2452 Red Pool  
  
The coffee tasted heavenly. It was strange, really… Sunny had been suffering from insomnia for a while now, surviving on sleeping pills and still having nightmares every time he did fall asleep. Perhaps as a result, everything felt tasteless to him — but whenever his therapist offered him coffee, he could not help but enjoy it.  
  
"So, where do I start?"  
  
As she opened her notebook to silently take notes, Sunny sighed.  
  
"I don't get those recurrent nightmares often, anymore…"  
  
He still saw them every time he slept, but he rarely slept, so that could hardly be called "often".  
  
"The world is sort of annoying, but I don't get irrationally angry either. It feels like I have a firmer grasp on myself."  
  
He had smashed his TV just this morning, but that anger was perfectly reasonable. There were many good reasons to hate the Valor Group and its CEO.  
  
"...I don't thinκ I really felt paranoid about something since our last session. So, I guess that is an improvement?"  
  
He had considered the best way to kill the supposed drunk in case the man attacked him, earlier this morning, but that was not paranoia. That was just experience, and Sunny would be a fool not to pay attention to strangers around him.  
  
Sunny continued spouting confident half-truths to give the therapist the impression that he was a stable, well-functioning member of society. Someone whom she should give a clean bill of health and never see again. He wasn't sure if his act was fooling the taciturn beauty, but she did not question his account even once.  
  
He was not sure if she believed him or simply didn't care.  
  
After a while, Sunny found himself simply recounting his thoughts to her without much pretense.  
  
"I am bored. I am restless… I want to get back to work. I tried doing things that normal people do in their free time, like going on a picnic or taking a walk in the park. But it has been raining the whole damn month. Staying inside is infuriating because of all the bullshit on the news, and I can't really go to a bar, can I? You told me not to mix sleeping pills with alcohol. I feel like... I'm missing something that I never had. So…"  
  
He hesitated for a few moments, and then asked:  
  
"Can't you just pass me, doc? We both know that I am only here to comply with what the judge said. And the judge only sent me here to comply with people paying for his vacation home."  
  
Of course, Sunny had failed to disclose a few important facts about himself to his beautiful shrink.  
  
For example, the fact that he sometimes felt like his nightmares were the actual reality.  
  
Or that he sometimes believed himself to be the only real person in the world.  
  
Or that he sometimes hallucinated foreign sights, sounds, and sensations, as if he possessed multiple bodies. That was probably because he often spaced out for a few seconds because of the insomnia, falling into bouts of microsleep.  
  
Little stuff like that.  
  
The therapist looked at him with her usual aloof expression.  
  
"Do you think you are mentally fit to resume work, Detective?"  
  
Sunny laughed, hiding the literal shivers her sonorous, enthralling voice sent running down his spine. It was probably a good thing that his therapist did not speak a lot… her voice was just as perilous as her looks, if not more bewitching.  
  
He shook his head.  
  
"Me, mentally fit? God, no. But who the hell is, anyway? I mean… with the way the world is, wouldn't it be stranger if I was perfectly fine? I'd definitely turn around and run if I ever met a person who seemed happy, healthy, and completely sane."  
  
She studied him for a while, then nodded and closed her notebook.  
  
"Alright, Detective. To be honest, I am not a fan of mandatory counseling myself. Despite the circumstances, however, you did show considerable progress in these few months we have been seeing each other. So, I am ready to report that you are fit to resume service… on one condition."  
  
Sunny raised an eyebrow, surprised. This was probably the most he had heard her talk ever since they met.  
  
"What's that?"  
  
The therapist studied him for a while, then said in her usual aloof tone:  
  
"I want you to continue therapy even after you are reinstated… in fact, I insist that you do. You are my patient, and I dislike the idea of leaving things unfinished. I abhor it."  
  
Sunny chuckled.  
  
"So… either I continue to see you, or I can't go back to work? How is that different from mandatory counseling?"  
  
She shrugged.  
  
"You can refuse."  
  
He remained silent for a few moments, then scoffed.  
  
"I am sorry, doc, but you seem to be overlooking something. These sessions were being billed to the Mirage City Police Department. If we continue to see each other after my mandatory therapy is over, though, I'll have to pay for the sessions myself. And I am very sorry to say this… but you are way out of my price range."  
  
A peasant like him would not even be let near this exclusive hospital in normal circumstances, let alone receive treatment here.  
  
His therapist gave him an impassive look, then sighed and reached into her pocket. Producing a beautifully embossed business card, she offered it to him with a graceful gesture.  
  
"This is my personal number. We can work something out."  
  
Sunny received the card with a stunned expression and looked down at it.  
  
'...Saint? No way, that's her actual name?'  
  
The saintly therapist was actually called Saint. Learning that fact, Sunny really felt crazy for a moment.  
  
Plus, she was giving him her number…  
  
Pushing silly thoughts out of his head, Sunny looked at the aloof beauty and cleared his throat.  
  
"Well, alright. I'll call you when things settle down a little, doc."  
  
With that, he put her card into his wallet and stood up.  
  
"Thanks for everything… I guess."  
  
She nodded indifferently, already turning away to start filling out the necessary paperwork.  
  
"Don't forget to get your sleeping pills from the pharmacy. Good sleep is the foundation of mental health, Detective. Be well."  
  
A few seconds later, Sunny found himself outside her office, somewhat lost. He had not expected that getting the stone-faced shrink to give him the clean bill of health would be so easy.  
  
'It turned out great, though?'  
  
Shaking his head, he went to the pharmacy situated on the lower floor of the hospital to get his prescription.  
  
…It was when he was waiting for the pharmacist to fill it, listening to the rain pattering against the window, that there was a loud sound of something heavy falling nearby.  
  
Then, a piercing scream shattered the silence.  
  
As Sunny turned around, he saw several tall, muscular orderlies running to the source of the noise with troubled faces.  
  
"Hurry!"  
  
"She got out again!"  
  
"How the hell is she…"  
  
He lingered for a while, watching the disappear behind a heavy door, then separated himself from the wall he had been leaning on and followed.  
  
Behind the door was one of the areas of the hospital where casual visitors weren't allowed. The dimly lit corridor was a complete mess, with several people struggling to get someone whom Sunny could not see behind them to the floor.  
  
Just in front of him, he saw an overturned wheelchair, its wheel still spinning…  
  
And a pool of red, vivid, glistening blood slowly spreading across the floor.  
  
At the heart of the pool was a kneeling nurse who was crying loudly while clutching at her face, red streaks running between her fingers and painting her white uniform into a striking shade of vermilion.  
  
At that moment, one of the brawny orderlies was tossed back, colliding with the wall with enough force to make the floor shake.  
  
"D—damn it! How is she… so strong!"  
  
"Hold her down, shit!"  
  
"Don't hurt her, you idiots! We're all done for if she gets hurt!"  
  
Sunny could finally see the cause of the mayhem.  
  
The person whom four muscular orderlies had been struggling to contain… was a slender woman with wavy black hair and a pretty, but cold and sharp face. She was wearing a shredded straitjacket and resisting the orderlies with an amount of strength unexpected from someone of her build and constitution, clearly unhinged.  
  
Strangest of all, though…  
  
Was the fact that her eyes were of bright, vibrant red color.  
  
Just like the blood on the floor.  
  
Humans were not supposed to have vividly red eyes, but no one seemed to notice or pay it any attention.  
  
By then, the orderlies finally managed to push the woman to the ground and were in the process of tying the sleeves of her straitjacket back up. She had been resisting them, still… until her gaze fell on Sunny.  
  
He froze.  
  
'Why… why does she look so familiar?'  
  
The woman's eerie red eyes widened a little when she saw him.  
  
And then, she suddenly laughed.  
  
Her laughter resounded across the corridor, growing louder and louder until it drowned out the pitiful whimpers of the injured nurse.  
  
The insane woman seemed to be incredibly amused all of a sudden. She seemed to be having thе time of her life.  
  
Taking a step back, Sunny pursed his lips and turned around.  
  
'Just another psycho.'  
  
There were too many of those around, these days.  
  
As he was walking back to the door, however, her laughing voice washed over him:  
  
"Kill him! You can actually kill him here! Find… Athena!"  
  
Shaking his head, Sunny shut the door behind him and tried to calm his wildly beating heart.  
  
The stench of blood was still stuck in his nose, making his hands tremble.  
  
The sight of it…  
  
'Damn it.'  
  
Although Sunny knew that mixing sleeping pills with alcohol was a terrible idea, he suddenly really craved a drink.