

Deception Knows My Name

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Henrietta's life revolves around a single rule: obedience. And in a world that doesn't tolerate failures, she'll learn one more lesson she should've been living from the start; that escape is futile.



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Henrietta stared at the photo carefully laid down on her desk. She glanced at her wrist watch, and sighed. The light footsteps she heard coming close from behind signaled the start of the operation.

It's almost time. I'm here to make sure you've got everything you need. a soft, melodic voice said.

Henrietta smirked and almost rolled her eyes for the overrated decency. She turned around and faced the owner of the voice whose skills are always regarded as second to none in the Guild.

I only need myself to make the kill. she assured.

The woman with the melodic voice smiled; one full of sarcasm and hidden contempt. *Good. Because you're practically the last person on my list whom I want to work with.*

Henrietta nodded. *I thought so.*

The other woman gave him one last smile. *You know the drills.*

Of course.

Oh well, you never failed, I guess there's no use telling you to stay alive.

Henrietta faked a frown. *I'll finish him off quick. He's done before you know it.*

(*lâ lâ lâ lâ lâ !*)

St. Arthur's Academy also known as the breeding ground of the elites.

Henrietta smiled in amusement as she carefully mapped out the school's interior on her memory. Four dormitories for in-campus students, big enough to house over eight hundred residents per house; a cafeteria that could shame even the most impressive ones at the biggest schools in U.S.; and facilities which is beyond what others claimed as state-of-the-arts.

Home of the spoiled brats and corrupt politicians of the future. she thought.

The thought of how she made her first kill against the standard bearer of the democrats during the last year's election sprang like a pop out on her memory. That was not so interesting.

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Henrietta went inside the library and whistled when she was welcomed by the vast, silent, Victorian-inspired built of the area. She's no fan of books, but if reading some would mean she could spend more time admiring the structure of this school's library, then why not?

Her eyes surveyed the place, remembering which books belong to what shelf, and on what category. It amuses her how her memory stores more than the information she needed to survive. She could even swear to god she'll remember every single face she crossed path with for the last 30 minutes.

How may I help you? a deep baritone voice asked. Henrietta thought it sounded sexy than deep.

No. I'm fine. she said, averting her attention to the owner of the voice. The guy raised a brow when he saw the streak of recognition on her face.

Well? he asked.

Henrietta shook her head. *Nothing.*

And then she went off.

She released a deep breath after she made sure that she's far enough of his sight. Of course she recognized the man; the 5 feet 9 blonde, 18 year-old heir of Rousenthals Conglomerate; the same man who's going to be dead in less than 72 hours.

She once again shook her head.

Chris Anthony Rousenthal surely has the most powerful ash-gray pair of eyes she's ever met.

(. . .)

Anthony lay wide awake on his bed that evening; arms folded below his head, and thoughts wandering off to somewhere else, to someone else. When he saw the mysterious library lady earlier and how her face flashed with recognition upon seeing him, Anthony knew they've met somewhere before. He knew they did. He's not just sure where and when, and if she could even remember the same thing.

He got out of bed and grabbed his phone. It's definitely easier if he finds out himself.

(. . .)

Henrietta stayed at the Hades House, the place which is said to have been housing the sons and daughters of arts and literature. She was pleased on the fact that the house's population is not as big as the others, but equally dreaded the realization that most of the people staying in there are females.

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She's always not comfortable staying with women. They're usually loud and overly sensitive, which makes them a viable target for Henrietta's playful thinking every time they attempt to do something stupid.

But right now, she had to bear it.

She walked past the group of ladies who was having a sort of group reading session, and was about to mount the stairs up to the second floor where her room was, when she caught a familiar figure at the periphery of her eyes. The murmurs and giggles from the group of girls behind her then followed.

Henrietta turned around and darted a sharp glare at the object of the ladies' ruckus.

"The last time I checked, you're staying at Olympus house." she said, looking particularly at the traveling bag Anthony was bringing with him.

He nodded, impressed. *"For a newcomer, you sure do an excellent research."*

Henrietta crossed her arms in front of her. *"I don't need any research when your face is constantly Vogue's favorite."* she said with a smile.

The way Anthony looked at her with the admiration that rivaled Prince Charles's way of admiring Queen Elizabeth told Henrietta that she got him in her claws all too easily.

"Henrietta Lee." she offered, extending her hand.

Anthony smiled and shook her hand.

"Chris Anthony Rousenthal." they said together.

(*lâ lâ !..*)

How she and Anthony became the best of friends in a span of two days was amusing. From complete strangers to best friends minus Henrietta's killing intent and they'll surely be lovers at the end of the week.

"So you're originally a Chinese?" Anthony asked as he took one big bite from his tuna sandwich.

They were currently having snacks at the school's cafeteria despite Henrietta's plea to just have it on the rooftop. The cafeteria's a very open space, and she hated the stares and meaningful, furtive glances the other students are giving them ever since they entered the area.

"One drawback on having an overly popular friend is too much attention." she said, looking away from him and giving a sharp look at a woman sitting on the adjacent table, who has been looking at their direction for about a minute. The woman, sensing Henrietta's murderous intent finished off her food, and immediately fled the scene.

"It wasn't my fault to be born a Rousenthal."

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â Uhuh..â

Anthony frowned. â *You couldnâ t possibly-*â

He was cut off with the ringing of Henriettaâ s phone.

â *I have to take this.*â she said, and excused herself.

Henrietta hid herself from Anthonyâ s view before taking the call.

â *Yes.*â

â *Henrietta Lee..*â came that same melodious voice, she loved and hated all at the same time.

â *Positive.*â

Henrietta heard the slight click on the other line, and knew right then that this was a conference call. For all she knew, both their client who ordered the kill and *Levi*, the head of their guild are listening to this conversation. She felt the sudden rise of chill at the back of her neck.

â *Leviâ !*â she thought with a frown.

â *As you were ordered, weâ re expecting the target to be dead tomorrow at exactly 12 midnight, right Henrietta?*â said the woman on the other line.

â *Yes.*â

â *I donâ t know if youâ re exactly doing your job but either ways, we made changes on the initial mission.*â

She heard someone clear his throat, apparently the client.

â *What is it?*â she asked.

â *The client needs Chris Anthony Rousenthal dead today.*â the woman ordered.

Henrietta opened her mouth to say something, but no words came out. Not that she havenâ t been into situations like this. In fact, majority of her missions has always required advance killings than the deadline. That was exactly why she developed the habit of ending her missions earlier than usual. She wasnâ t just expecting it now.

Noticing her silence, the woman from the other line continued.

â *Youâ ll have to make the kill before 12 midnight today. Otherwiseâ !.*â

â *Otherwise what?*â Henrietta asked.

â *Otherwise, Iâ ll do it.*â

Henrietta froze. *Levi*â s silky-smooth tone of voice crept like a deadly omen from the other line, ready to destroy whoever dares to fail a mission. She swallowed the lump on her throat and eased her breathing.

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“You don’t need to. I’ll take him down as ordered.” Henrietta said before cutting off the line.

She shut her eyes tight and clinched her fists.

(...)

Anthony surveyed the library. It was almost 9 in the evening, and everyone shall be back at their dorms by now if they don’t want to miss the bedtime inspections by their house representative. Unfortunately, it seemed like he’s not going back anytime soon.

“Hey! I’m here!” he called out, darting his eyes from left to right as he walked along the history reference area of the magnanimous room. He kept on wondering why Henrietta wanted to meet at the library at this hour. All he was informed of was that it was something important.

“Henri-”

Before he could call her name again, a soft hand covered his mouth, forcing his head back and pulling him away from the main alley. Anthony struggled by pulling off the hand that gripped his lower jaw and mouth, but his abductor only tightened the hold, swallowing Anthony’s attempt to cry for help. He wriggled his body to pull himself away, but the cold sensation on his neck and the slight pain he felt after when the abductor cut his skin with whatever pointed object he was holding, completely silenced Anthony, rendering him immobile.

After what felt like eternity, the abductor eased his grip on his mouth, but didn’t let him go.

“Don’t move.” the voice commanded, and Anthony froze. His abductor must have strategically covered *her* face to mask *her* identity, but he knew she was a *she*.

He closed his eyes tight. He has always been aware of the threat to his life ever since he was declared as the heir of their business empire. In fact he had several worse experiences before than what was happening as of the moment. What he couldn’t get though was why it needs to be *her*.

“Will you kill me?” he asked, his back still on his abductress.

Anthony felt the blade on his neck sank deeper.

Few moments of silence passed. He didn’t know if she was waiting for somebody or anything. What he wanted now was to buy some time before it gets too late.

“If you want to kill me, then do it now.”

The soft and strong hand of his abductress clasped his hair, pulling his head back. This time, she allowed Anthony to face her. Judging from how he looked at her, she knew he wasn’t at all surprised.

“I’ve always thought we’ve met somewhere before...guess I was right after all.”

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“I don’t know what you’re talking about, now shut up. And if you’re trying to buy some time to save yourself, then forget it. Nobody’s coming.” Henrietta said.

She pushed Anthony hard against the high rack of select medieval history books, pinning him hard with her arm against his chest. Henrietta raised the knife she was holding and showed it to Anthony.

A tiny blot of blood was visible from the cut it inflicted on Anthony’s skin. Its sharp silver blade glistened beautifully against the light coming from the full moon outside.

She smiled mischievously. *“Made in Greece. Just the perfect one for you.”*

Anthony who seemed to have lost interest in the whole charade sighed and closed his eyes. *“Do it now.”*

Just as she was about to say something more, she heard the soft, almost inaudible footsteps coming their way. Henrietta need not to defend or hide from the intruder. She had all the idea who it was.

“You shouldn’t have come.” she said, as Levi’s petite, divine-like figure, as others say, materialized in front of them.

Henrietta’s eyes were immediately drawn on Levi’s right hand which was holding her trademark silencer with the glamorous Aries zodiac symbol engraved in gold.

She looked at her in question.

Levi stared back.

“I obeyed your—”

“Go.” Levi commanded.

Henrietta smirked. While she’s used to have her time cut off when necessary, she’s not practically in favor of letting somebody else handle the job that is originally hers.

“I don’t understand why—”

A silent gunshot that shattered the chandelier above cut her off. Henrietta braced herself for its falling debris, but aside from several shattered glass that fell down, the decor remained anchored on its hinges. Beyond state-of-the-arts, indeed.

“Go.” Levi repeated, this time, taking no for an answer as she pointed her gun at her own subordinate.

Perhaps everything happened too quickly before Henrietta managed to understand what was going on that she also didn’t notice the slight movement behind her. Before she knew it, a sharp stabbing pain struck her lower waist. Henrietta brought her hand to where it hurt and felt dizzy looking at her own blood drenching her hand.

Just as she was about to turn around, Levi fired, barely missing Henrietta on the process to directly land on Anthony’s body.

Anthony staggered backwards, clutching his abdomen as if to prevent blood from oozing. He cursed and held his sharp glare at Levi. Even after he slumped down on the floor, he managed to grab Henrietta’s knife

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which he used in stabbing her from behind. He clutched the handle hard enough until it hurts, before plunging it straight to his heart.

Henrietta leaned defeated on the nearest shelf, holding her wounded waist. She was breathing hard, but she knew it has nothing to do with exhaustion. She was trembling, but it wasn't solely because of Levi's presence. She wiped away her sweat with the back of her unoccupied hand.

Get yourself clean. I'll take charge of the rest from here. Levi ordered.

Henrietta didn't move from her position and looked instead at Anthony's direction. Though with difficulty, he was still alive and breathing. Henrietta diverted her look at Levi. She didn't understand what happened, but she knew she deserved some answers; answers, which might be best left unsaid.

Mission's over. Levi said as she once again raised her gun, firing it straight at Anthony's head. Henrietta couldn't look at him as Levi emptied her slug, planting every single bullet on the target. All she did was listen; listen to the melody of Levi's weapon as it once again took its honor in ending another's life.

Henrietta stared at Levi; an emotionless, cold and unforgiving personality. She feared her but respected her at the same time. It felt strange and quite unreasonable to admire a cold-blooded killer, yet she couldn't do something than to be drawn more and more to such a forbidding presence.

The moment she made sure Anthony's dead, Henrietta left the library, left St. Arthur's for good. The room she occupied has already been cleaned up as if she never existed. Her school records were already pulled out and burned down without the school noticing.

She left without a word to anybody.

That's how she works. That's how the Guild works.

(. . .)

A week later, Henrietta stared dumbfounded at the wide screen monitor in front of her. Levi's hazel brown eyes pierced right through her like a knife plunged deep on her consciousness.

Your next mission. Kat, the melodious-voiced woman said. *You are to bring her back alive.*

Henrietta shook her head. *I don't get this.*

Levi has to be eliminated.

Levi finished my mission.

Kat raised a brow. *Which is exactly why you need to kill her.*

No. Henrietta said in finality as she turned on her heels, not wanting to take the order.

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She was aware of how Levi vanished after the night she killed Anthony, but she never thought of it as something that is worthy of making too much fuss about, considering how Levi does her job; perfectly and with utmost secrecy. So as to why the â Guildâ had decided to eliminate their best agent still remains a puzzle.

â *Levi has become too much capable for her own good.*â she heard Kat said just in time for her to slid in her keycard and open the steel door.

â *Iâ ve obeyed my orders, Kat. Iâ ve killed more than what others of my level are capable of. Iâ m letting Levi live. She hasnâ t done anything against us.*â Henrietta reasoned, though by doing so, she immediately felt the aversion that the other woman threw at her.

â *Not yet.*â

With a momentary glance at the other woman, Henrietta left.

(â lâ lâ lâ lâ !.)

It was no more than a week when Henrietta learned about the news that changed her life forever. The â Guildâ whom she considered as her home; the place where she grew up and learned the essence of killing others in order to survive; the place which taught her the ins and outs of life has been infiltrated, broken down until no one survived.

She was on a mission when the attack happened. She survived. Lucky for all other agents who were on their missions as well. Their lives were spared. But nothing added fuel to her raging anger than the fact that Levi did it. She who started the Guild ended it in her own hands. A bloodbath.

â *I told you. Sheâ s not letting anyone of us live.*â Kat said on a phone call the day after the attack. Henrietta expected much. Without Levi, Kat was after all the strongest.

â *Why?*â she remembered herself asking.

â *She had her orders.*â

â *Orders?! Damn it! She killed our team, and youâ re pestering me about those damn orders?! Now you, better tell me what the hell is going on.*â she snapped, releasing her anger and disbelief at the other woman who seemed to show no single sympathy on the Guildâ s fate.

There was an ominous silence on the other line before Kat told her about it all.

Levi was hired by Anthonyâ s father to avenge his son.

â *Levi was the one who pulled the trigger! She killed him!*â Henrietta yelled.

â *Says who? You? Your word against her. Who do you think sounds more believable?*

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Henrietta fell silent. She knew Kat was right. Guild agents are sworn in utmost secrecy, and no one knows their existence aside from the elite circle of select reformist who believes in the so-called ultimate justice against corrupt power of the society. Technically, they are non-existent; a myth; a lie.

Levi is gone tired of her own games, Henrietta. And she knows we are still here. Sooner than later she will bury us down as well together with the others. Crap. Our lives will never be even written down on history. How does that sound? Kat asked with a sigh.

A joke.

She heard Kat's melodious laugh from the other line. *Then why don't we play along with that joke and see if she will get the chance to make other people laugh?*

Henrietta thought about the offer and eventually decided that Kat was right. They have nothing to lose after all. If Levi plans to erase all traces of the Guild, then might as well fought their way out to preserve something that they've been working for their whole lives.

Church of Canterbury. 9pm. North Wing. Henrietta said.

Right away. Kat said with a smile.

As the silence of the night filled the air, Henrietta drew out a deep breath. She loaded her guns, wounded her favorite set of knives on her right leg, and hoisted her black leather bag containing ammunitions of different calibers on her shoulders.

The skies showed a promising good evening with bright stars and full moon. Yet all Henrietta could see was bloodshed.

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