Claude bumbled his way into witnessing Adrian's Father and Erwin Tees discussing their plan to find and kill Felipe after hiding in one of the offices. Perhaps his detective intuition was no joke after all. After pointing the finger, and some pressure from the Escobarus family, he was apprehended and questioned. Erwin quickly sold him out to try and score a reduced prison sentence, as did the man who was captured at the Booker's party.

The evidence was clear and overwhelming. There were no excuses that he could air to get out of this one. Financial records and testimony from his own staff and accountants sealed his fate. He confessed to the offence soon after and was due to be sentenced a month from now. To say that this was the biggest story in the past decade would be an understatement. It sent shockwaves through the upper classes in a way that few other scandals could hope to boast of.

Adrian was obviously absent from the academy to handle the family affairs. It was a coin toss as to whether he'd return at all. Felipe and Beatrice wanted to see nothing of him, but he technically didn't do anything wrong. His Father claimed that the entire scheme was his idea and that Adrian didn't know a thing. Regardless of his intentions, Adrian was now the head of the Roderro family for the foreseeable future. It was a huge amount of responsibility for one young man to shoulder. Adrian did not strike me as the type to flourish under those circumstances. Impatient, impulsive, and with little time for other people.

Being the head of a family was tough. I'd seen first-hand how much time and effort my Father dedicated to keeping everything in line. If not bookkeeping and arranging events, it was living up to the standards that his peers expected from him. They wouldn't hesitate to tear anyone down if they didn't conform to exactly what was established.

Classes were suspended for a while. A week passed before the faculty hashed out the details with the parents, who came around to sending the students back now that the people behind the assassination scheme were locked up. It was lucky for the new Headmaster because Felipe's presence on the trip was almost blamed for the whole thing happening in the first place.

The biggest surprise arrived minutes before the first lesson back was due to begin. Claude wheeled his way into the classroom in a wheelchair with a beaming smile on his face. It was almost as if he'd never had that near-death experience in the first place. There was a disturbance as the other students hurried over to speak with him and ask how he earned such a grievous injury. He finally got the fifteen minutes of fame that he was looking for, he only needed to jump in front of a bullet to get it.

I winced as I overheard one of them ask, “Did it hurt?”

Getting shot wasn't nice, of course it hurt!

Claude smiled and practised the humility he was so well known for, “It wasn't that bad really. I was just worried for Felipe once I overheard what they were talking about.”

Max's eyes rolled so far back that they almost fell out of his sockets. He put a firm end to Claude's boasting with a friendly clip around one of his ears, “Don't go exaggerating the bloody story for this lot. They're good enough at doing that without your help.”

The now-humbled Claude nodded sheepishly, “Ah. Sorry. The Doctors said that I should be able to walk again in a few months, so I decided to come back to the academy and get on with it instead of waiting.” Aside from the wheelchair, there was also a bulging area around his midsection where the wound was packed with gauze and tape.

“I'm happy that you didn't bleed to death,” Max exclaimed.

Claude thought nothing of it, “Heh. But you know, girls like scars – so I'm happy to share the story if anyone's willing to listen.”

“Oh Goddess, not again. You told me the exact same story five times when I visited you in the hospital, aren't you tired of it yet?”

“What? It's an exciting story!” Claude protested.

Samantha joined the chorus, “Most people would find nearly dying a rather traumatic experience, but I've long since learned to accept that Claude doesn't seem to care about those sorts of things.”

Claude spoke under his breath, “Is Adrian still here?”

“No, and the teachers told us not to speak about it or spread any rumours until he returns.”



Fat chance of that happening. Claude and Samantha looked in my direction with differing expressions. Claude was still suspicious of me, but Samantha knew everything. She hadn't told him, which was the second surprise of the day aside from his arrival to the classroom. How long was she willing to lie to one of her close friends for? When would her better nature win out and force her to spill the beans? I never assumed trust from others. Samantha could say one thing to me and turn around to blab to somebody else.

Claude's persistence was my biggest enemy. As I had the ability to magnetically attract trouble, he boasted the ability to place himself into the wrong places at the right times. It was incredible how he turned out to be the lynchpin by which the entire case against Adrian's father ultimately hinged. As a victim of the crimes committed, he could tell the full story to the police and have a level of credibility he wouldn't otherwise enjoy. By pointing them in the right direction he caused the entire house of cards to crumble.

"Well, it's not like I'm holding it against him. I'd never be as foolish as to accuse someone of being involved without evidence."

Max and Claude had made up while I wasn't looking, but even then, he was laying it on thick with that statement. Samantha resisted the urge to point out that he'd been accusing me of various criminal offences for some time. Technically he was correct, but Samantha revealed to me that he believed I was doing something untoward with Felipe and Beatrice.

"Alright everyone, please save the chatter for later!" the teacher ordered. Everyone scuttled away to their seats and pulled out their implements for another lecture. Claude was forced to sit at the front, near a small table that had been brought into the chamber for his use.

"I understand that everyone is very excited at the moment, but we need to hurry on with our lessons now that the disruption has ended. We have a lot to catch up on."

It was going to take some time for the kids to adjust back to being in lessons again. I did not envy the position of the teachers and lecturers who now contended with a

wave of gossip and conflict formed by the events at the school trip. There were lots of restless legs and hushed whispers.

When the lesson was over, and most of the information dispensed discarded to the careless winds, Samantha made a point to follow me along my usual route through the campus until we reached the sitting area which I used to hide away from the popular girls and their ceaseless chatter. I sat down on one of the benches and took a moment to admire the carefully cultivated greenery that surrounded me. It seemed that I was one of the only students who saw how much effort was put into this place. Samantha's head peered around one of the hedgerows.

"Something to say?"

She'd been avoiding me since our last discussion outside of the theatre. She clearly saw fit to dash my hopes of my true nature scaring her away. She approached and sat next to me.

"I wanted to ask you to reconsider my offer."

"You're as persistent as Claude."

She shook her head frantically, "No, no. I'm nothing like Claude! Don't you dare accuse me of something like that!" I couldn't stop myself from laughing in the distinct manner by which I had become known. Samantha turned bright red because of my mockery.

"Apologies. Your reaction was... interesting."

"Perhaps I'm being a little mean to Claude by saying that, but he has a way of riling people up."

"If you're worried about riling me up – why do you persist in trying to associate with me? Surely you'd be better served dedicating your time to something else."

"Is it weird if I say that I find you exciting?"

"Yes," I responded bluntly, "I'm actually very dull."

"Even with the gunfighting and heroics?"

“I’m no hero, and the occasions where I’m forced to use violence are not ones to be anticipated. A wrong move could cost me or someone else their life. In truth, I’m terrified of them.”

The foolhardy didn’t last long in this business.

Samantha twiddled her thumbs, “When I saw you all covered in blood back then, I was worried that you’d been hurt. I was expecting to see some terrible injuries on you, just like Claude.”

“I was just as surprised as you. Someone caught me off-guard and shot at me, but the bullet disappeared into nothing. I must have used some kind of magic to protect myself but I have no earthly idea of what it may have been.”

Samantha stroked her chin, “Something disappearing? If you’re certain that it didn’t miss you, then perhaps you use Nihilistic magic to destroy it in mid-air?”

Nihilistic magic was, as the name suggested, a school of thought and practice that allowed one to destroy the bonds between molecules at the snap of a finger. It was a narrow subset of what was considered black magic by most mages. Affinity for it was extremely rare; but if Maria was meant to stand as an opposite to Samantha, who was naturally aligned with light magic, then it begged to reason that I was destined to learn a thing or two about it.

“Could I really have used nihilist magic at a moment like that? From what I’ve read, it takes years of dedicated training to make use of it.”

“They say that your affinity for magic can guide your hand in times of crisis or stress. Almost being killed seems to qualify in my eyes.”

“A near-death experience.”

“Right! I did something similar when we found Claude. I used what I’d read about light magic to stop him from bleeding. I don’t think I would have been able to do it if that wasn’t true. The only thing I could do was focus on healing him – and then it happened right in front of me!”

“Impressive, but in my eyes, it only means that we’re polar opposites. They do say that an affinity is closely tied with a person’s sense of self.”

Samantha took a more optimistic view, “Or, it could mean that we’re like two sides of a coin! Opposites attract!”

“You’re only endangering yourself by getting close to me. What if you have to deal with incidents like the theatre shooting again and again?”

“Those happened before we became friends anyway,” Samantha responded. I graciously ignored the way that she spoke about our estrangement in the past tense.

“And you’re not scared of being around me, knowing what you do?”

Samantha’s trepidation was a clear signal to me that she couldn’t accept those risks without conditions attached. Could she trust me? That was the question she asked herself. Would there come a time where she became the target of my aggression? That was something that no normal human was willing to deal with.

She tested her resolve and nodded, “I know you. A bad person wouldn’t do so much to protect their friends. Felipe and Beatrice are safe because of you.”

My attempts to freak her out with a cool gaze were not working. My only option was to chase her away via exposure. She’d get bored of hanging around me in time, and if she was fully willing to accept the risks that came with it then I couldn’t see a reason to refuse.

“Do as you please, then. But don’t complain when things don’t work out.”

Samantha cheered like she’d just won a million dollars, leaping off of the bench and holding her arms up in the air in a victorious fashion.

“Woohoo, I did it!”

“You sure did...”

“You don’t get it – this is a big moment. There isn’t a single girl in this academy who doesn’t want to be your friend, and now I get to be a member of that exclusive club!”

“It doesn’t come with any benefits.”

I stood up and met her eye to chest, because the damn girl was one-half plus my height.

“That’s fine by me! But maybe you could show me a thing or two about how you do all of that amazing stuff!”

Was this girl right in the head?

“I’m not going to do that.”

“Why not?” she whined. I was already heading towards the next lesson, forcing her to chase after me.

“Because hopefully you’ll never need to use any of those ‘skills,’ have you ever heard of dramatic irony?”

Samantha followed me like a lost puppy before coming out with the single-most boundary violating statement she could.

“You have really nice legs.”

“Hm?”

Samantha blushed, “Ah. It’s just that… when I saw you fighting on the roof, you’d unzipped your skirt and I could see them. I didn’t look on purpose! I promise.”

I pinched the bridge of my nose. I was a little too focused on not dying to worry about whether my underwear was visible.

“You’re unbelievable.”

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“Adrian, I need you to do something for me, as the man of the family.”

Adrian Roderro wanted to believe earnestly that the stories about his Father were not true. They were on the front pages of every major newspaper, and spoken about between the other nobles as if it were settled fact. While he may have thought that Adrian would be spared any of the backlash based on his ignorance to the scheme, the truth was much different. Adrian was left holding the shattered pieces of his family’s already sketchy reputation.

Their last face-to-face meeting at the jailhouse affirmed his worst fears. He'd done all of it, from the scheming to the payments, to allowing them into the parliament building to try and murder Felipe. So deep was his obsession with finding a good wife for him that he never once stopped to think about the immorality of his actions. Adrian almost punched him in the nose when he sat down in that chair. Again, and again, his father took extreme action on his behalf – even when he expressly didn't want it.

“As the head of the Roderro family, there's an important heirloom that you must recover from my office. Once you find it, I want you to follow my instructions and activate it.”

He stepped through the door and into his now abandoned office. It was empty without him; every piece was left in the same place as it was when he was arrested. The investigation found all of the evidence it needed without tearing it asunder, not that he was stupid enough to keep incriminating documents in such an obvious place. He was only stupid enough to write down the budget for his gang of assassins for someone to find in a less obvious hiding place.

“Take the watch from the lockbox using this key, and press the button on the top twice in a location of your choosing. You can press the second switch on the side to go there whenever you please.”

Adrian heard of this timepiece before. It was the pride and joy of the family's collection and a connective tether to their past as one of the biggest families of mages in the nation. It was a profoundly rare, valuable and powerful magical item that had to be charged with magical energy for decades to be usable. This was not a mere teleportation charm. It contained the means to cast one of the most difficult and secretive spells known to mankind. Not only did it store the location as a mana marker to be attracted to later, but it also stored the time of use.

It was a one-way ticket into the past.

Adrian studied the golden watch with a sceptical eye. It looked valuable, but the prospect of travelling back in time was too abstract for him to imagine. What would

he even use such an ability for? As far as he knew, it was reserved almost exclusively by the previous house leaders to insure themselves against dangerous situations.

Engraved into the metal was a cryptic statement; “All that is, will be. All that will be, is.”

Adrian closed his eyes and sat down in the chair that his Father used. It was too late to use it to deter him from launching his plan now. He was the only one with an active mana marker in place, only he could use that marker to go into the past. Why did he not use it when he had the chance? He even found the time to lock it in the box before he was arrested. Clearly, he must have had a good reason. Perhaps he believed that the single charge the watch came with was better used on his son.

Such consideration was rare from a man like him.

Adrian slipped the watch into his pocket and stared out across the room which was now his sole property. It wasn't to his taste, but he expected his Father to be out of prison in due time. No, he'd have to make an office space of his own instead, and then deal with the myriad problems that now faced the family.

Adrian spoke to himself, “Compared to this, the academy doesn't seem so bad.”

The silence was deafening,

