

I had always wanted to become ruler, I thought, Leaning back in my chair. I clasp my hands together and look at the painting of myself on the other side of the room. Sun streams in through a window, lighting the painting with full colors. I admire my striking features exemplified in the portrait, my wise eyes, sharp, and defined features. I continue to stare as the clock ticks, and a draft from the heating system causes my flag hanging above the beautiful portrait to tremble.

I sit up, getting into a more comfortable position, but keeping my eyes on the portrait. With great effort, I slide my hand downwards, moving my shirt out of the way, creeping towards my belt, my heart pounding. I reach for the buckle - and then - an intruder!

My secretary, Morand, swings open the hardwood door. "Premier! It is I!" He exclaims, striding towards me.

I scramble my hand back onto my desk, trying to look like I am filling out paperwork. "What is it, Morand?" I mutter, looking down to the carpeted floor and away from my immaculate image.

Morand brings himself over to the desk to stand in front of me. He brushes himself off and says: "The Minister of Security found a bodyguard for you, as you requested. He wants you to inspect him before he is assigned,"

"Why didn't you just have him call me?" I say, looking up into Morand's eyes, "The Minister that is," I add.

"Sir..." Morand responds, taken aback by my vitriol, and says in an almost resigned tone "I'll just bring the guard in. His name is Legrande. He's French - from Besancon, but if you request, he will take up house in the capitol building here, in Geneva."

"Move him here." I sigh, and look back up. "Is there anything else?" I ask.

"You have a meeting on economic policy with the cabinet at 3 o'clock," he replies.

"Thank you for reminding me." I grit my teeth. Morand seems to understand, and makes his way out of the room. I hear a few inaudible words coming from outside afterwards.

I look down at my papers, malaise creeping over me. My Secretary is a tolerable interruption, but meeting a new person currently causes a fearful rage to form within me. I take a deep breath, calming myself as I hear the heavy footsteps of my new bodyguard coming towards me. I prepare my smile, choking on my own frustration.

"LeGrande, Reporting for duty Sir!" He says, much too loud for my tastes. I look up with my well prepared expression. Fitting to his name, he is a large man, and annoyingly, taller than I. He has unremarkable brown hair, cut short, though he doesn't appear to be a military man.

I decide they chose him for political conviction and strength rather than professional experience. It would also explain his lack of any indicator of rank on his uniform except my seal.

I ponder exactly how end this threat to my comfort while I lock eyes with him, keeping my gentle expression plastered on. I decide to give him a friendly mock-salute. "I can see my ministers chose well! I am in safe hands I see?" I flatter. He stalls, surprised at my casual reaction.

"Thank you, sir." He says, displeasing me. I am now stumbling, but I manage to keep it off my face as I fumble for a response calculated to make him leave without making a poor impression.

"I'd love to get to know my new guardian later, but I have much work to do you see? If you could just..." I pause, my heart pounding, "Guard the door?" I finish after a brief pause.

My bodyguard nods, and to my great excitement walks over to the door without saying a word. I let out a sigh of relief, relief that is soon extinguished when he opens his mouth right when he gets to the door.

“Would you like me to be inside the room or outside sir?” He asks.

“Outside!” I snap. He complies and makes a beeline for the door. I sigh again, resting my head in my hands, my elbows leaning against the table. I realize the papers, which I finally take the time to read in my boredom, are about the bodyguards appointment and stationing. More rage floods through me, enough that I stand up, pushing my chair back.

Morand never had to come here and tell me about this bodyguard if he had not made the assumption I had not been reading my paperwork. This was a grave transgression against my character.

I start to pace the room, shaking my hands and cursing, not knowing how to solve this in a healthy manner. I storm over to my door, pulling it open and bringing my startled bodyguard into view.

“Sir?” He says.

“My boy, could you get my secretary over here? I need to speak with him,” I say, giving him a father's smile.

“Of course sir, I will make a call!” He answers, in his loud faux-military tone, childish even.

*You're not a fucking soldier, boy, you're a gullible child from Besancon who decided his purpose in life was to stand outside my door, as if assassin's would walk in through my front door!* I imagine myself saying to him. The Windows! The windows do not even lock, and I'm only on the second floor. More fear floods into me and my heart begins to race again as I slam the door shut behind me.

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“...Sir?” Someone asks. I open my eyes and straighten up in my seat from my dozing. I was in my council room, my seat placed at a circular table, my ministers occupying all the other seats at the table and looking at me confused. The Head of Government sat opposite of me on the table, his eyes narrowing as he clicked his pen.

“We were just discussing dissident political figures currently, Premier.” The Minister of Security piped up, breaking the tension building and stopping the clicking of the pen.

“I do not need to reminding Minister, do you think I was sleeping?” I spit, “Now, who are the prime suspects for this anti-government conspiracy? We should deal with them as quickly as possible.”

The Head of Government interrupts, “Premier, I understand your worries of destabilization, and these are rational fears. That being said, purging cannot be the answer!”

His swift inference of my intentions makes me clench my fists underneath the table. “I’m deeply hurt that you would think that our government would resort to such brutal measures. Do you not think me loved by the people?” I begin to get louder and angrier, “Your swiftness to imply I intend to repeat the mistakes of past rulers makes me think you do not care for my leadership as much as I previously thought. Do not jump to such conclusions in the future or you will make even more of a fool out of yourself!” I finish, nearly shouting.

My face begins to turn red and I divert my gaze, hiding my anger and embarrassment in what appears to be injury. I continue in a nigh inaudible voice, “Please deal with any dissidents how you see fit, Minister of Security, meeting adjourned.” The ministers stare at me as I get up, push my chair in, watching me leave.

“Install bars on my windows too, they’re a safety hazard.” I say before I walk out the door, shutting it behind me. My bodyguard is annoyingly waiting at attention outside, nodding at me,

“How did it go sir?” He asks as I push past him. I hear his footsteps quick behind me, and he wisely does not say anything. The labyrinthine hallways leading back to my office seem to twist and contort, and choking nausea makes me stumble.

“Premier...?” He asks, placing a hand on my shoulder to steady me as I begin to wheeze.

“I’m just feeling a little dizzy, Legrand.” I say, looking at him with a pained smile. He looks at me with smug disbelief, narrowing his eyes.

“Perhaps I should call a doctor?” He asks.

“That will not be necessary, my boy.” I say, nodding at him and continuing to smile, stepping haphazardly towards my office, the door now only just down the hall.

“Are you certain, Premier?” He says, pressing after me.

“Yes!” I snap, not even looking behind me as I fumble with the doorknob, swinging the door open and stepping inside. Inside I see two workers, pounding away with tools at my window, installing bars.

“What the hell is going on here!” I shout, my nausea seeming to burn away with my rising rage. “Only government officials are allowed in this room without my permission!” I stride towards the grimy, dirty workers, disgust now starting to boil within me. They turn around, looking at me with brief surprise that soon gives way to terror.

“We’re just following the orders of the Minister of Security, he said you ordered it!” one of them says, giving a pitiful salute.

That was less than half an hour ago, surely he could not have been so prepared? I think.

“Nonsense, I specifically ordered that this be done after I have left the building! and under supervision of the Minister of Security as to avoid sabotage!” I lie.

“Not to offend you sir, but we just finished, we’d been prepared ahead of time.” drawls the other worker, tipping his hat to me.

“Just get out of here!” I snarl. I turn my head, noticing Legrand is still behind me and order, “Remove them.”

Legrand sighs and stands up straight, walking over to the workers. Without having to touch them, his imposing figure sends them running for their toolboxes and scrambling out of the room, but not before I spot their nametags . My mood is further spoiled as envy for Legrand bubbles up once more. Still, I head back to my desk to begin filling out the forms for their imprisonment. I notice the new bars cast a shadow over my portrait, and begin grumbling about having it moved.

Legrand lingers by the door, not sure whether to remain in the room or not. I speak to him. “Legrand my boy, how is it you came to be my bodyguard? You were chosen for political conviction correct? How does one do that?” I ask, not with curiosity but with a desire to repair my image.

Legrand looked down and away for me for a moment, then walked over to my desk, sitting down in the chair across from me. “It is a long and difficult story for me sir, but I will tell it if you insist. It started when I was a young teenager in France when the economic collapse hit it. I had long been handing out pamphlets for your movement, translating them into french, convincing my friends about your righteousness. When the governments of Europe began to collapse, I joined one of the police units of your new government, Le Unité Extermination Sociale...” Legrande pauses for a moment, his face hardening.

There is a sudden knock at the door. Morand. Legrand excuses himself and let's the secretary into the room, exchanges formalities with him, and Morand walks over and sits down in the seat Legrand had been occupying. He hands me some papers. Without speaking, I begin to stamp and sign the papers.

"Sir?" He asks, staring. I do not speak, and as I finish, hand the papers back to him. He adjusts his glasses and after looking the papers over, begins to. He exchanges some words in french with Legrand that I do not understand before he exits.

I take a deep breath. My ministers were expert politicians and technocrats I could trust whatever proposals they sent my way. This justified not reading them. "It's getting late Legrand, why don't we retire?" I say after a long silence. As we left the room I realized to my dissatisfaction that my bodyguard had in fact been not only a soldier but a fanatic.

Later that night I decided to leave my quarters to get fresh air for my nausea. Legrand had left my door for what I assume was a bathroom break, and the other rotating guard had fallen asleep. I tried to leave earlier that night but the guards insisted that they go with me if I left.

I used my keys to exit the building.

A large brick wall and guard towers surrounded the building, but they all faced outwards so leaving was easy. I stood for a moment, breathing in the cold Swiss air. I realized now that I did not know my way around Geneva, for I had not seen anything other than the inside of the capitol building.

I decide to walk away from the entrance anyways, down the clean streets of the city. I start to break into a jog. The streets are empty, and this fills me with fear. Soon I am almost sprinting, sweat dripping down my forehead as I run.

Then I see a small figure, hunched sitting on a doorstep. I slow to a walk, then double over onto my knees, panting and feeling vomit climbing up my throat. The old man at the step stares at me, shifts around, adjusts his glasses and asks, "Drink a bit too much, my boy?"

"No, Im just... exercising?" I say after a minute, heavy breaths punctuating every word.

"Well you aren't doing a good job, did you rough up the wrong person?" He asks laughing. At this point I notice his accent does not seem Swiss. A local dialect perhaps?

"What is your name?" I ask, my breaths and heaves starting to subside and I manage to stand up.

"Tell me yours first, stranger." he says.

"I can't tell you." I plead, shivering.

"Ah, I see, you're an escaped convict aren't you, my boy? On the run from the police? I hear the new laws are quite lenient on prisoners, it's like a resort! I have a phone you could call the police on if you like!" He laughs again, slapping his knee. I hear the sound of a distant engine. The man stops laughing, coming to a halt with a serious look on his eyes. "Name or book it."

A powerful hand grabs me from behind, pulling me back and into a car seat. I kick, scrape and struggle at the figure before I hear "Premier! it's me, Legrand!" I shake my head trying to orient myself. The driver slams the accelerator. I pull Legrand's hands off me, my body aching now. He is sitting next to me with a concerned look on his face.

"What is the meaning of this?" I ask, chuckling weakly.

"We thought you had been kidnapped." he says , unamused.

"I was just out and about getting some fresh air, talking to my subjects," I defend.

"If we can track you, then who knows who else can? You are lucky we picked you up first sir." He says, patting my shoulder. I shrug him off. "Let's get back to sleep sir, you had



us all worried sick. I lean back in the seat, sighing and closing my eyes. Legrand does not speak for the rest of the ride, and I find no rest in the tension.

After a few minutes we arrive back at the capitol building, and I am escorted back through the nauseating halls to my fine room. I tried hopelessly to try to sleep in the depths of the bed, and after a few hours I marched back over to the door, only to discover it was locked from the outside, and I had no key.

Weeks passed. Paper flooded my desk, and I dutifully stamped it, as was my role as the most powerful man in the world. Legrand and I shared a pleasant silence. The Head of Government committed suicide.

Today, however, was different. Morrand delivered a gift of pastries and a letter at my desk. Legrand took it upon himself to read the letter aloud for me. "Dear Premier, it's my understanding my husband, a security expert, was imprisoned by accident and without your knowledge. I beg of you to please have him released, as he has committed no crime." it says. I think back to the two ill-mannered window technicians, and begin eating the pastries. The package lets out a small beeping noise.

I stop chewing and Legrand springs to action, throwing the package to the floor and tackling me over the desk, my chair falling back as he attempts to cover me. An ear-shattering noise splits my head and I cry out as my head slams against the floor. I spit out the remnants of the pastries over Legrand, who seems to be bleeding. My hearing creeps back, and Legrand rolls off of me, holding his bleeding side, and slumping against the wall, as I start to shake, my eyes welling up. I notice that the shrapnel had pierced Legrand and embedded itself in my abdomen, and I start to retch.

"Premier!" I hear Legrand, sounding miles away, as he crawls back over to me.

"I'm scared." I croak, as I start to feel faint, "I didn't want this!"

“Premier, you aren’t making sense, calm down I will get help!” He says as he tries to examine my wound, even as his own stains his clothing.

“Legrand, I’m going to die.” I moan.

“Don’t speak like that!” He tries to make a call on his personal cell phone, but there seems to be no more reception, and he tosses the phone away.

“Legrand, I don’t want this!” Legrand looks at me like he was my mother, he began to try to make some kind of bandage from his greatcoat, ignoring his own wound.

“That is why you must the premier, because you don’t want to.” He says in a poor attempt to comfort me, “Those who want to rule aren’t fit to.” He finishes contented. His fumbling hands make me retch and cry in pain.

“But I want power Legrand. I want control not this! I don’t care about whatever pamphlets you distributed or what you believe in just fix me!” I rave, starting to flail my arms around like a wounded animal as nausea overcomes me. Legrand immediately stopped his searching.

“I never finished my story about why I they picked me to be your bodyguard Premier, let me tell you,” He says, not moving at all, his voice ragged and painful.

“What are you talking about! Get me help!” I cry, starting to feel numb.

“My parents sided with the old government you see. So one night they were brought to our headquarters, you see.” My eyes focus on his trembling hands, not able to look away.

“I forgive you for saving them! I don’t expect you to sacrifice everything now get me out of here please!” I start to smell a slight tinge of smoke in the air.

“I did not save them, Premier.” He says. My heart drops. “I did it for your pamphlets, and you don’t care about them. I did it for what we...” He pauses, and corrects himself. “...I believed in.”

“Im sorry.” I say. He looks at his hands, still trembling, and then slowly, moves them back towards me, but this time he starts to wrap them around my neck. I start to kick and flail even

more, adrenaline rushing through me and pain vanishing. My lungs cry for air. Vomit starts to back up in my throat. My blows bounce off him to no effect, until I spot an opening. My leg manages to sail into his groin, and his hands loosen.

I break free and scramble to my feet, sprinting away, anywhere. The Windows! I realize. I sprint, ignoring all my pain, towards the nearest window. I rush to open the windows, fumbling with the mechanism. I hear Legrand rising to his feet, recovering behind me. I slide open the window.

Only now do I notice the thick iron bars.

Everything was silent for a moment, save the blood rushing through my ears, and the sound of a cocking gun.