Chapter I

June 13th,2023

"Mom! Look at this one! It says it is from the 12th century!" - the eleven year old girl said to her mother as her eyes caught the old and beautiful painting in the Museum.
"You're right honey! This place does have a lot of older arts." - said her Mother.
It was around 5pm in the evening, when a lot of people were leaving the Vespera Art Museum as it was the last session.

"Hey Victor! Quickly transfer the 14th Old Piece to the Car waiting outside! It's an order from Mr. Blackwood." - A voice came from the phone of the manager sitting around the corner table of the museum.

"I'm sorry, but who are you?" - The manager said.
"Who am I? Oh,I forgot to mention this is my second number, I'm Mr. Vanholt!" - he said.
"Oh I understand sir! I'm quickly arranging the workers to do it as quickly as possible!"

"I know that's why I told you instead of the other manager. It has been around 6 years since you joined this museum, and you always do your duties on time!!" - he said with excitement.
"Haha thank you sir! I'm glad!" - Victor Everhart said.

"Hey, take the 14th old piece and transfer it to the car waiting outside, its an order from Mr.Blackwood!" - Victor said to one of the workers on his phone.
"I just went with the flow, as he said. Let's see what happens now", Victor said to himself and sighed.

This museum was home to one of the greatest pieces of humankind. The older art pieces were one of the most valuable ones to be certain. Mr. Blackwood was a millionaire who made most of his fortune through this museum. It was around 5:20 pm when the last session ended and the museum had no people except the employees and guests in the offices.

"Oh man, this one is heavy! Do you know why this is getting transferred anyways?", one of the workers asked the other.
"No idea at all. Maybe some kind of business plan. I mean who cares anyway.", the worker said as he successfully put the art in the car.

"Here, it's done!", he said to the driver.

A voice came from the car pilot. "Good Job and thank you! By the way, do you know any restaurants nearby? I'm hungry you know" - said the driver.
"I'm actually hungry too, well the working time is ending soon. And yes, there is a restaurant nearby, just go straight and then left." - one of the workers said.
"Oh yeah I remember now, thanks pal, Mr. Blackwood is waiting, I'll have to go faster!" - he started the car and went away.
"Is this a new driver? I couldn't recognize his voice at all!" - one of the workers asked.
"Maybe. I mean who cares. Let's go for lunch."

"Have you heard about 'The Ghost' ?" - Magnus, one of the workers, asked his friend Arthur, another worker in the Vespera Museum, on their way home after their working hour ended.

"Dude ofcourse, what kind of museum employee would I be if I didn't know about that" - Arthur said laughingly.

"I wonder if he has any plans to steal from Vespera" - Magnus.

"After stealing that 100 million dollar art, his standards must be high, you know. Would he come after this one?" - Arthur.
"I mean he can, right? Who knows. And he might stop doing big thefts to avoid getting caught now!" - Magnus.
"You care way too much about this stuff, Magnus. I mean who car-", Magnus stopped Arthur there, saying "Ofcourse Arthur we have to care! It's not only about Vespera, It's also about our jobs!"
Arthur giggles.

That was too easy. Too easy to be exact. I wonder if Aria is done now. I told her to come here at exactly 5:45 pm. She is late as always.

A man was standing in front of a house at the Barlow Street, which was around 6kms from Vespera. He had a weird but charming appearance. He had a black hat on his head, a sunglass on his eyes even though its night. He had informal clothing on his body, but everything he wore was black. Seemed like he was waiting for someone, while having his car by his side.

"Oh, there she is! Finally, Without her, I can't even proceed." - he whispered to himself.

"Hi! My first work is done, now what is the next thing I'll have to do?" - she asked.
"Nice job! So...", Aria cuts his line.
"You didn't tell me much about the project this time, what is it?" - Aria asks.
"Nothing much. That's why I didn't tell you. I just had to steal one from Vespera." - he said.
"From Vespera? I heard that it has a good amount of security systems. How did it go?" - she became curious.
"Hmm nothing much. Who cares about the security when you don't even have to go through it." - he said, with a neutral expression on his face.
"I won't even question how you did it, I mean you did something impossible some weeks ago, so this shouldn't be that much. Well, obviously with my help!" - Aria said.
"Yes, thank you. That's why I asked you to come here at 5:10 instead of even earlier." - he said, "Now listen to what you'll have to do...."

I don't know if what I anticipated is correct or not. But I can see two paths infront of me, and in both of those paths, I am seeing my absolute victory!

The house infront of them had a very silent aura around it. It seemed like only a few people lived in it. Maybe even just one person.

The Vespera Art Museum closed, and Mr.Everhart was preparing to go home. He was checking some news on his phone. He suddenly saw some news on some old events reminding him of a very important theft case.

"I wonder where this 'Ghost' is now. Is our museum safe from him? A lot of security was installed so I doubt that it isn't. But it is insanely impressive to actually steal something that valuable!"
He was thinking all of this standing in the bus stop. That's how popular and impactful this theft was. This news spread in the whole country, everyone, especially the one's handling museums and artworks became super careful of this 'Ghost'.

People did name him 'The Ghost', but for many reasons. He was actually seen in many cameras, but every time he was seen in different clothes. Sometimes fully white, sometimes fully black. Even though it has been around 5-6 weeks since this happened, no one has been able to catch this 'Ghost', nor the artwork he stole.

I don't know why, but I feel some kind of omen is there. But why do I feel it?

He suddenly heard a voice, "Lucian?".

Chapter II

June 12th,2023
Morning,

Today I received a request. A person named Luther Kane has sent me an email requesting me to perform a theft in the Vespera Art Museum,well that's what he wrote in the email. Professionalism is there, I would have just said "steal it".
I was in my living room, with my laptop on my lap. I was feeling lazy enough to not answer the mail right away, so I just started looking for Luther Kane on the internet, to look for surface information. I also thought of another person who might be a help in this project....

When I was searching about it, I received two sounds at the same time. One was from my phone, Aria was calling me. And the other one was from my doorbell. With no second thoughts, I went for the door.

Lucian closed the windows in his laptop, and opened the door. It was his older brother, Magnus Cole. He was his only sibling who is now married and lives in another apartment.

"Oh it's you!", Lucian expressed, greeting Magnus.

"How's your art business going?", Magnus asked after sitting on the sofa.

Lucian's home was astonishing. He is a wealthy artist, well, that's what everyone knows him as. His secret of being a millionaire just by selling arts is still a secret to everyone.

"So why did you call me?", Magnus asked, smiling.
"Do I need a reason bro?", Lucian said while brewing a coffee from the coffee machine.
"Ofcourse not!", Magnus said.
"So is everything alright? Like how is your family?", Lucian asked.
"My family is all good! I'm too! But I would say that the job I have is a little tiring, you know, being in the museum for 12 hours!", Magnus expressed.
"I understand! Sometimes some of my clients give me deadlines for arts, so I just sit at my table all day and complete it. It surely is tiring.", Lucian said.
"By the way, is Vespera doing well? I mean has the "Ghost" laid his hands on it?", Lucian asked curiously.
"Yeah it's alright. But I don't think it is gonna stay safe for long. I shouldn't have applied for this job, it's just never secured. Who knows

when the museum's economy is gonna collapse and we are gonna lose our jobs.", Magnus explained with a little bit of worry.
"Don't worry too much bro, even if you lose your job, you can join my business. I'm always here for you!", Lucian said.
"That's really sweet of you. I just wish this "Ghost" wouldn't come after us.". Magnus said.

Lucian started looking at his laptop again. Magnus took a sip from the coffee, Lucian too. Suddenly he turned to Magnus, and asked, "Is this the manager of Vespera?". Lucian showed a picture of Victor Everhart on his laptop.

"Oh yeah! This is Mr.Everhart, one of the managers of Vespera.", Magnus said.
"I never knew that. I know him, and he is an old high school senior of mine. We used to be friends! It has been a long time since we talked.", Lucian said with mixed emotions.

"Yeah he joined this position around 6 years ago, he is a very hard working and passionate manager as well. I can give you his number if you want!" - Magnus said.
"Oh that would be good! Tell me then.", Lucian said with joy.

While Magnus was going through his contacts, Lucian noticed that there are two numbers saved with the name Mr.Everhart.

"7304928390 - that is the number!", Magnus said slowly and Lucian noted it down.

Lucian immediately called that number and after just 2 seconds he said, "Man, this number is switched off. Is there any other number, brother?", Lucian asked.

"Yes there is! But this one is for professional use as it is his phone number which is in the managing room.", Magnus said.

"Oh, then you can't give it to me. It's ok I'll try later then.", Lucian said with a little disappointment.
"There is no problem giving it to you though, you're my brother after all. And you are his old friend, he won't be disturbed to talk to you while on work. I mean I have seen him talk with his family members while on work.", Magnus said.

"Ok I got it. Today's your leave, and he is in the Museum right now. Yeah it's better if I have both numbers. I can call him if his personal phone is off.", Lucian smiles.

Magnus gives Victor's management number to Lucian. Just then Lucian remembered something. "Oh yeah, this is your pen you left in here previously.", Lucian said while handing Magnus a fancy looking pen from his pocket.

"Oh this was in here? Rebecca gifted me this one, she was sad when I lost it!", Magnus said with excitement. "She would be happy if I told her I found this!".

Magnus took the pen from Lucian's hand. "I'll go now bro! I have some work at home actually."
"Bye brother! Come again next week! You didn't leave something here this time, right?", Lucian asked, smiling.
"No, my phone is with me!", Magnus said laughingly while leaving.

Lucian sat on his sofa with his laptop on his lap, again.

Yeah, I didn't know who Victor Everhart was. Him being a friend was just a lie to make my brother give me his number. But now I can at least execute my plan which I made just after looking at the mail. A lot of information about the Vespera Museum is available online. The owner of it is Elias Blackwood, and Dorian Vanholt is the assistant of Blackwood.

I searched for videos of Blackwood and Vanholt to see who's voice I can replicate better, who's voice is more similar to mine. I'm having good luck because Vanholt's voice is really similar to mine. Guess what, it just got easier.

Being diverse with my project is an important thing. Otherwise these smart-ass people would find a pattern in everything and get closer to me. That is also why i wear different clothes everywhere, use different tactics every time i perform a theft, oh sorry, every time I steal.

For the Everhart part, I'll just tell him something that the museum members know very well. Such as that he is working there for around 6 years or something like he has been doing a very good job. That should make him gain trust.....

Well, no! I'll obviously need a secondary plan. I'll just tell Aria to somehow remove Mr.Vanholt's mobile sim. So if Victor suspects me and calls Dorian with his actual number, he will find it switched off. Which should convince him and will have a good reason why Mr.Vanholt would use a second number.

Just then Lucian's phone rang, again. It was Aria.

Oh shit, I forgot about her call.

"Hello?", Lucian said.
"You are way too busy. Is it another theft project? Like, you could have told me about it.", Aria said with a bored voice.
"Yeah it was another one, I'll tell you about it later. By the way, I'm going to an art festival this evening, wanna go out with me? Bring your friend with us too maybe?", Lucian said.
Aria went from bored to excited in a second.
"Ofcourse I'd love it! Will it be a problem if it's just you and me?", Aria asked.
"No, no problem at all!", Lucian said while having a smile on his face.

Chapter III

June 12th,2023
Night,

Lucian entered his home. After experiencing the art festival with Aria, he dropped her at her home and then returned.
He turned on the lights, took a shower, then a 45 minute nap and woke up.

He yawns and mumbles to himself.
Should I respond to the email now? Yeah, I should actually.
The thing is, Luther Kane has given me his number and wants a response via call. This is obviously not something new so I'll just do it after 5 minutes. He would not like my sleepy voice, not like I care but reputation is a thing.

Lucian picks a sim from a box of sims and inserts it into his secondary phone.

"Hello? Is this Luther Kane?", Lucian said, changing his voice a little bit.
"Yes, it is me. Who are you?", Luther's voice was deep.
"Me? I'm the Ghost. You mailed me, remember?", Lucian expressed in a calm manner.

"And how can I trust you? How can I know if you are the ghost and not someone else trying to scam me?", Luther said curiously, trying to evoke something.
"Oh come on now. You paid 100k to mail me, obviously you would be careful. You probably have given me a very new number that you have never shared before.", Lucian said with a bored voice.
"You are just as experienced as I thought!", Luther giggled, "Sorry for that, I was just testing you."
"Yeah no problem. So tell me more about the theft I guess?", Lucian expressed.
"Yeah ofcourse! So you read my mail right? You'll just have to do the job by tomorrow! Do it however you want, just make sure I'm not exposed by any chance.", Luther informed.
"Don't worry about that. Consider the work done. Anything else you have to say?", Lucian asked.
"Oh yeah. I want you to come to my house and give me the art by your hand!", Luther expressed.
"I usually do it by sending it through a private paid service, but if you want me to come by myself, you'll have to pay extra.", Lucian said.
"Pay extra? I guess that's understandable. I actually had more projects like these for you, and I can only explain those to you in person, so that's why I thought...", Luther said, offering potential projects.
"I guess that'll benefit me, but rule is rule. I'm a very disciplined person, you know. You'll have to pay an extra 100k for that.", Lucian informed.

"100k huh? So including the 100k I already paid. I'll give you a total of 1.4 million. Right?",
"You are absolutely right. By the way, is there a time-frame?", Lucian asked curiously.
"Um..Yes there is. Didn't I mention it earlier in the email? I think I did...", Luther said.
"Oh yes I think you did. Is the time really important Mr.Kane?", Lucian said.
"It's not that important but I'll expect you to do it in time!", Luther expressed.
"Yeah don't worry, I'll most probably do it before that time. I'll do my best to make sure you get your piece quickly!", Lucian giggles.
"No no. You don't have to! Just do it in the time frame I mentioned and it'll be okay!", Luther's voice got higher in pitch.
"Ahh sure. I've made a plan already. See you tomorrow then!", Lucian prepared to cut the call.
"Nice to work with you. I am looking forward to it then!", Luther cuts the call.

Lucian removes the sim from the phone and switches it off just as usual. He then threw the phone on his bed and stretched himself and yawned.
He then stares at the huge painting hanging on the wall behind his bed. Minutes passed, he still didn't stop staring. Some memories don't fade, they just return when life gives you a chance to remember.

June 13th,2023

Morning,

"Aria! Are you there yet?", Lucian asked Aria via phone.
"I'm right in here! I said that I'm here for a business deal proposal, right now Mr.Vanholt is outside for some reason, but the staff said he is coming.", Aria whispered through her phone.
"Perfect! Now do as I said. Remove the sim from the phone quickly and then when Mr.Vanholt is coming pretend that you just came inside. Is that alright?", Lucian said.
"I'll try! Pray for me though, I don't want to get caught!", Aria giggles.
"Yeah yeah you'll not, you're an expert in this so don't waste time!", Lucian cuts the call.

Aria quickly takes the phone of Mr.Vanholt and starts the removing process. She removes it and hides the sim inside the clock sitting on the table of the office, making it really hard to find.
Then she positioned herself outside the door and called Lucian.

"Impressive Aria! It has been only 1 minute since you called me previously and you are done!", Lucian said with a smile.
"I know I'm really good. This is just the minimum I have to be in order to be The Ghost's theft partner you know. ", Aria smirks.
"By the way, I saw something in Vanholt's phone that might be useful to you!", Aria whispered.

"Yes, tell me please! Any detail might be useful.", Lucian said curiously.
"Mr.Blackwood messaged Dorian saying that he is going for the break right now, it was around 5:10!", Aria informed.
"That..That is something of...a very good observation! I'll see how I can use that. Now talk with Dorian for some time and then come out and meet me at the Barlow Street at around 5:45, is that ok?", Lucian informs.
"That means I'll have to rush a little, well, I'll try to make it in time. Please wait if I go late.", Aria said.
"Well ofcourse, I'm the one who needs you. Just try your best to come in time. I'm going for my plan now, bye!", Lucian cuts the call.

June 13th,2023
Evening,

And that is how I planned everything.", Lucian summarized to Aria.
"Nice plan! So now you're gonna enter Luther's house and give the painting to him.", Aria asked, expecting agreement.
"You're right.", Lucian said.
"And you want me to come inside when you message me and use the strategy you told me?", Aria asks again.
"Right! Now stand here and I'm going inside!", Lucian expresses.

Lucian tapped the doorbell and instantly a security guard came from the inner door. As Lucian was wearing a mask, the security guard instantly realizes he is the person Luther was talking about as he has already told him to let anyone enter who has a mask on, the rest is on Luther himself.

"Come inside Sir! Mr.Kane is waiting for you inside!", The guard invites Lucian.

Lucian had a black mask with white marks on it. He also had a white cap on. He had a bag on his back which had two paintings. The one behind the top one was the actual painting he had to deliver.

The guard leaves Lucian at the door of Luther's living room. Lucian opened the door and saw two men sitting on the sofas...

Chapter IV

As Lucian entered the room he felt a strong aura of danger. The darker visual atmosphere of the room made it more intense.
There were two men sitting on the sofas, one of them was a known person to Lucian, but unexpected. While the other one was an unknown person, but quite expected.

"Welcome, Mr.Ghost! It's fascinating to see you in person! Meet my partner, Mr.Blackwood. Elias, introduce yourself to him, wouldn't you?", Luther said to Mr.Blackwood, who was sitting beside him.

"There is no time for all this, Mr.Kane. Quickly capture him and tell him the stuff.", Elias Blackwood, said in a mid-toned voice.
"You're right!", Luther said, clicking a button on his table.

Amidst this, Lucian observed a lot of things. He noticed that there were cameras installed on the walls in the room. He also noticed that there were footprint sensors on the floor, which didn't affect Lucian because he wore socks beforehand. At the end, he observed sounds coming from all around the room, from the door he entered, from the other doors in the room, everywhere.

"Capture him! And unmask him quickly!", Luther shouted, ordering the people that came from the doors. They were assassins hired by Luther and Blackwood to corner Lucian.

There were around 12 assassins around Lucian, 4 of them held Lucian tightly with no way to escape.

Lucian suddenly shouted, "Elias! Unmask me and your dear brother Dorian is gonna die!"

As soon as those words reached Elias's ears, a word came out of his mouth instantly, "Stop!". The word was so loud, it echoed through the room for 10 seconds. All the assassins became statues. The fear and anger in his voice was prominent, scaring even Luther Kane.

Lucian then continues, "I have fit a bomb in Mr.Vanholt's office and have tied him completely. I also deactivated his phone. Don't believe me? Just try calling him.", Lucian said in a calm voice.

Luther said, "Blackwood! Don't listen to him! He is trying to distract you! Unmask him quickly!"
Blackwood became extremely angry and held Luther by his collar, "Shut up you idiot! I don't want to get another of my family member get killed!"
Elias quickly took out his phone and called Dorian. His number was actually not reachable. Elias's face was conquered by fear as he realized that everything Lucian said was true.

Lucian again continued with a smile that was visible through his mask, "Touch me and I will say a code word that will instantly activate the bomb through the device I have hidden in somewhere."Lucian said, "So don't you dare touch me or even move from here, all of you! Put your guns down!"

Elias became completely static, along with everyone in the room. Lucian brought out his mobile and said, "I now have texted my partner to come here and rescue me. And that person is already in here, so don't try to make any sudden move, because I too know how to do it!", Lucian warned.

Luther suddenly asked, "B-B-But how did you know about our plan? How did you know that this was a setup?"
Lucian laughs a little, "The small suspicions that I had was enough to make me take advanced steps. But what happened this evening cleared everything for me. When Luther first mentioned the time 5:10 pm in his email, I didn't suspect much except for the fact that why would someone give such a specific time. While talking with Luther on the phone, I got to know that it is very important for Luther to make sure I go to the museum at that exact time. Even though Luther did a very good job at hiding it through his great acting skills.
And when I was executing my plan, I realized everything went too smoothly to believe. I suspected that the people I'm lying to actually know everything. After that, when I sent my partner to Vanholt's office, my partner informed me that Elias goes on a break everyday at

around 5:10 pm. That confirmed my theory that you two are working together to catch me. So I told my partner to fit a bomb there. The proposal given to me to come here in person wasn't a very good plan either."

"H-How can you plan this much and this quickly? You were ahead of us all the time?", Luther asked in shock. While Elias was still static with a facial expression mix of sadness and anger.

"By the way, Elias? Your wife was killed, wasn't she?, Lucian's voice became calmer and smile became a neutral expression.
Elias's mind got filled with grief and regret, visible through his face. He murmured some words, "Please, Let go of my brother, I'll let you go, please.", even if he was saying please, he was saying it as an order rather than a request.

"I'll let your brother go if you let me escape this house with no problems.", Lucian said.
Luther looked towards Elias and gave him an expression that was suggesting Elias to not take steps based on emotions.

"But don't worry. I don't want to kill any of you. In Fact, I empathize with you. You are still wearing the pendant your wife gave you, which has a picture of your wife with you. That's how I remembered about your wife's death in the first place. But she is in a better place now. And don't do anything that'll make your brother die too, live a honest life, unlike me.", Lucian said.

Luther looks at the pendant Elias was wearing. He becomes shocked at the observation of Lucian, as he himself never noticed it before.

Lucian quickly tapped a button on his phone and said, "Goodbye, I'm taking the money and the artwork as a price for the problems you put me through, Mr.Kane."

Minutes pass, but still nothing happens, Luther and Elias keep on waiting, thinking of something. As the sound of the clock progresses, Lucian becomes more confused.

Why isn't Aria still coming? I texted her and it is seen as well. She is supposed to be on the top of this room. I told her to come here and release the sleeping gas in this room, as no one except me and Aria is wearing a mask, this would have been a perfect strategy. But why isn't she coming?

Lucian, for the first time in a long period, seemed stressed. He was confused as never before.

Luther whispered to himself, "What is happening? Why isn't his partner coming to save him? Is this our choice? No, If we try to unmask him right now, he will kill Vanholt in an instant. I guess we'll have to see what happens next."

Footsteps of people came from the top-floor. Lucian became stressed to hear it, he was expecting something else.

Suddenly the sounds stop and the inner door of the room opens, with another 4 assassins, comes a masked lady.

Lucian's brain became fully null seeing this scene, he whispered with mixed expressions, "A-Aria?"

Chapter V

In my teen days, I always used to think that everything should be fair, and if something isn't, then it is wrong and needs fixing. I believed in absolute equality and blamed nature for creating people inferior to others. But as life went on and I learned to see multiple perspectives, I realized that this is how the world is supposed to be. I realized that nothing in life is fair, and it is not supposed to be either. I started expecting the unexpected, never complaining about something that didn't seem fair.
But now, I'm unconsciously asking, why?

Everyone in the room except Lucian unfreezed. Elias's expression changed from fear to relief.
Seeing Lucian with such a rare expression made Elias believe that he is now in a safe situation.

"Your partner, Aria, was nothing but a traitor for you, it seems", Elias said with a neutral face.
Luther stared at Elias with an amazed expression as Elias started showing his phone to Lucian while sitting still.

"When I was trying to call Dorian, I saw a message from one of my assassins I hired for emergency purposes. He said, a person named

Aria is claiming to be the ghost's partner. And she is..", Lucian stopped him right there.

"S-So you are saying, she betrayed me?! And she wanted to get me caught?", Lucian said in a louder voice.

"Yes! That's what it seems like", Elias said, finally with a smile.

Wait a minute, am I missing something? Did she get caught or is she willingly doing this? Is she doing this to save me somehow? Should I go with her-

"Look at me", Aria finally spoke up, pointing towards Lucian.
"This was just how I wanted it to go! And you are finally getting caught. Now Mr.Blackwood, I'm right here, there is nothing that can stop you from unmasking him right? Do it.", Aria expressed with a smile.

"You're right! Thank you! We'll definitely pay you for your consideration!", Luther also spoke up, excitedly.

"Aria, how can you do this to me?", Lucian said with a voice that didn't express anything at all.

"I'm still the same", Aria said calmly.

Still the same? Does she mean she is still helping me?

"And by that, I mean I was always like this. I got closer to you, to gain your trust and the day has finally come!", Aria shouted.

Elias quickly stood up from the sofa and went towards Lucian himself, to unmask him.

As Elias was approaching him, he quickly balanced his mind and spoke up, "Mr.Blackwood! You are forgetting that your brother's life is still in my hands! My partner not saving me doesn't make your brother safe!"

Elias was punched by an invisible force while going towards Lucian as he heard this.

Luther Kane suddenly smiled and said, "So, should we kill this girl?"

Without giving anyone a further chance to reply, he continued, "If you don't do what we say, we are going to kill your ex partner", he smirked, "And, we are gonna keep her hostage just to keep things safe."

Elias got impressed by the things Luther said. He just went back to sit on the sofa. As soon as he touched the sofa, the assassins surrounding Aria grabbed her hands and started tieing her with a rope. Aria showed no resistance.

Lucing at last took a deep breath and sat on the chair positioned in front of Elias and Luther.

"Tell me what do you want.", Lucian said with a cold voice.
"I want you to work under me, for free.", Elias said, almost trying to request Lucian, even after cornering him.
"So, you were trying to unmask me, to know my identity and use that as a threat to make me keep working for you in the future and not betray you?", Lucian asked.
"Exactly, you know it.", Luther said, before Elias could.
"Well, I can't really know your identity now because my brother's life is in your hands. But remember, Aria Volkov is gonna stay with us from now on, and if you do anything that gets me in trouble, consider her dead.", Elias said in a threatening voice.

"Okay, right. I am ready to work under your conditions, but you'll have to spare my identity. I am gonna go away from here and never meet you in person again. Here is my personal number, so call me when I have to start. And kill her if you suspect me of betraying you.", Lucian promised boldly.

Luther got close to Elias and whispered, "Would it be a good decision, Sir? His identity would have been the best way to keep him under us. Are you sure this hostage is enough to keep him?"

Elias whispered back, "The emotions I saw in his eyes when he first saw her, no matter how good a person is at deceiving, no one can fake that. I'm more than 100% sure that this hostage is enough!"

I have no idea why Aria did that. Can I even trust people from now on? She was the only person I genuinely loved and trusted, aside from my parents. No no, this can't be it. No matter what happens, the Aria I know would never do something like this. I am pretty sure she is doing this under some kind of pressure. I'll have to rescue her from here as soon as I get the chance. But why did she not resist at all to being held hostage? Was she really that invested to get me caught? It's an act, I can feel it's an act.
Otherwise, why didn't she call me by my real name in front of Elias and Luther? She addressed me as "The Ghost". Was she trying to not expose my identity?

Elias took the paper Lucian gave him, which had a number written in it. He quickly typed the number and called Lucian.

The phone in Lucian's shirt's pocket started ringing.

"See? I don't lie, why would I?", Lucian said.
Elias smiled and said, "So should we call it a deal?"

Lucian said, "I guess so."

Luther stood up and went towards the assassins surrounding Aria and said, "Go and throw her in the room I made for hostages. This bastard really tried to corner us, show him our power."

Lucian's eyes went towards Luther and quickly responded through mouth, "Watch your language Mr.Kane, throw her in the room huh? Did you just forget that I have Mr.Blackwood's brother as a hostage too? This is a mutual deal."

"Can't you just not say these things now? Didn't I pay you enough to not let your pride interfere with our plan?", Elias said with a silent anger towards Luther.

Luther said, "Yes, Sir. I apologize."
"Not letting pride or emotions interfere with our plans? Did he just forget how he lost his mind hearing about his brother being hostage? In fact, this situation came up just because of that", Luther whispered to himself, barely hearable to anyone else.

Lucian took the art he brought with him and opened the door. As the assassins followed him to the outside door, he faded into the dark of the night.

I'm coming soon, Aria.

Chapter VI

Luther was sitting on a chair in the hostage room, while Aria was sitting on a chair attached to the wall, located opposite Luther's.

"So, what is your name, girl?", Luther asked, looking at his computer.
"Is that important?", Aria asked with a bored voice.
"Umm, yes it is. Just tell me already.", Luther looked at Aria.
"It's Aria Volkov. By the way, is this place safe for me? And will I be provided with everything?", Aria asked, raising her voice a little bit.
"Don't worry. Mr.Blackwood told me to arrange everything for you. I was wondering why he was arranging this much luxury for a hostage.", Luther said.
"And what did he say?", Aria asked curiously, smiling barely.
"He said that 'The ghost' has asked him to give you everything you need. Elias was blinded by emotions back then you know, he accepted the conditions.", Luther said with a mocking towards Elias.
Aria said, "I'm going to my assigned room then". She went for the door.
"Remember, if you even try to escape this place anyhow, there are sensors and cameras to catch you. We have guards and assassins 24/7.", Luther warned with a smirk.
"Quit all that talking. I know all of this. I thought he would get caught, but you guys were planning to use him instead. Well, whatever.", Aria looked back at Luther just to turn back again.

"Hey! Wait!", Luther suddenly said with a higher voice.
Aria looked back at Luther and said, "Now what?"
"If you are a past partner of 'The Ghost', then shouldn't you know about his identity?", Luther asked curiously.

Aria stood there with no expressions for a few seconds before answering, "I should have, but I don't."
"And what do you mean by that?", Luther asked calmly.
"He never told me his real name, as his theft partner, I was only given a nickname. It's 'Luke'. Now can I go?", Aria said, adjusting herself on the door.
"Luke huh? Yeah, you can go now.", Luther said looking back at his computer.

"She really thinks I believed that? But there is no way to pressurize her to say his real name now, so better stay silent", Luther thought with a sigh.

As Aria was on her way to her assigned room, she met Elias face to face. Elias was reaching for the management room where Luther is, but he quickly stopped and said to Aria, "Miss Volkov, you're assigned to room number 8. Call the management if you need anything.", Elias said formally, with a soft voice.

"Miss Volkov? This guy know my surname too? Damn, that Luther guy is surely fast at sending information. Even though that guy was kind of

harsh, this guy seems genuinely nice.", Aria thought before answering, "Yes! I'll go, thanks."

Just after that he rushed toward the management room.

"Luther, I'm going to open the mission now. I'm calling him....what name did you say? Luke, right. We are going to call him by that nickname too. I will tell Luke to start the project tomorrow. Arrange some cars, they might be needed.", Elias said with a low but fast voice.

"Alright, I'll do it.", Luther said.

"Don't worry I'll pay you time to time for all the expenses with your profits.", Elias said, sitting on his chair.

"Thanks", Luther said, turning his eyes towards Elias from his computer.

Just when Elias was about to close his eyes for a little bit, his phone rang. An unsaved number appeared on his screen.

"Hello? Who is this?", Elias asked, not knowing who it was.
"Oh, Elias! It's me, Dorian!", he said.

"Oh shit! How irresponsible can I be? How did I not check my brother's life status? I have been in this house for an hour now, so I didn't even get the chance.", Elias thought with regret and relief at the same time.

"Dorian! Are you okay now?", Elias asked quickly.

"Yeah I'm okay? Why, though? Something happened?", Dorian asked. Elias's eyes became wide in disbelief, he stuttered and asked, "Why did you call me with this new number? What happened to the other one?"

"Oh yeah, I think someone removed the sim card of my mobile and hid it somewhere. I couldn't find it so I just bought another one. I was actually about to tell you this, maybe some kind of plan is getting used against us.", Dorian said.

"Y-You might be right, I'll call you later, I'm busy so I'll be absent today, is everything okay there?", Elias asked.

"Yeah I got everything managed. Don't worry.", Dorian said.

"Okay, I'm cutting the call.", Elias cut the call and his face drowned in shock.
kind of important info?", Luther asked, waiting for an answer.

"We missed his identity for nothing, absolutely nothing! He didn't place any kind of bomb in Dorian's office nor did he tie him up as he claimed to! It was-It was all a bluff!", Elias shouted.

Luther's eyes became wide too but then he acted normal and said, "Well I did tell you to not take his words into consideration and do what we planned!"

"Just shut up! How could I have risked that considering my brother's life? It's easy for you to say it, would you have done the same if it was someone close to you?!", Elias almost became red in anger.

"Yeah yeah you're right but, calm down! We missed his identity but we still have some kind of control right?", Luther said.

Elias became calm, controlling his anger. "You're right. I shouldn't think about the past. Let's see what happens next.", Elias said and got out of his chair and walked to the middle of the room, going through his contacts in his mobile.

He pressed on a contact, changed the name from 'Ghost' to 'Luke' and then called it.

"Hello Luke! Are you ready to do the theft?", Elias asked rapidly.

Luke huh? Aria told them that already? Now it's obvious she didn't betray me. I'll ask her what happened after I rescued her.

"So now you know my nickname too?", Lucian asked.
"Yes I do. Your ex theft partner told us that. Now answer me!", Elias expressed.
"Yeah, tell me what to do.", Lucian said.

"Listen to me", Elias sat on his chair again preparing to tell his plans to Lucian.

"You'll have to steal an artwork from the Eclipse Cultural Museum. The 16th piece to be specific!", Elias informed.

"Another painting? Why? And can I ask what is your goal?", Lucian asked, with a little irritated voice.

"I'll explain it to you in the process. But the thing is, the location of my goal is hidden in that art piece.", Elias said.

"But what are you after though? Some kind of treasure? Or some kind of information?", Lucian asked.

"Can I trust this guy? Trust enough to tell him my goal? I mean we have a really important hostage in our control, he shouldn't be able to do something.", Elias kept thinking.

"Or..Or some revenge?", Lucian asked curiously, almost out of nowhere.

Elias was silent for a few seconds before saying, "Yes..."

Chapter VII

I failed, I failed to pay my due. Now I feel like I was trapped in here, intentionally. Regret is flowing through my blood, as I am seeing nothing in front of my eyes. Being blindfolded, I'm getting pulled towards an unknown place, an unknown room.

My ears are all open and I can hear the screams and laughs. Both being feminine.

My mind only having thoughts of our past and future, not the present. Me and my wife, Evie, are being treated as animals as they throw us in a room, tying up our hands and legs and blindfolding us.

The room is huge and vacant, the echoes our voice makes tells me that.
"Elias! What are we gonna do now?", Evie says as she cries, and I, being able to do nothing, say "I'm sorry!", while weeping.

"Well, well. See what we got here! Another one! Why don't these damn animals get their lessons? I'm tired of giving them those!", the voice of someone echoed through the room as other voices laughed.

Evie's hands were touching mine, and I suddenly felt it slipping away. They are taking Evie away from me, as I hear her screams intensify.

As soon as I was going to scream my lungs out, I realized my mouth was also tied up with a rope.

"Open his blindfold now!", that terrifying voice strikes again.

I feel a lot of disgusting hands touching my face to open my blindfold. It has been hours since I saw something, and as soon as I opened my eyes, my eyes begged me to close it.

I see a lot of men and women around Evie, a little far away from me, doing something to her.
My eyes widen as I see her mouth getting stitched up by needles and threads by those monsters.

I can't do anything except sit there while seeing and hearing her going through this hell. She is the sweetest person I met in my life, and also the most innocent one. Why is she getting the punishment of my debt?

My eyes went dry and my face got tired of trying to break the ropes I was tied with.

Blood was everywhere around Evie as they were done stitching up her mouth and she was just laying there with no control over her body anymore, but those eyes. My insides were exploding with regret as I saw those innocent eyes of her, begging for help, going through extreme pain all alone, not even being able to scream or talk through her stitched mouth.

I'm only getting more tense as I see her getting dragged in by those monsters. They put her in a big glass box, that can contain more than 3 humans. It was full of salt with a little water.

They laid her on top of the box of salt and started putting some kind of worms on top of her. They started taking me close to her, probably to let me observe those things even better.

I'm internally dead as I'm seeing her getting bitten by those worm-like creatures creating bloody cuts on her body, they increase the number of worms as her internal screams begin to rise, which can only be heard by me.

She started to struggle a lot getting her body parts bitten. Just in a minute, the salt in the box became all red with her blood. The smile of those monsters indicated that hell is just at its initial part.

They start pushing her down the salt heap and salt starts touching her wounds, which persisted now in hundreds. She starts drowning in the salt and the salt starts going in her eyes, giving her an amount of pain I can never imagine. As soon as the salt started going into her nose, stopping her breath, they pulled her nose out of the salt and pushed her down. Now she was experiencing pain every single second while not being able to scream at all and still not die.

They stopped her from dying and living at the same time.

The people around me are holding my face and eyes to make sure I witness every one of these. They killed me internally and her in all ways.

What happened the other parts of the hour, I can't remember, just because I don't want to.
One thing that was consistent through that part of my life, was that voice. That voice of that devil who was instructing all those people to do those stuff to my wife.

I then finally saw the end of her suffering, and I saw them taking her body out of the salt and packing her with a white paper.
"Sell her to the necrophiles!", said that Devil's voice.

My heart stopped almost completely and they dragged my body around the floor towards the exit and threw me out.

My mind was full of these thoughts but my mouth spoke none.

"So you are really hiding this from me? I guess that's reasonable.", Lucian said.

"Just know that It's to take revenge on some people who killed my wife.", Elias said, trying to cut the call.

"I understand.", Lucian said with a comforting voice and cut the call.

He has his strong reasons to do this. This art surely contains information that he will be able to use against those people, or get closer to them maybe.
Well, I do have a plan on how to perform this heist, but I'll have to check on a lot of things before I decide something.

Lucian closed his eyes for a second and sat on his bed, while having his phone in his hands.
Just after 3 seconds, he took his phone and called Elias again.

"My work is done for now, so goodnight Mr.Blackwood, I'm going to sleep.", Luther said yawning.

Elias made some signs with his hands, indicating a goodnight, while losing himself on his chair. He got up again as he received Lucian's call.

"Hello?", Luther asked quickly.
"Oh hello. What I was saying is that I might not be able to do this project tomorrow. I'll need some specific day or days to do this. Is that ok?", Lucian asked.
"If that ensures the project's completion, then it's okay.", Elias said, with an unusually calm voice.
"Sure. That's all I need. Thanks.", Lucian cut the call.

Lucian looks at the calendar and remembers something. Then he lays on his bed with his laptop on his lap. Getting comfortable while thinking was his favorite thing to do, even if life didn't give him much of those moments.

18th July, 2001. That's when the Eclipse Cultural Museum was established, which should mean that in just 4 days, the museum would be celebrating its 22nd year...

Chapter VIII

15th July,2023
Morning,

"Hello, everyone! Welcome to the preparation meeting of our 22nd Anniversary! Huge thanks to all of these talented people for being here!", Mr.Jacobs said, with an inviting smile to all of the people sitting in the office of Eclipse.

Saul Jacobs, the owner of Eclipse, sat on his chair. It was a long, oval table with chairs around it.

"Enjoy the drinks on the table and then we should proceed with our discussion, shouldn't we?", Saul expressed.

The table had artists and designers around it. Some of the notable ones being Gary Loxley, Emily Adams, Lucian Cole, Frank Austin.

After some moments of chatting, Saul said with an announcing voice, "So, now, I request all the respected people here to let their creativity shine and show us a sparkle of it!"

"I do have some plans, Lucian. But I'll let you speak first.", Gary said to Lucian.
"Ah you don't have to, just say it out.", Lucian said to Gary.
"Why not? What about the costume plan you were talking about? I really liked it!", this time Gary said it a little loudly, catching everyone's attention.

As soon as everyone heard Gary's words, the chatting stopped and the room became silent. Everyone, including Saul Jacobs looked at Lucian, expecting him to bring up his idea.

Lucian looked at everyone with a nervous smile and stood up.
"Please, Mr.Cole. Share your idea with us!", Saul insisted.

"Yes, for sure! So I was thinking we could arrange a special week for this anniversary where all our visitors will wear something..ahh..based on something related to Eclipse Museum?", Lucian said looking at everyone.

"That is a really good idea, Mr.Cole! But what could this costume be?", Saul asked.
"What about a suit inspired by a Polar Bear? Since it was the first artwork ever presented in this museum?", Frank Austin spoke up, with a smirk.

"Yeah, that would be a good idea!", Lucian added.
"Mr.Cole! You designed some suits for this, didn't you?", Gary said to Lucian while pointing at the papers he was holding.

Lucian then gave those papers to Mr.Jacobs. As Saul went through the papers his eyes sparkled. "These are some amazing designs, Mr. Cole!", Saul expressed, while showing the designs to the other people.

"Yeah, these suits are almost good. Well, I can make them better.", Frank said, looking at the designs.

"Here comes our 'best designer in the world' to save us!" - Gary whispered to himself, mocking Frank.

"Well, I have some ideas too, may I present them?", Emily said looking at Lucian.

"Yeah please do, I'm done with my idea.", Lucian said sitting down.

"We might paint the walls of the museum with colorful patterns that represent different emotions!, Karl, you have the blueprint I gave you?", Emily said.

"Yeah, here it is!", Karl said giving Saul the blueprints.

"We'll be incorporating all of these ideas into the anniversary for sure. Mr.Loxley, don't you have anything to say?", Saul turned towards Gary.

"Oh. me? No no, I'm going with Mr.Cole's plan. Is that okay?", Gary said, pointing at the suit designs.

"That's all good! So our special week will be from 18th July to 24th July, and we will be incorporating these suits into our theme and the visitors will be wearing these as a part of our celebration!", Saul announced.

"Huge thanks to all of the artists who came together to form these plans, and we are looking forward to its execution!", Saul said as everyone stood up, going outside the room.

"You didn't have to let me speak first you know, maybe Frank or some other people had their own initial ideas!", Lucian said to Gary as they were leaving the building.
"Oh come on, your plan was great. Who cares about that Frank.", Gary said.
"Yeah, our work is basically done here, they will make the suits and arrange them. By the way, are you interested in a friendly competition?", Lucian smirked.
"Oh sure, why not?", Gary smirked back.

15th July,2023
Afternoon,

"So, I'll be doing the heist on 20th July, Is that good?", Lucian informs Elias.
"Why such a specific date?", Elias asked curiously, "Does something happen that day that you can use to your advantage?", he added.
"Kind of. That day seems to be the perfect day for my plan, I have backups but that day is important.", Lucian said.
"Okay then.", Elias cuts the call.

When I was checking the yearly electric condition of this city yesterday, I found out that every year on 29th December and 20th July, the electric supply of this city goes off for 28 seconds at exactly 4:47 pm. It's most probably because of how the electricity is distributed around the country. It takes a lot of time to fix such an issue and it has been happening for almost 24 years, with no exception.

That's why I suggested a special week instead of a special day, as I extended the costume days till 24th July, which covers 20th July.

As everyone or almost everyone will be wearing the same costume, it'll be easier for me to steal the art during the blackout and go away with it by confusing the security cameras. The costumes I designed also have space inside it that can store that art. I'm just hoping that damn Frank doesn't change it's structure way too much or I'll have to use backpacks or something else.

There's also something I need to do tomorrow. I'll go there with someone, Gary maybe. But, I wonder what Aria is doing now. I thought of planning a way to contact her after this heist, but I'm kind of missing her already.

And...The painting I'll be going after is an interesting one too, A spirit possessing a demon to make it suicide. I'll try to draw it myself, haven't tested my skills in a while.

Lucian went towards his drawing table and pulled out a few pages and his drawing instruments, he then pulled out his phone and searched for the '16th piece' of Eclipse.
He started drawing a sketch of it and then relaxed on his chair a bit.
He then called Gary.
"Hey! Ready to go to Eclipse tomorrow?", Lucian asked.
"Tomorrow? Didn't you say 20th July? I think you got amnesia or something.", Gary said.
"Yeah no. I'm talking about an extra day. I just wanted to look at it before the colors, you know.", Lucian tried to explain.
"I get it. But why me? You can go with your girl, right?", Gary asked.
"I don't have one, remember?", Lucian said.
"Oh yeah how can I forget", Gary giggles. "Sure, when then?", he added.
"11 am maybe?", Lucian suggested.
"Done!", Gary said.

Chapter IX

20th July, 2023
4:15 pm

The Eclipse Cultural Museum is at the moment full to the brim with visitors. It has been only 15 minutes since the Special Week of the Museum started, and it's already full of polar bears.
Lucian, with his friends, entered the line with the same costumes, all pretty much looking the same.
But, some people in the crowd had extra accessories like bags, including Lucian and his friends.

"You guys did come here before, right?", Dale asked, pointing towards Gary and Lucian, while being the first of the four friends in the line.
"Yeah we did. But it wasn't this full with people that day!", Gary said.
"A lot of things have changed for sure, look at the colors!", Lucian expressed, while looking around.
"I heard that Emily Adams was a part of this theme, by the way, what did you guys do?", Miles asked, looking at Gary.
"Us? Ahh..We did the costumes, partly.", Gary said.
"Oh that's why these sucks, so this was your plan.", Dale looked at Gary and Lucian.
"Yeah, like what are these masks for? I can barely see things.", Miles said.

"Shut up, see forward. The line is going on.", Gary told Miles, pointing at Dale, as the line went a little forward.
Lucian was still gazing around, as he was watching certain parts of the museum, he was remembering the last time he got here.

In around 20 minutes, Lucian reached the 10th piece, while everyone was gazing at the paintings, tasting its artistic beauty with their eyes.

16th July, 2023
As Lucian and Gary were walking with the line, Lucian was stopping and taking a good look around the museum.

The line starts going forward almost every 2 minutes. But the special days will have a lot more visitors than now, so I'll consider that as just 2 minutes. So if one art piece takes 2 minutes, 16 will take 32. I'll have to be present in front of the 16th piece at exactly 4:47 pm. Which means, we will have to enter the line around 4:15 pm. It will make it much easier for me, as I'll have to move less.

"Let's go forward, Lucian!", Gary said.
"Huh?"

20th July,2023
"Oh yeah", Lucian told Gary as he went forward. Gary was the 3rd one of the friends, Lucian being the last.

"Look at this one, it's a unique one! A human-like beast who is climbing its way to heaven!", Dale said.
"Right! I have no idea what that means though, I'm less into conceptual ones you know.", Miles replied quickly.
"Well, then what do you think about the next ones then?", Gary said to Miles pointing at the 16th piece, which they were about to go infront of, while Dale already did.

Lucian became the ghost infront of everyone, but no one noticed as both of them looked the same.

As the city-wide electric blackout was on its way, Lucian was positioned infront of the 16th piece, apparently by fate.
Lucian was looking at the art, along with Gary, when memories of 16th July struck Lucian's mind again.

16th July, 2023

So this is the one I'll have to steal. It's even better to look at it in person.
All original paintings placed in museums have their trademarks, which are usually hidden, in order to protect them from duplicity.

Gary was looking at the same painting.

The trademark is nowhere in the front of the painting, and I assume it's not in the back either, because it'll be too easy to find otherwise.

So it has to be somewhere else. Is it inside the painting frame? It is possible.

Just as Lucian was thinking, he noticed a small button-like point under the painting frame.

Is that the button that has the trademark inside it? A pretty baseless assumption but there is...a way to confirm this.

"Hey Gary! Wait for me, I'm getting a call!", Lucian raised his voice.
"It's fine! I'm right here!", Gary shouted from a distance as he went forward already.

"Hey, Elias, where are the trademarks in the paintings in your museum?", Lucian whispered through his phone quickly.
"Huh?", Elias replied.
"Quickly, it's essential for the theft!", Lucian said.
"Our trademarks are usually on the back of the paintings.", Elias said, increasing his talking speed.
"Oh. Do you know of any museum which places their trademarks inside the painting frames itself?", Lucian said, lowering his voice even more.
"I do. Actually most of them place it inside.", Elias said.
"That's all I need to know, thanks.", Lucian cut the phone instantly.

That button most probably does contain the trademark then, I'll have to wear the night goggles on that day, so I'll be able to remove the

trademark better, and the smoothening oil, which will cover up the traces of the removed trademark sticker.

"Gary, wait for me!", Lucian went towards Gary.
"How is the 16th piece?", Gary asked Lucian.

<u>20th July, 2023</u>

"Oh, it's exceptiona- just as Lucian was about to complete his sentence, the world around him became pitch black.

At the very moment it became dark, the chaos rose. The people unaware of this blackout started shouting each other's names. The guards standing at the 1st,10th and 20th piece were telling the crowd to calm down and wait a few seconds till the electricity came back.

The ticking of clocks became much more intense as the crowd went to the path of silence.
Some people even turned on their phone flashlights.

"You guys don't have to turn on flashlights, the feeling I get from dark places is something else!", Miles said excitedly.
"Yeah yeah we are doing nothing at all!", Gary said.
"Where's Lucian, can you hear him?", Dale asked.
"Yeah, here he is, Lucian?", Gary asked, trying to observe him.
Just after around 1 second, a voice came as a reply, "I'm right here, I'm just tying my shoelace!", Lucian said, from a little isolated place as

the line went forward a little bit, leaving Lucian alone infront of the 16th piece, outside the line.

Just after 28 seconds, the lights came back, and Lucian was just where his friends saw him before the blackout, behind Gary.

After reaching the 20th piece, the last one, they were preparing for the exit, but the line became completely static as an announcing voice from the speakers in the museum spoke up.

"Attention, all the visitors and the staff! The 16th piece has been stolen from this museum during the blackout! Don't let any of the visitors exit yet! The thief is one of them!".

Shit. If they found the missing painting even after just a few seconds, we would have been out.

The expressions in the crowd changed, some becoming shocked, some becoming careful.
The guards quickly shaped a square shaped line made of visitors, ready to investigate them.

Through the large number of people, Lucian and his friends were placed around the front row.
As they were going through people's clothes and bags, people were chatting, most probably about 'The Ghost', and how he might be in this heist.

The guards finally came towards Lucian's part of the line. As Miles was infront the line, the guards checked him first.
After the guard checked his clothes, he went for his bag. As everyone was looking towards the guards, excitement flowed within them as they were hoping for 'The Ghost' to be caught.

The guard invents the 16th piece from Mile Gray's bag, saying "So..You are the one....

Chapter X

Everyone in the crowd tensed up, as they were about to witness The Ghost's identity.
"Unmask him right now!", the other guard said to the guard checking Miles.

"You are caught! Remove the mask right now!", the guard commanded as he grabbed Mile's hands.
"Me?", Miles replied in a loud, but calm voice.
Everyone stared at Miles as he removed his mask, seeing a smiling face.

Gary comes out from the crowd, and tells the guard, "Sir! It seems like you misunderstood something!", Dale and Lucian followed Gary, coming out of the crowd.
The guard became a little confused, "And who are you?", the other guard asked.
As Gary removed his mask, so did Dale and Lucian.

A lot of the visitors, including the guards, were shocked to see Gary and Lucian.
"Mr.Loxley and Mr.Cole? You guys visit here as well?", one of the visitors asked, watching their artistic idols.

"Yeah, we do. But the problem is, you guys misunderstood something! My friend, Miles Gray, is not the thief!", Gary said, being in the middle of the crowd.
"B-But sir, then what about this painting?", The guard asked quickly, carefully holding the painting.

"That is drawn by us!", Dale spoke up just as Gary was about to speak.
"Yes!", Lucian expressed agreement.

"What?", the guard seemed confused.

15th July,2023

Noon,

"Yeah, our work is basically done here, they will make the suits and arrange them. By the way, are you interested in a friendly competition?", Lucian smirked.
"Oh sure, why not, what will this be about then?", Gary smirked back.
"The idea is, we'll be trying to replicate the paintings from the Eclipse Museum. I have the 12th and 16th piece in mind. The competition will be about who can copy the painting including the frame in the museum more accurately. Is that alright?", Lucian asked.
"Damn brother, you're really creative. But who's this 'we'?", Gary asked.

"We? Maybe invite Dale and Miles too? Then we'll be comparing our paintings in the museum itself when we visit it on 20th July. How's that?", Lucian expressed.
"Alright! I know I'm gonna be the winner, but let's give you guys a chance, right?", Gary smirked.
"Yeah yeah, we'll see about that."

20th July, 2023
4:53 pm,
As the line around Lucian was on its way to the exit, he remembered something.
"Hey! I was thinking, we could exchange our paintings now, remember the competition?", Lucian expressed.
"Why right now? Let us exit first, then we'll do it!", Gary said.
"I get it, you are afraid that my painting will beat yours, isn't it?", Dale smirked, looking back at Gary.
"What level of stupidity are you on?", Gary said.
"Leave Gary, show me your painting, Lucian! I was particularly excited for yours!", Miles said pointing to Lucian, while Dale and Gary were talking.
"Oh, here it is! Give me yours then, I don't know how good this will be compared to the others", Lucian giggles.

4:56 pm (Current time)

"You see, we were doing a friendly competition among us to decide who can replicate these paintings better. So the one you are holding is made by...umm..yeah! Lucian!", Dale explained.
Gary nodded his head in agreement.

"So, you're telling me, this is not the actual painting?", The guard seemed confused and suspicious at the same time.

"Yes, Sir. Look at our bags! All 4 of us have made painting replicas from here. They all look pretty real, not just mine!", Lucian took some steps towards the guards.

Seeing this, the crowd was giving different opinions, some even disappointed.

"Wait, Lucian. How can they believe our words, right?", Gary interrupted.
"You can check all the paintings by your own hands.", Gary said in a calm voice, suggesting the guards himself.

"Right", the other guard said while taking the bags of those four.

As the guards looked at the bags, they found a single painting from each bag, excluding Lucian's, which had 4 paintings.

"Hey! Check the trademark on all of them! Then we'll know if they are just a replica or not", one of the staff suggested.

The guard quickly went through all the paintings looking for something, a trademark to be specific.
Just as he reached the first painting in Miles' bag, he found a button under it.
He quickly pressed it and a wooden bar came out of it sliding. And it had no trademarks.

Both the guards were confused about it.
"So...Should we leave now? We have our work to do.", Gary said to the guards.
"We apologize Sir. We definitely made some mistakes.", the guards said in unison.

"No it's okay. There's no need to apologize! You had to check everyone anyways.", Miles said, packing his bag, along with the others.

The Ghost left the museum infront of everyone's eyes, once again. The number of visitors lessened as time passed. Even after the return of the electricity, the museum was still looming with darkness, until Lucian and his friends left it.

"We are gonna lose our jobs, Aden!", one of the guards said.
"We'll make up some excuse, it's not completely our fault either!", the other one replied.

The painting made its way through the museum, through the roads of the city, to Lucian's house.

"Hello?", Lucian picked up his phone, and called Elias.
"Is the painting with you?", Elias asked rapidly.
"Yeah, I got it!", Lucian said.
"Thank God, I thought you lost the painting or something.", Elias said with relief.
"You know about the Eclipse Case?", Lucian asked.

"I do. The theft case is literally on the television! But now the point is, you'll have to analyze that painting you have!", Elias said, with determination.
"First tell me, what is this even about? Like, why would the location of your enemy be in this? And how did you get to know this either?", Lucian asked curiously.

The history of Elias's life was still unknown to Lucian, though he made some guesses.

"Well, you know what, when my wife was killed by them, I heard them accidently, and got to know about their secret of having their location hidden in here.", Elias said, with multiple pauses in between.

"That's all. Well then, I'll try decoding what this painting is about then.", Lucian said with a sigh.
"I expect you to. Aria Volkov is fine here, she also told me to make sure you don't come to this place.", Elias said, with a soft voice.
"She did? Well, I believe you. I'll be updating you as soon as I figure out anything.", Lucian cut the call.

What was that? Did she really say that? Or is it just another lie to manipulate me? Whatever it is, I'll find a way to secretly contact her.

And also...how would Elias have this much information about his enemy's location...just by accident? Something just doesn't seem right....