

Chapter -75

Everyone let out startled yelps and scattered. The half-naked women hid behind the large couch; the Henchmen jumped back in surprise, before regaining their composure and drawing their weapons; the Bodyguard charged directly for me, unfazed by my appearance; and, unsurprisingly, the Chief of Police squeezed his golden key tightly and vanished into thin air.

...Only to immediately appear in the same spot he'd just left.

Before he could waste another charge of the key, his Bodyguard yelled, “He used an ability on you Liam, just stay where you are while I kill him!”

Isabella came at me with surprising speed, swinging her greatsword in a downward chop aimed at my neck. With a nonchalant step to the side, I avoided her attack and immediately retorted by driving Brock into her abdomen.

“*Eat this!?*” he yelled.

In an explosion of air that made the entire room tremble, the Bodyguard was lifted off her feet and sent flying backwards. When she hit the web-formed ceiling, her whole body passed through it thanks to my Glitch Collision passive. Meanwhile, the air that Brock had expelled with the punch was refilled, and then some, thanks to draining it from her body.

Liam made a sound as though he'd just choked on his own tongue, before jumping behind the couch with the women who were already hiding there.

The other Henchman had completely frozen in their places, as they all probably had expected Isabella to take me down.

I panned around, grinning at them all.

“Boo!” I yelled, and couldn't help but laugh at the few people who let out squeaks of fear.

Then I brought up my inventory and withdrew a single object.

“Oh... *that* is mean,” Panda said.

I placed the black whistle against my lips and blew air through it.

Player ‘Gambit’ has activated a Conspiracy Whistle.

You have received +10% Insanity!

The surrounding Players all wailed at the sound, which was a given. It was less of a note and more of a violation of their inner ear canals by the scraping finger of an eldritch creature. Unlike the first time I’d used it, blood didn’t spontaneously run out my nostrils, and, honestly, it was kind of nice. Almost like an itch I didn’t know I had was being scratched.

I blew the whistle again.

You have received +10% Insanity!

“Someone stop him!” yelled a woman.

“I heard a voice!” someone else exclaimed.

“Everyone, stuff your ears!” advised a third.

I grinned, then blew the whistle a few more times. Instead of a finger in my ear canal, the sensation warped into that of a long dexterous tongue tipped with small spikes. Blood began to drip from my nostrils, while also welling forth from my tear ducts.

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On the fifth use, one of the women behind the couch let out a deepening gurgle, followed by the screams of those around her. At her transformation, several others were pushed over the edge and began to undergo their own spasming and writhing manifestations of insanity. It was similar to what I’d witnessed when I’d used the whistle to expose the Skinstealer during the Weaponlution Event.

“It’s cascading, the fear,” Panda marveled, as all of those around us bucked and writhed.

I didn’t know exactly what controlled it, but it was clear that witnessing someone else transform into an Insanity Monster incurred an insanity gain in most people. For some reason, however, not all of the people in the room transformed, maybe because they were used to witnessing horrific things and had perhaps inflicted quite a lot of insanity themselves.

“Look at what you’ve done!” yelled Liam, as he leapt over the couch and charged for me with a green-veined serpent-themed dagger that screamed ‘venomous’.

I avoided his attempt to slash me with a few simple pivots of my upper body, then grabbed his wrist with my left hand and crushed it.

He screamed in pain. I let go and gestured for the door with a grin. After all, the torment had just begun.

Clutching his wrist, he ran past me towards the exit, while the boss monsters around us were tearing into those Henchman that’d retained their humanity.

“Poetic, isn’t it Liam!?” I yelled, as he ran out through the exit, only to somehow get turned around and arrive right back at where he’d left.

“Let me go! If it’s money you need, I’ve got a lot! You can have it!”

“You really don’t remember me, do you!?”

I’d watched the screens, and none of them were focused on me. There was one that’d been looking at Bee, and a screen that still displayed Samantha’s corpse, as well as another tracking Logan, but not a single display showed me. And I knew from watching them before dropping down through the ceiling that they could cycle through the various Eye-Spy Drones that trailed Players.

To Liam, I was a nobody. I couldn’t comprehend it. Despite everything he’d done to antagonize me over the years, I wasn’t even a blip on his radar now.

“You ruined my life!” I yelled at him, as he tried to run out of the tunnel leading into the room, only to arrive back where he started.

“Let me go, please! I have a family!”

I knew that he had two ex-wives, both of whom had divorced him because of cheating scandals, as well as an estranged daughter that was surely now in the ‘Children’s Zone’ run by the ants.

“Fuck your family! You’re the reason I lost Kevin!” I yelled back.

“Who?” both Panda and Liam asked, confused.

At his voice, the former Chief of Police looked to my shoulder, just now noticing him.

“Why is there a panda sitting on your shoulder? And why does it talk?”

“Kevin was my best friend!” I yelled, ignoring his question.

“I also lost my fridge magnet collection, and I was evicted! All because of you and the Mayor!”

There was a pause as Liam took in my words. Probably he was regretting his past actions and reflecting upon how karma had a wicked way of returning like a boomerang.

But then he seemed to come to his senses, and an arrogant expression morphed his face into a sneer, while the last of his Henchmen behind us were torn to shreds by the rending claws and needle teeth of the Insanity Monsters I’d manifested.

“You’re the guy!” he then said, putting two-and-two together. “You’re the Birthday Suit Bandit! You’re the reason why I kept getting death threats and bags of glitter sent to my office!”

“I actually never sent you anything,” I said.

“Oh... well, I know you tried to attack me! The Mayor didn’t believe it was good for his image to take you down, but he sure changed his tune after you stabbed him and killed his dog!” He was starting to regain some of his confidence, which wasn’t exactly how I’d planned for this to pan out.

“*You* killed his dog!” I replied. “Then you framed me! I’d never hurt an animal.”

“You literally just killed a Swan earlier,” Panda remarked, looking kind of bored with this anticlimactic battle of words. “Can you just kill him already?”

“Don’t listen to the panda!” Liam then insisted, suddenly remembering that I still had the upper hand here. “And yes, I did frame you. I’m sorry! But I didn’t have a choice! They were rioting in the streets to have you set free.”

I grinned to myself at the image. I’d actually made people fight back at the local government through my actions.

A last gut-wrenching scream emerged from one of the Henchman, and I turned to see the monsters devouring the bodies, while eyeing Liam and I hungrily. Instead of fighting them, I surged forward and grabbed him by the throat with my purple gauntlet.

Immediately, the purple curse spread from the balloon fingers to the skin of his neck, while a crackling pop of Static made him yelp, and the Drain Air started siphoning the oxygen out of his body.

I didn’t want him to die immediately.

That would be no fun.

So, when the Insanity Boss Monsters began moving towards us, I brought out my longboard and kicked off down the web-formed tunnel. I headed through the rooms where many of his men had fled to, and others were cautiously entering, as though wanting to prove they had been on the way to help their boss, without actually contributing anything.

My sudden appearance startled many of them, and the monsters on my heels drove several more over the edge and caused them to transform.

All the while, Liam Johnson was struggling in my grip, the air sucked out of him and my gauntlet becoming bloated with every desperate inhale he did.

He managed to utter a single strained sentence before he passed out from lack of oxygen.

“Why do I taste grape...?”