

INERTiA

Memories

## Part 1

# A guess

*BEEP-BEEP-BEEP, BEEP-BEEP-BEEP.*

Purely based on instincts, Jason‘s hand moved right on top of the alarm clock and slammed the button on top of it. He proceeded to pull the sheet off his face, and strangely enough, his usual glass of water wasn’t on the night table next to him. A throbbing headache came right at him immediately. The clock read 15:20, a pair of numbers he recognized and saw fairly often these days.

*Not again.*

He jumped out of his bed, and observed his own bedroom. His bed was large for a single person, but not quite fit for two. The lamp that hung above his room was a bit old, and would flicker once or twice throughout the day. In front of his unremarkable crescent desk, his window was usually covered by black curtains along with another set of blinds that he had left to cover them. The computer screen and the holosphere were dimmed. The floor was covered with a somewhat intricate carpet with no pattern worth noting– it was mostly just decoration – although he usually walked around with slippers.

No one had meddled with his bedroom at least, except for the glass.

Suddenly he heard the sound of water coming out of the spring. He went directly to the open kitchen connected to his bedroom – there were several windows covered by white curtains, the walls were a matte hue of grey, and the kitchen wasn’t anything complicated. The only thing that really stood out was the cutting board of his that could be elevated and cleaned right next to kitchen sink, and a bundle of chopsticks. A few meters away, he had two black couches and a sofa chair, a table, and a 60 inches screen connected to an all-in-one computer setup which he had used only once or twice during his four month stay for anything besides connecting to his boss. The terrace window covered half of the wall towards the beach – it was admittedly quite the sight, with palm trees growing unnaturally not too far away, like many other plants across the island.

It was a comfortable living here in New Atlantis, but he was not happy to have returned here after escaping 7 years ago. Even though Diana had come again, she did it in her usual manner – uninvited, and somehow making it right through the locked door. Not that he made any efforts to close off his residence, but regardless of that, he found it somewhat… what was the right word? It was a habit of hers that he found difficult to appreciate, in spite of her intentions. Regrettably appreciative might have been the right description.

In spite of everything he found annoying about Diana – most of them being habits of hers, sadly – he fully appreciated the fact that she was no eyesore. Brown hair reaching her shoulders and brown eyes was quite the boring combination, but her facial features made up for that by a good amount. She had a very straight nose, curved at the end, finely placed eyes and eyebrows that didn’t take one’s attention. One couldn’t complain about her cheekbones and chin, and her forehead was just the right size. Her mouth was modest, and she usually didn’t wear any makeup besides some mascara. Her slender body was covered altogether by a black suit which he would assume she had at least ten exact copies of, with varying shirt colors to go along with it. Today she had decided upon a moderately dark red shit, and unlike her usual footwear, sandals.

‘I cannot figure out why you keep doing this,’ Jason said, leaning on the door. The headache wouldn’t go away.

‘It’s simple – you would be a mess otherwise. Actually, more of a mess,’ she added, as she put another cleaned glass bottle in the plastic bag she was holding. ‘How many times have I told you to stop drinking like this?’

‘Around seventeen times, this would be your tenth visiting uninvited I suppose,’ he replied, raising his hand towards the sofa. Three bottles of varying sizes rose up in the air and hovered slowly towards the kitchen sink, descending upon arrival.

‘Thank you.’

‘I would hardly thank someone for handing me more work,’ he replied, sitting down on the couch directly opposite to the screen.

‘Did you ever learn manners and politeness, Jason?’ Diana asked, turning around with a glare. When she saw his face, her own turned to a regretful expression.

‘*Sigh.* And this is why I drink.’ He extended his hand towards fridge. It opened, and a can of beer flew out from it – until Diana stopped it with her hand. Was he already that predictable? He forced it out of her hand and caught it, at which point he noticed how it had bent when she stopped it with her fingers. ‘Sorry if that hurt.’ Just as he was about to open the can, she covered it with her hand, which was red on the back, surprisingly enough.

‘Jason, please. For me, at least. You know I didn’t mean it that way.’

He sighed again, and looked up at her. She had that apologetic face of hers again. He wondered how many times he had made her apologize like this in the recent months. Probably more than in the past, after his return to New Atlantis – even though she had helped keep his presence a secret, and done nothing against him, in a way, the opposite *was* actually the case. After a few drinks it had leaked out of her, and as an understatement, he was not pleased.

‘The sole reason he disapproves of you is the fact that you drink.’

‘It’s *not* the sole reason, I know that the Blackhearts have contacts within Old Atlantis – or rather, it’s obvious – and we both know that I was essentially blackmailed into this.’

Diana groaned, sitting down on the couch next to his, and picked up the remote. The screen flickered once, and settled down on the image of a male news reporter in his 30s standing in front of the Old Atlantis government building.

*‘… and in addition to severing their ties to yet another of their so-called benefactors, Old Atlantis’ foreign ministry has announced that it has decided to restrict manatech even further, by requesting many different countries’ assistance in manatech control, and using their own if deemed necessary. The Floating Isles and…*’

Jason got up from the couch and went towards the terrace window.

‘What does boss want this time then?’

‘He’s coming tomorrow, and wants us to go with him. He wouldn’t specify where.’

‘So he has the honesty to at least let me guess we’re going to the Blackhearts. Can’t figure out why though.’

‘Jason…’

‘I know, I know. No matter where I try to go, I will eventually be found because of those bloody telepaths back in Old Atlantis. So what are we doing then?’ The beer she had denied him was terribly tempting right now. He could feel his mouth anticipate the alcohol.

‘As you know, they are one of the few families that have ever adopted magicians… and Atlantis is considering severing them.’

If he had been drinking right now, he would have spit out everything, and perhaps some more, due to yesterday’s drinking session, as he called them. Instead he only turned around, facing her with a skeptical expression. ‘Why would they do that? The Blackhearts are one of the three *sworn* families.’

‘And that is precisely why. Have you ever thought about the spying and surveillance capabilities we magicians have?’

*‘… and here is the minister’s announcement.* “Following investigation done by us and various third parties that will go unnamed, as well as rigorous discussions, we have arrived to the conclusion that our technology cannot remain safe in the hands of those with the ability to distribute them, any longer. “ *In the following questioning, the minister declined answering the majority of questions, explaining that…*’

Jason looked at the remote’s power button for one second, and saw the screen turn black in an instant after.

‘Not really, I don’t know if manatech can do much for you telepaths, even though you can contact people across the globe, but you don’t need magic for that.’

‘Well, our reach does expand, but how deep some can delve into the minds of others varies.’

‘And what exactly made the Blackhearts suspicious?’

‘William worries about you, you know. While we all possess magic, we’re still human beings. I would guess he decided to find out why you drown yourself in alcohol.’

‘I was quite vague back then, you know.’

‘And no one has found a way to pierce your mind, if that’s of any interest to you, nor would anyone want to with the way you’re drinking. But William wants to help you, Jason. He applied specifically for the Foreign Ministry, having studied the history of mana. The government employs him but he works for himself.’

‘Whatever that means. When does he arrive?’

A few hours later, after dining in the city, they found themselves back at the residence. He had nearly expected Diana to be driving a limo, as she often came along with an assistant, but she was driving by herself for once. She was a surprisingly sharp driver, but he couldn’t understand why she didn’t just use the automobile the way it was supposed to. For whatever reason, she neglected the *auto* part and always demanded someone drive it manually. They waited as they rested on the couches.

‘He will be online soon and we are going to meet him tomorrow in front of the Blackthorn,’ Diana said. She picked up her phone while they waited. Jason glanced at the screen, showing the Blackthorn.

‘The uncanny architectural construction of the decade. I knew they were lunatics but this is beyond me.’

‘What do you think it is then?’

‘A display of their insanity for all I care.’

‘It is a display of power, Jason,’ a deep voice answered. The man’s voice reverberated slightly throughout the room and its source appeared on the screen a second after. A black man with millimeters of hair across his scalp, but a firm expression on his face, and he had a quite masculine set of facial features to complement that, his eyebrows being remarkably thick. He was the director of Foreign Ministry – the actual minister acted more or less as the director of trivial affairs such as relations with the *benefactors* of Old Atlantis, and the one whom all the embassies reported to, and also the public face of the ministry. This black man however, he was the one behind the scenes, directing the less public doings of the Atlantean government. There was only one other person above him, and that was the PM.

The first time they had met, Jason had been drinking just an hour before. His breath apparently gave away a considerable consumption of cognac, which he had asked about. Jason had answered with the name of it, to which the black man answered “Never have I seen a more… refined young man,” which was a poor attempt at starting a relationship even though he *had* spent a good amount, seeing as Diana had at that time just snitched on him. After a few minutes, the director and his guards had been forced to use manatech weaponry to suppress Jason, which proved to be a futile and somewhat painful effort.

The screen showed him nodding, keeping eye contact, as they usually did nowadays. It had not been this… diplomatic, in the beginning, but Jason had grown up a bit. He nodded as well. ‘Boss.’ They stared at each other for a bit. The camera on top of the screen kept looking at Jason, until it turned to Diana.

‘Before you say anything, he kept himself clean this week.’ Jason couldn’t help looking at her lie just like that to the director, but she did a good job of not paying any attention to him and playing it well. The camera turned back to Jason.

‘Good. Before we begin, I would just like to inform you that we will meet in the afternoon at thirteen, in front of the Blackthorn. As per usual, you may ask questions first, Jason.’

‘Why the fuck have I been placed here and why is it *them*?’ he asked quietly. He made sure to make his anger a bit subtle outside of his wording. He stared intently at the image of the director’s eyes, which closed in forethought until he was done formulating an answer in his head. As per Jason’s demands, he was to give a thorough explanation to try and quell any further questions that Jason might come to ask later. In addition to that, there would be no secrets between the three of them, should anyone be looking for them – the exception being their private lives, and how Jason grew up, which he had no interest in discussion with anyone anymore, ever since Diana decided to *inform* the director.

‘A month ago, Atlantis’ 125th anniversary was celebrated across the New World, including New Atlantis, on the twenty-third of April in 2095. This was around the time you were stationed here, and we found that to be a suitable time to sneak you in when most people are not working here, without getting anyone from New Atlantis involved. After that, I asked that Diana watch over you, and I’m sorry but that lie was obvious. I *can* tell however, that you didn’t drink today, seeing as your leg is quivering again,’ he pointed out. Jason hadn’t realized it, but that kind of detail didn’t really capture his attention.

‘During the last three months, I gave you and Diana few orders because I wanted you to become more familiar with this place as it has developed, plus there were some things I wanted you to confirm for me, such as the Blackhearts’ projects here, the most prominent being the Blackthorn, their newest home and business center. I don’t remember how many you had decided to fight during your time here after drinking,’

‘Four shitheads and one whore, to be exact.’

‘Yes, four men and one woman. Now, these individuals sustained terrible injuries, one of them now being a cyborg more or less, another a less intelligent man, but for my part, Jason, it was more about seeing you in a less… controlled, area. You’ve made significant progress, and for that, I congratulate you.’ He raised a glass of what looked to be a glass of cognac, his usual signal for them sharing a drink one way or another. Jason opened up his can of beer, and they sipped from their drinks in unison. William inhaled the air from the cognac glass before opening his eyes again. The director firmly believed that closing off the senses empowered the remaining ones.

‘At the same time, I decided to find out why you drink.’ Jason turned his head towards the beach through the windows. The palm trees over there surely had coconuts killing people once or twice a year. He wondered if William ever took a day off. ‘Some problems can be found to have old roots, and I have compelling indications which seem to suggest just that. Do note, however, that I have only reached out to the Blackhearts through third parties with no connections to us. Some accounts are frankly disturbing, and regrettably, it now comes off as no surprise to me that you drink so much. I do not want you drinking when you have work to do, but when you’re on leave, you may do as you deem fit.’

‘Hardly expected that one,’ Jason replied with a dull voice. He drank about half the can before he put it down, greeted by a slightly regretful expression from the director when he turned his attention back to him.

‘I haven’t seen you smile, Jason. In all my years, you are the one person I have never seen smiling.’ He didn’t answer. There was a long minute of silence until Diana changed her position and sat down next to Jason. William sighed, a rare composition of movements and sounds coming from that man.

‘I am starting to worry about you, Jason.’

‘You blackmailed me and expect no paybacks?’

‘Jason, now is not the time, we-’

‘Fuck off you piece of shit.’ He felt his ears prepare for more audible sounds as he spoke.

‘Jason Blackheart Viole! This…’ the screen went black in an instant. Jason was surprised to see Diana had picked up the remote and pressed the power button. She tried to look away from him, until she looked like something had forced her to face him.

‘How long have you known it was he who wanted you?’

‘Oh I talked to the PM once, two weeks after my first assignment. He told me that the Foreign Ministry serves to request and fulfill favors, not return any, unlike what the rest of the world thinks, even though that wasn’t the answer I was looking for. For whatever reason they were expecting me to come back the way I did, but I guess they were right to, using me as a tool. At least I didn’t break anything but a couple of doors.’

‘Jason…’

‘I killed someone. I don’t care what that person did but once I stopped the electricity he was dead. I pulled a plug I didn’t even know anything about, and what do I get? Front-pages across the fucking world about this person who died in the hospital because the electricity went out, when it is literally impossible for that to happen. That machine had its own battery. Surveillance at an unparalleled level. And it stays on the news for fucking three months before it starts dying down, because of the amount of investigation they put into it. An innocent man was executed only for the purpose of ending the whole case. I’m surprised I didn’t die from drinking during that time, but I suppose it was a good introduction to my job and preparation for my routine.’

She hugged him, and put her hand on the back of his head, pushing him onto her shoulder, while putting her own head on his.

‘I’m sorry,’ she squeaked. She was sobbing again. This was likely seventh time. He could not bear to look at her, nor could she look at him without guilt crippling her even further. She had asked him once, if he could forgive her. His only reply was “I killed someone, Diana”. He had also disposed of any high regards of her.

He wondered if his next assignment would be another assassination. Jason felt dangerously close to getting used to it.

‘Go home, Diana, I only have one bed and I can’t drive.’

‘I’ll sleep on the couch,’ she replied, having now calmed down – correction, she was sleepy – after he gave her a glass of something with a label he hadn’t bothered reading. At a glance, he had managed to make out *non* in the text, and assumed it wasn’t alcoholic.

*Way to go… a medium-sized mess… for once.*

The last part came as an afterthought to him. Jason briefly considered giving her the bed instead. He walked over to the kitchen, found the cupboard he usually kept closed, grabbed the sleeping pills, and put three of them in a glass of water. He stared at the pills until they dissolved into nothingness, within three seconds, until he sent them hovering in front of Diana’s head. As he had guessed, she drank only a mouthful, but it was enough to put her to sleep.

The sun was still lighting up the evening. He decided to lie down on the beach chair outside, after putting Diana on his bed. She didn’t notice anything while she slowly floated up in the air, and landed in his bedroom.

Jason went back to the kitchen and made himself a cocktail – a mojito, although he couldn’t find any rum he actually liked – on the fly, and just before he stepped out onto the terrace, he decided to bring the bottle of rum with him anyway. He might as well make sure that he would actually fall asleep.

Just as he was about to lie down on the chair, he stopped for a second. Something was not quite right. He looked around himself – there was nothing suspicious to be seen. No footsteps on the nearby sand that he could see. He hadn’t heard anything since they came back. Aside from the fact that there were now 2 people in this residence, nothing had changed, and then it occurred to him. It was precisely that they were 2 people.

The look on her face when she was sleeping was… reminiscent, particularly that her mouth was slightly open. There was no way to tell if she was having a dream or not, as the only movement came from her breathing. He decided to cover her with the bed sheet before his thoughts drifted to memories he would rather keep sealed. He went immediately back to the terrace, and took a sip of his cocktail. It tasted a bit bland.

His inability to appreciate the sunset was somewhat disturbing to him, as most people found it a beautiful thing to watch, apparently. Was it the beauty of it? He had seen many, and better iterations of the sunset. Was it the atmosphere? He didn’t feel any such thing most of the time, at least nothing he was conscious of. Perhaps it was the setting, that it signified the end of the day?

‘Sigh.’ He figured it was useless to ponder. A lot of the time, all Jason wanted was to sleep away his time in New Atlantis, the place where he had been raised. He picked up the glass of water with the sleeping drugs, and emptied the glass in one go. He could have taken more but the headaches had been bad enough recently. And just as he had figured, three sleeping pills had been just enough for him to fall asleep, as he felt a familiar loss of control in his limbs.

Despite the eyelids covering his eyes, sunlight reached them nonetheless, although weakened and giving his receptors an impression of red. Dawn was upon him, and he sneezed instantly when he opened his eyes. Jason decided to pick up the hat he usually used to block out the sunlight from his face while he slept on the terrace, and put it on his face. The warmth combined with the feeling of restfulness on top of a comfy chair, was perhaps the one good thing in the morning, until his stomach craved his attention. At the same time, it looked like clouds were coming.

To his surprise, Diana was already cooking up something in the kitchen when he came in.

‘Thank you.’ Jason didn’t respond, and sat down on couch, pressing on the remote. It was a quarter to ten. In three hours, roughly, until he would find himself at doorsteps he would likely recognize stylistically. If not the outside entrance, then the entry hall. The weather today was going to be white clouds turning grey, followed by heavy downpour, and finishing off with a clear sky for the remainder of the day. The only thing he minded was that the forecast concerned Old Atlantis and not New Atlantis, which was apparently going to be showered throughout the entire day.

‘Did you watch the news?’ Jason asked. Diana made no sounds for a couple of seconds until she replied.

‘He didn’t tell you, but this visit is official.’

‘Bloody nigger.’

‘People would think you’re a racist if you behaved like that in public.’

‘Good thing I don’t.’

‘Speaking of which, when did you start using slurs?’

‘From the first day I learned them, I suppose.’

‘Did you have a knack for badmouthing people even back then?’

‘Consider it a culmination of events. I was definitely different back when I used to live here.’