

## Operation Undercover: Ines in Paris - Part 3

For Halima Abdi

By TheSpiralledEye

*With Roanoke gone how will Ines, a civilian, fare against her attacker and will her old personality ever resurface?*

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Ines could feel herself shaking, backing up into the empty street as the woman stalked closer; the gun still pointed at Ines' chest. What was she supposed to do? She was sure she once knew over a dozen ways to disarm an opponent with a firearm barehanded only minutes ago but now all she could recall was that one karate lesson she attended and did so poorly at.

The woman was grinning; she could tell by the way her cold eyes sparkled in the moonlight, she was enjoying her victims' fear. Ines did her best to try and get a grip and stop her hands from trembling as she held them up in what she hoped was a proper karate pose. Hands out in front ready to defend herself; even if she couldn't remember how to be an agent right now she was not going down without a fight.

Her bravado lasted mere seconds as the woman laughed; the sound was cold and bitter, Ines had never heard such a sound, it made the hairs on her arms stand on end. Then there was a bang and a sudden stinging sensation in her palm. All that effort to hyper herself up for a fight and she had somehow forgotten about the gun right in front of her.

Her hand stung badly before going numb then her arm then her shoulder. In fact the numbness was rapidly spreading through her entire body. Strange that's not how she imagined getting shot would feel.

The world swayed around her colours mixing like paint on a canvas as she drunkenly turned her palm to look at it. There was no bullet hole, only a small red canister somehow suspended in the middle of her palm. It took her a few long seconds to realise that the sting had been a needle sticking into her. A dart, poisoned no doubt.

The cement beneath her heels turned to water and she felt herself falling and a moment later everything went black. She was unconscious before she even hit the ground.

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Ines came to slowly; for a few moments before the fog of sleep was kicked off she was confused. Where were her silk sheets? The ones she so loved waking up to each morning and snuggling against before starting her day? Then she remembered; the alley, the woman,

the *gun*. Her eyes snapped open and she discovered she was chained to a chair. Her hands tied behind her back with what felt like cable ties as thick metal squashed her chest and torso against the chair.

Her legs were each tied to one of the front legs with the same chains and as she struggled she realised there was no way to slip herself free. She could feel the metal pressing down hard against her skin, sweat was already gathering against her clothes where the chains pushed against her.

The room was bare, save for a single light hanging above her, swinging slightly thanks to the air being pumped through a nearby vent. Panic began to rise up in her chest but a few deep breaths kept it at bay, barely.

Roanoke would know how to get out of this, she was almost fully confident that he had in fact, done just that on more than one occasion. Why couldn't she remember it? Whenever she tried to think back to her past missions as Roanoke she found instead memories of travelling abroad; visiting French cafes or starting up her journalism career.

Memories that, no matter how real they felt to her, she knew had to be false. Watcher had never mentioned that could be a side effect; Ines taking over her mind. Though it honestly was starting to feel like the other way around; Ines felt more real than Roanoke at this point; something she would be worried about if she didn't have a much more pressing issue to deal with right now.

The killer had caught her and even without Roanoke's years of experience she knew what being tied to a chair meant; interrogation. Ines bit her cheek; did she have the mental fortitude to deal with that now? She was alone and scared and while her memories were getting sketchier by the minutes they were still there. All the secrets she knew, the faces, the people of her agency. She couldn't put them in danger by saying anything. But...she also didn't want to die.

Hot tears burned behind her eyes; she had no much to look forward to! Kate and her had a girls night planned in a few days and her paper was thinking of sending her over to Germany to cover Oktoberfest and its effect on the local business scene in a few weeks! Perhaps it was petty but these small, fun moments made her upcoming weeks all the brighter; she didn't want to miss out on them because she was going to be found dead in a ditch.

There was only one thing she could do; she had to convince the killer they had made a mistake, that she wasn't an agent at all. She may have been stupid enough to mutter it under her breath but perhaps she could spin that as her joking, or perhaps referring to an agent of justice as a journalist, seeking out the truth. It was a slim chance; but slim was better than no chance at all.

There was just one problem; she did still have those memories and as long as they existed there would be that temptation. She had no choice, she had to erase them, no matter how terrifying the prospect was, it was time to fully and willingly immerse herself into this new life.

Ines thought hard, pushing away all those memories of Roanoke and focusing on her new ones as Ines.

Listening to her parents talk about the difficulties of moving from Japan to France; remembering how out of place she felt getting out her bento box at lunch time while all the other girls had pastries. Her temptation to hide that part of herself before ultimately deciding to embrace it, no matter what the other students at her all girls school said.

She remembered her first kiss at the school dance when she was thirteen. It had been awkward, lasting only a moment behind a bunch of glittery balloons before the boy ran off red in the face. That relationship hadn't gone anywhere but the next had; those first stumbling steps into teenage romance had taught her so much about herself and her sexuality and she'd learned to hone it and use it to her advantage. By the time she was a teenager she had learned that a warm smile or the gentle, platonic touch of an arm could open more doors than force ever could. A small smile flickered across her face now as she remembered, and in doing so felt the lonely, bitter school days of Roanoke melt away entirely.

She remembered her college years and how the pressure had started to build. She didn't know what to study, having been flitting from major to major trying to find her passion when she had stumbled into journalism by chance. She had heard rumours of a professor sleeping with his students in exchange for better grades and, rather than ignoring it like her classmates, decided to investigate. With her looks and charm all it had taken was a few flirtatious smiles and a bad term paper to coerce the man into inviting her to his office, only to reveal her recording device before things got too steamy.

She'd written a report for the school paper and gotten the man fired in one fell swoop and just like that her passion for investigation and justice had been born. Not like Roanoke, who followed orders empty of any moral compass; Ines had passion and drive, emotions that easily washed away the blank state of the assassin.

That passion for journalism had also brought her first great love to her; while Roanoke was training to become a killing machine Ines had been falling head over heels for Jean. Jean had been a good man, passionate about both her and their shared career. They had spent many nights studying, as well as doing far more salacious things in the library and while it didn't work out in the end, Ines still treasured the memory of his touch.

The memories were coming faster and stronger now; Ines wasn't sure she could stop them even if she tried and to be honest, she didn't want to. This life, her life, was so full of colour and excitement it was as though she were experiencing them for the first time. A life of greyscale finally turning passionate and colourful.

Her first job, the one that started her globetrotting adventures and truly opened her eyes to how big and beautiful the world could be. She saw horrors yes, but also experienced the best in people. She interviewed movie stars on yachts in the Mediterranean, jazz musicians in smokey clubs and politicians in great glass skyscrapers. More than once getting the hard hitting truths nobody else could by utilising her strongest asset; her charm. She brought people into her bed with ease, coaxing their secrets from them with warm touches and soft kisses.

These memories bought Ines comfort despite the horrid circumstances. If she was going to die down here before some mad woman believed she was some sort of super spy, she wanted to remember the good times before she went. She was just remembering her first date with Jean, in a warm Parisian cafe when she heard somebody approaching the door. Instantly the smell of coffee was gone and her eyes flickered open to see the cold steel door.

The door clicked open and in walked the blonde woman; she looked like something out of a noir film. She moved with confidence; long legs taking quick strides toward Ines as she trembled in her chains. Her hair was perfectly coiffed, falling in soft waves around her face and covering one eye, and her dark makeup was flawlessly applied, giving her an alluring, almost otherworldly appearance. She looked dangerous; white teeth glinting like a sharks as her top lip curled into a cruel smile. She reminded Ines of a predator on the hunt. Her body language was calculated and deliberate, and her eyes seemed to size the other woman up with a cool detachment.

"Ines." She sighed happily, "So happy to finally meet you."

"W-who are you?" She trembled "Why have you kidnapped me? Why am I chained up! If y-you want to ransom me you wont get much!"

That had to be it; she was a foreign correspondent; people in her line of work got ransomed off all the time but that was usually for the ones working in dangerous war zones and the like. Not her covering business pieces abroad.

"Oh I see, playing dumb are we?" The woman chuckled, "That won't get you far, agent."

“Agent?” Ines blinked in confusion, “Like...secret agent? You think I’m a spy?”

“I know you are.” The woman frowned, “I don’t make mistakes, I know that American agency is recruiting new women to take care of the ones I...eliminated. But they must really be scraping the bottom of the barrel to think they could train a scared little journalist into a proper foreign agent.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Ines cried, “I just do news! I’m a journalist, not a secret agent! I don’t even like spy movies!”

She started to cry; she was terrified. This woman had to be crazy.

“Don’t you lie to me.” The woman hissed, “I know you must know something, Watcher recruited you didn’t he you little harlot.”

“I don’t know who that is!” She insisted, trembling as the other woman pressed a red, painted nail to her cheek.

The nail was sharp, far sharper than it should have been. Ines could tell that it would puncture her skin easily if her captor so wished.

“Watcher is mine. You hear.” She hissed “All mine and once I get rid of the rest of his little agents he’ll see it too!”

So this woman was obsessed with some man called Watcher? What sort of name was that?

“I don’t know any Watcher.” Ines closed her eyes, “Please just believe me, If I ever met him on the job it was just a fling. I do that t-to get information sometimes! I didn’t know he was taken!”

“So you did sleep with him!” the woman screeched, “I knew it I knew he was just recruiting pretty women to make his own hareem. It’s to make me jealous, I just know it.”

“I don’t know!” Ines wailed “I sleep with men sometimes when I work b-but they are just one night stands! Sometimes I don’t even get their name! You can have him. I promise I won’t do it again if you just let me go!”

The woman pressed her nails against Ines' neck, one sharp point pressing against her pulse. Were those nails sharp enough to cut her throat? Ines didn't want to find out.

"Tell me the number you call to contact him."

"I don't have one, even if I have met him I never get the numbers..."

"You're lying, he's your handler!"

"I don't even know what that is!"

The woman hissed, taking a few steps back and glared down at Ines with fury. She trembled but held the woman's gaze; silently begging to any God that would listen that her captor believed her truths.

"I know you're lying." The woman hissed, "You must be! You're just a good actress. I know you have a silver tongue, I was watching you in Japan, coaxing that man into sleeping with you like some common whore."

Ines' cheeks burned; how long had this woman been watching her? Did she have proof of her little escapades, if her boss found out she was sleeping out to get her scoops she might even lose her job! Not to mention her life if this madwoman had her way.

"Once I get that number, I'll be able to get into the system and find the full files of the rest of the agency's secret agents." The woman said, half to herself, "You will give me that number. None of the others did and look what happened to them."

Ines didn't know who these "others" were but she could take an educated guess as to their fates. It was one she did not want to follow.

"A few more hours in here alone might loosen your tongue." The woman said eventually, "Believe it or not I don't like getting messy, it takes far too long to wash blood out of my fine clothes. But know this, if you continue to defy me, and keep me from my beloved Watcher, I will make that sacrifice."

Ines had no doubt she meant every word and she swallowed nervously, watching the blonde woman sashay away, slamming the door closed behind her and making Ines flinch with the sound. She was alone again; not the best but it was better than having that crazy woman at her throat.

She looked around desperately for a way to escape. A window, a grate, anything but she was out of luck. The room was concrete, floor to ceiling, the only grate being that of the air filter, a few inches in diameter. Even a stick thin supermodel wouldn't be able to squeeze their way inside there, let alone her with her curvaceous figure. No, the only way out was through the door that had just slammed closed. Even if she did manage to get out of these chains, the door was almost certainly locked and that left her with no option but to fall into despair.

What had she done to deserve this? She was just a woman living her normal life, she never wanted to get caught up with spies and espionage. Now she was going to die at the hands of a mad woman who probably dreamed the whole thing up. Her poor parents; she was supposed to have dinner with them this weekend, what would they think when she didn't show up without so much as a phone call? Her mother loved those dinners, they cooked nabe together and ate traditional sweet potato cakes for dessert over green tea and laughed about how much better they were than croissants.

Desperate, she began to struggle. Her fingers were slick with terrified sweat, perhaps if she struggled enough she would clip them free. She had to try at least, she couldn't just give up and let this woman kill her. She tried to twist and kick her legs but the chains held fast, as did the ones around her middle. She swore she could feel them crushing against her harder with every breath, her breasts were squashed against her middle and her long dark hair was pinned against her back, essentially pinning her head in place.

She rocked back and forth, trying to get her hands free, if she could just do that perhaps she could find the lock and push these damn chains off. After a few minutes she thought she felt the cable ties began to shift, moving further down from her wrists to almost cut into her hands.

It felt as though freedom was on the tip of her tongue and the taste of it made her dizzy. So dizzy in fact that she didn't realise until it was too late that she was rocking her chair a bit too much. With a cry she fell sideways onto the floor with no way to brace herself for the impact. Her shoulder pulsed with pain as her full body weight crushed down on it and she awkwardly managed to roll onto her front. With her legs still stuck to the chair she was forced to lean chest and face against the cold floor with no way to move. It was hopeless.

A moment later the sound of the door made her freeze and she heard the clack of heels against concrete followed by that cold laugh.

“You look really pathetic right now, you know that?”

Ines felt her skin burn with embarrassment against the concrete floor. A moment later she was moving, the woman positioning her back on the ground once more with a victorious grin.

“Now that you’ve had some time to sweat. Literally.” The woman taunted, “Let’s get back to our little chat.”

“I keep telling you, you’ve made a mistake-”

“I don’t make mistakes!”

The woman’s voice was shrill enough that it made Ines’ ears ring.

“I am perfect! I am a perfectionist, the perfect agent and soon Watcher will know all he needs is me! Just as soon as you tell me what I need to know!”

Ines curled inwards as much as her chains allowed, trying to make herself small. She wished she could disappear entirely.

“Now, if you wont give me his number perhaps you’ll give me the codes used to log into your secret account. I got your laptop when I grabbed you, I know all I need is a few special words typed into the note app to open up your secure connection. Tell. Me.”

Ines’ head was spinning, she didn’t understand any of this but she was sure saying ‘I don’t know’ would push this maniac over the edge. She couldn’t fight, she couldn’t flee, so she froze, staring at her captor with wide, terrified eyes.

“I...I don’t know!”

She heard the slap more than she felt it. The shock left her ears ringing and her vision momentarily dazed. She blinked to clear them and turned her head back to gaze up at the terrifying blonde before her. She didn’t know what to do, she was going to die. As an ache began to form on her cheek where she’d been struck Ines felt hopelessness wash over her. She wished she really was a secret agent, then she would be able to get out of this.

Ines squeezed her eyes closed as she started to feel light headed. There was something else too, a pressure behind her eyes almost as if something was pushing inside



her mind, struggling to get out. She blinked a few times, feeling an odd electric sensation begin to hum beneath her skin. She did not have time to think about what it meant before suddenly, she wasn't Ines anymore.

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The agent's eyes snapped open; focused, intelligent, ready to take in every detail of their situation. The woman in front of them seemed to shift, sensing a change in the air as the agent's eyes flicked from side to side, instantly assessing the room and its few assets and how she could use them to her advantage.

The cable ties around her wrists were tight, far too tight to be slipped off no matter how she angled her arms or wrists. No choice then, with a painful yank she dislocated her hands, the popping sound echoing off the walls as she then slipped her limp limbs out of their ties.

Their captor took a step back in shock, giving the agent the perfect opportunity to slam a hand down on her lap and angle into her elbow before snapping it back into place. With one functioning hand back, getting the other back was a simple task. Her wrists ached from the pain but that didn't matter, the agent was not stopped by such things.

Without hesitation and before her captor could get her bearings she launched herself to the side, slamming down on the ground twice as hard as before and feeling the wooden chair break under the pressure. Almost instantly the chains were loose and it was a simple matter to stand and take a fighting stance.

"I knew you were lying!" The woman hissed, hurriedly reaching into the deep pockets of her coat, no doubt to pull out a much more deadly gun.

That was a mistake.

The second the woman's hand disappeared into her pocket The Agent was flying forward. They grabbed for the blonde's long hair, yanking it back so that she was forced to stare at the ceiling while The Agent's free hand gripped around her wrists before it could grab the gun. With a fluid motion the agent threw her against the wall, grabbing the collar of the long coat as she flew past and pulling it off.

The woman moved to get up but the agent was too quick, one swift kick to the head and their former captor was unconscious, groaning on the floor as her eyes fluttered close. A cake walk. The agent rubbed at their wrists, still sore from the escape, before moving to the coat. The pockets revealed both the dart gun and regular kind as well as a phone.

The Agents' eyes narrowed; this was an agency phone. Oh it may look like any other mobile but the agent had a keen eye, they could see the small details. How did she happen upon one of these? Phones like this belonged to agents only and were always deactivated if stolen, lost or otherwise misplaced.

The agent clicked it on to reveal that it did indeed work; though a code had to be input in order to make it work as anything other than a regular mobile. But still, these phones were tracked every minute by Watcher, how had this woman gotten a hold of a working model?

The question was answered a moment later when their former captor groaned. The agent spun around, ready for round two but found the woman was still conscientious, she was however changing. The blonde hair regressed back into her skull as it darkened, the long legs thickening, feet growing so much that the agent could see the heels struggling to even contain them. The blouse deflated as her breasts slowly disappeared and the make up on her face began to look more and more out of place as the shape of her face changed.

The agent, composed and emotionless as they were, couldn't help but step back. Even they had not seen this coming. Slowly, the woman laying on the floor before them became a face they recognised and suddenly, many of the puzzle pieces clicked into place. Watcher appeared at their feet, still unconscious and sporting the bruise from their kick.

The agent took no chances, gathering up the chains and securely tying Watcher up to ensure he couldn't move if he was to regain consciousness. There was something strange going on, was this whole thing a set up? They would have to find out. Curious as they were though, the agent could feel themselves slipping away. They were safe now, no longer needed and just as quickly as they had manifested the agent slipped back down into the recess of Ines' mind and let the woman return.

It was like missing a step when going up a staircase. With a sudden jolt Ines felt herself almost fall into her own body; the memories of the agent still lingering, yet fuzzy. It felt almost like a dream, insubstantial and hard to grasp. The specifics seemed to turn to sand in her hands, falling through faster the harder she tried to grasp them. The woman had been right? She really was a secret agent and not only did she know Watcher, he was right here!

Ines rubbed nervously at her swollen wrists, she could not believe she had almost broken them getting out of that chair. Not only that she'd bounced back and won the fight as though it were nothing. What was she supposed to do now? She couldn't just leave Watcher here, but staying in this room any longer would drive her mad. She checked the chains one last time and then quietly crept over to the door and pushed it open. Thankfully the woman, Watcher, hadn't locked in when she re-entered.

She stepped up a small staircase and found herself in a small Parisian style hour. The large windows were covered with thick velvet curtains that darkened each room and made the whole house smell musty and ancient. The furniture in them all had a thick layer of dust coating them with the exception of a small room toward the back.

There was a desk and computer, along with a table littered with what looked to be chemistry sets. Beakers filled with a clear liquid that made her head swim when she removed the lid before quickly replacing it. The drug that had knocked her out no doubt. The computer was locked and after a few minutes of trying all the obvious passwords she could think of Ines gave up getting any further there.

Her hand tightened around the phone she had picked up earlier; she remembered those thoughts, that there was something wrong about it. Watcher hadn't reported it missing or inactive because well...it was his. Had Watcher been behind this the whole time using that strange womanly disguise? Something about it tugged at her memory and for a moment she could see it; a big silver machine that looked reminiscent of an MRI; a machine that slowly turned a man into...her!

As quickly as the memory came it began to haze over until all the details bled away almost entirely; till it was nothing but a memory of a memory. Something odd was going on here, Ines couldn't help but think she was missing something, something important.

Her mind whirred as she pulled back one of the curtains and peaked outside. Judging by the street style, they were still in Paris. So at least she hadn't been taken far. The sun was peeking over the horizon line of houses so it seemed like she had been here most of the night.

The smart thing to do would be to call the cops but...something stopped her. Something didn't feel right; it was that other side to her, the one that had taken over and made her able to do such amazing things. It was a little voice in her head now, urging her not to involve the authorities.

She decided to listen; that mysterious other personality had saved her life after all. So instead of searching the house for a phone she went back downstairs to where Watcher was laying on the floor. He groaned loudly and Ines' heart began to race. A moment later the man's eyes opened and stared up at the agent with confusion as he pressed a hand to his forehead and winced.

"Roanoke?" Watcher groaned, "What the hell happened?"

"I think that's a question you need to answer." Ines said, putting on her best hard hitting journalistic voice.

The man was getting to his feet, looking down at his ill fitting clothing with a mix of horror and confusion.

“Roanoke, what the hell happened here? Why am I dressed like a woman?”

“I don’t know.” Ines replied nervously, “But...I think something is wrong. I don’t know any Roanoke and I don’t know how I just did all that.”

“All what? God my head.” The man cleared his throat, “Pass me my phone, I’ll arrange a pick up and we will figure out what’s going on.”

She was hesitant; but this man genuinely seemed confused by everything. Ines had always been good at reading people, it was part of what made her such a good journalist and so successful at charming people into bed. Her eyes narrowed as she took in Watcher’s bewildered expression followed by his attempts to look cool and in control. Perhaps he could have fooled somebody else but not her; she could tell he was hiding his embarrassment and confusion. He really did not remember the woman and all the things she had done; so with a silent prayer that this wasn’t a mistake, she handed it over.

Walker punched some letters and numbers into what looked like a regular note app and suddenly his screen changed. He made a call, speaking hurriedly into the speaker before turning the phone off with a flick of his wrist.

“Let’s figure out where the hell we are and I will organise a pick up.” He said seriously, heading up the stairs. “Fill me in on what I missed.”

Ines did her best; telling him about her attack and waking up in the basement as well as that strange second personality that had taken over and allowed her to get free.

“You’re saying that woman was me?” Watcher said through gritted teeth, “So the one killing off our people...was me all along.”

There was something in his voice, Ines wasn’t sure what exactly it was but she could tell there was something he wasn’t telling her.

“I’m...sorry, Roanoke.” Watcher said clearing his throat, “You underwent a huge transformation for a mission that should never have existed.”

So she wasn't Ines after all. She really had been a secret agent, so why did she remember growing up as a woman on the streets of Paris? Why couldn't she remember being this...Roanoke?

"Ines." She said finally as Watcher continued looking around.

"Sorry?"

"My name, it's Ines." She repeated, "I am beginning to think maybe we aren't on the same page. After everything you put me through in the last few hours I think I deserve an explanation."

Watcher looked awkward; Ines could tell he was used to being the one with all the answers; always in charge and respected. Fortunately for her, they clearly had some sort of history that made Watcher feel he owed her, not to mention she still had her silver tongue. She took a step forward, softening her facial features and looked right in his eyes.

"Please." She whispered, "I need to know what's going on."

That did it. Watcher sighed and sat down at the desk chair looking defeated.

"I didn't know it was me." he admitted slowly, "I swear to you I didn't know. The machine that made you into Ines, we tested it on me first. It had some kinks, The transformation wasn't stable, I would flicker back and forth seemingly at random. As a woman I never remembered much of who I was, and I never remembered being her at all."

"The fellas in tech said they fixed it, the mental instructions helped solidify things more and so we thought that was it. I didn't have any more blackouts so I thought the effects had run their course. Clearly they hadn't."

So it had been Watcher this whole time, his female alter ego obsessed with owning him herself to the point that she went on a murderous rampage just to get his attention.

"It must have happened while I slept. The Last thing I remember was going to sleep in my Paris safe house, then all of a sudden I am waking up with a headache and you standing over me."

Ines tried to remember Roanoke, but it was all awkward flashes and just trying made her head throb with pain.

“I think you should call for pick up. Or whatever your agents call it.” She said finally, “I think we need to get you somewhere safe, the last thing I need is you passing out from a concussion and turning into that murderous bitch again. Some offence.”

“Some taken.” He said seriously, though Ines was sure she could see the side of his mouth twist into a small, anxious smile.

Ines sat down on the floor, the exhaustion finally getting to her as the adrenaline of the whole ordeal finally wore off. She had so much to think about and none of the energy to do it so instead she watched the man before her talking into his phone. Wary of any signs that his killer alter ego might return.

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Ines crossed her ankles nervously before uncrossing them again. The agency psychiatrist jotted something down on her notepad and the sound of lead against paper seemed impossibly loud. Ines starred the woman down trying hard to find her irritating because after reading his file, she was sure that's how Roanoke would feel about her.

Roanoke hated psychologists and doctors; his least favourite part of every mission was the mandatory debrief and counselling sessions he was forced through. He always gave the same answers and wrote as little as possible when it came to his own feelings; the man had the emotional depth of a teaspoon. Something that made trying to understand him all the more difficult. Ines had read everything written by and about Roanoke in the last few weeks. She'd visited his apartment, she'd read his history file and every single mission he'd been on. She knew his methods, his personality, his motivations and yet he still felt like a stranger to her.

She knew, logically, that she and Roanoke were the same person and thanks to the help of a lovely man in Tech named Nigel, she had managed to get a sort of middle ground between these new memories and her old ones. No matter how much they fiddled around with the mental programming, they could not restore Roanoke's old memories. Instead they seemed to meld with Ines' fake ones, creating a third, middle ground history between then two.

She still had her childhood in Paris, her journalistic dreams but now she remembered being recruited as a foreign agent several years ago. Using her job to travel the world and

gather covert information for her agency and help the western world avoid war. It was hardly the life of emotionless assassinations Roanoke had actually gone through but it was something. Frankly, after reading through some of his mission debriefs, Ines wasn't sure she even wanted to remember them.

“So, how are you feeling?” The psychiatrist, Rose, smiled, “It’s been a week since we last spoke, any new memories to report?”

Her tone was soft; Roanoke would have thought it sounded fake but Ines could tell she was genuine. Rose cared about her patients, she went to great lengths to make them comfortable; Ines could respect that.

“Nothing yet.” She admitted, “If I am honest with you, I am okay with that.”

“Really?”

“Yes, Roanoke was so...cold. His life seems so lonely and dull. I like being a reporter and the version of my life that I remember now is just...nicer.”

“I see.” Rose pressed her lips together, “But there is more isn't there?”

Ines crossed and uncrossed her ankles again. She was sitting with her knees together, feet the side mermaid style on the couch. It was a ladylike way to sit, her preferred position. Whenever she tried to sit like a man with her legs spread she just felt uncomfortable.

“I guess I feel a little bit guilty just abandoning my former life. Shouldn't I be more upset that everything I know is basically a lie?” She sighed, “But I'm not! Not bothered at all, in fact I am happy about it! That's wrong isn't it?”

“I see, so if Nigel walked in here right now and said he had a way to definitely turn you back into Roanoke would you do it?” Rose asked.

Ines hesitated, would she?

“I guess. I know that's what he would want me to do.”

“What about what *you* want?”

“I want...to be me.” Ines admitted, “But isn’t that unfair?”

“How? Roanoke willingly changed, now you are willingly staying this way.”

She hadn’t really thought about it like that before.

“And how about The Agent?” Rose said carefully, “Have they appeared again?”

“No, not at all.” Ines shook her head.

She had taken to calling that remnant of Roanoke The Agent simply because that’s what they always referred to themselves as in her head. In their early sessions Rose had used hypnosis and other psychological tricks to lure them out but the session provided very little in the way of information. The Agent had no real personality, only skills. Rose’s best guess was that when she fully accepted the Ines persona all of the muscle memory and skills of Roanoke were sealed away and now only manifested when needed, as The Agent.

At first she had been worried she was developing a second personality just like Watcher had. The Agent seemed almost amoral, simply doing what needed to be done to ensure Ines survived any given situation when her life was threatened. What was to stop it going rouge? Thankfully, that didn’t seem to be the case. After a bit of practice she had gotten the hang of bringing them out and sealing them away again at will, the latter task was surprisingly easy to do. The Agent didn’t seem to have any desire to be in control when the situation didn’t call for it. The moment combat ended, they willingly faded back into her subconscious.

“According to the latest reports, you lack combat skills unless they are active and so far you are in complete control.”

“Yes,” Ines confirmed, “I can take control back any time, but if a fight is happening...probably not the best idea.”

She laughed nervously and crossed her ankles again as Rose wrote something down.

“The agency has given you leave to return to Paris and life as Ines, with or without your agent status; once I have finished my evaluations.” Rose continued looking down at her notes, “I am happy to sign you off now, meaning you can be on your way in a few days.”



“Really” Ines blinked in confusion.

“Yes, really.” Rose smiled, “We’ve had several sessions now and I am confident you have processed your trauma and adjusted to your new memories without any side effects. I am also sure you are in a decent headspace, though I would like to check in with you once a week via video calls for the first month you’ve in Paris to see how returning home affects your mental state.”

Home. Paris was home. What an odd thing to think. Ines had visited Roanoke’s apartment and she’d never seen a dwelling less home like. It was empty, everything there had a function, there was no decoration, no history. Without the secret stash of weapons it would be ready for a real estate showing. There was just no character to the place, especially not when compared to her airy, beautiful Paris apartment.

“Thank you, Rose.” Ines said softly with a smile which Rose returned.

No, no matter how hard she tried she couldn’t hate this woman. Perhaps Roanoke could but frankly, she didn’t really care anymore.

~

Agent Red was a tall man, he smiled a lot and spoke fast. He was so jovial that it was hard to believe he was in charge of agent missions now. Watcher had held that position for nearly thirty years and his replacement couldn’t be more different. Ines liked him; a lot actually. Which is why she was happy to tell him she had decided to stay an agent.

“Yoshida, that’s brilliant!” He grinned, sweeping her into a hug that she welcomed. “I am so glad, honestly, the agency needs more silver tongues savants in its midst.”

“Glad to be of service.” She replied, “Plus I will get to travel all the more!”

“This really has worked out better than we’d hoped.” Red said, “If only Watcher’s little problem could be fixed everything would be perfect.”

The mood soured for a moment. Of course with his alter ego Watcher was no longer fit for duty, or freedom. While it had not been him directly, his actions had gotten several agents killed. He was currently on a special house arrest within the secure penthouse of one of the

agency's towers. He lived in relative comfort, but couldn't leave. The risk was just too great. Ines had considered visiting but couldn't bring herself to do it. Not yet.

Perhaps in the future when his alter ego was more under control. She was sure he would get there. Nigel was making improvements to the tech every day, if they couldn't get her under control they would be able to remove her entirely in the future, he was sure.

"What about the tech? What'll happen to it?" Ines asked after a moment.

"We're retiring it for active agents, the side effects, the split personalities and memory replacement, it's all too risky for active agents. Instead we are using it for well...retirement."

"What do you mean?"

"A lot of agents are ready to leave service after a few years but going back to civilian life, especially for those who stick around for decades, can be hard." Red explained, "This machine can give them whole new civilian backstories and lives for them to enjoy, plus the risk of them being discovered is minimal. So no looking over their shoulders for the rest of their lives."

"That's an amazing idea." Ines gasped, "It'll be great for witness protection too!"

"Exactly." Red snapped his fingers, "We're in talks with the CIA and FBI to do just that. And now that Nigel has perfected the memory integration technology we won't have any issues like you had, where your entire memory is erased. The agents will remember their new lives and will be able to choose how much of their old one remains, if at all."

Ines nodded, it sounded perfect.

"Speaking of, there is one last thing we need to discuss about your cover now that we've decided to permanently delete Roanoke." Red turned serious and picked up a stack of papers.

Ines recognised it; it was the detailed synopsis of her new life. She had spent weeks writing out every memory she had of Ines' fake past to give them an idea of just how extensive the memory alteration process had been. Red placed the papers down and tapped at a line.

"You mention parents, of course everybody has them but, well, Ines doesn't."

Ines pressed her lips together, the backs of her eyes burned slightly but she managed to stop any tears from welling. It was awful, remembering her parents and knowing they weren't real. She would never meet them, never enjoy any happy moments like the ones she remembered having. She met Red's eyes and they were filled with sympathy before he continued.

"This retirement program may help with that."

"What do you mean?"

"I have two older agents, ones who are ready to retire. After speaking with them extensively and having them both evaluated they have volunteered to make their new lives, those of Ines' family."

Ines' jaw dropped.

"Really?"

"With the information we have from you, Nigel will be able to construct them physically and ensure their own memories match yours as closely as possible. It may be a little awkward for a while but really, it will kill two birds with one stone. Ines no longer comes from thin air and two agents who have been trying to keep their relationship a secret for years can finally settle down, be a married couple and have a family."

Ines giggled a little; relationships in their line of work was difficult, she wondered which agents had been having a secret relationship together this entire time. Sounded like a great story in its own right. Perhaps if they chose to keep their old memories along with the new they could tell her about it and she could sell the story as fiction. Journalist and novel author; she liked the sound of that.

Ines smiled at Red; perhaps this mission, despite its difficulties and fallout, had been a blessing in disguise. Even if she still felt a little guilty about leaving Roanoke behind she smiled; this was a new beginning and she was ready to give it her all.

~

**One Year Later...**

As she walked through the deserted hallway, Ines could sense that someone was following her. It was one of the rare occasions where her work kept her in Paris. Officially, she was here to write a story on the diplomatic mission from Russia but secretly, her mission was to stop Russian spies from breaking into the government offices during the party and getting away with critical financial data.

Ines kept her pace steady, trying not to show any signs of fear. She turned a corner and there was a man before her. A quick glance over her shoulder showed another two at her back. She had seen them at the party, game recognised game, there was no point in playing pretend. These men knew she was no simple report and she knew they were more than hired bodyguards.

"If this is what we're up against, we have nothing to worry about" one of them said, a wicked grin spreading across his face.

Ines didn't hesitate. She knew that if she showed any weakness, they would take advantage of it. Instead, she took a deep breath and got into a fighting stance, feeling a seductive smile form across her face as The Agent slowly took over. The attackers laughed, thinking it was a joke.

"Looks like we've got ourselves a fighter," another one sneered.

But Ines was not afraid. She had trained for this moment, or rather, Roanoke had. The attackers lunged at her, but The Agent was too fast. She dodged their punches and kicks, taking them by surprise. Ines had become so adept at calling forth the remnants of Roanoke that she no longer even felt dizzy when it happened. Her body moved of its own will, she was nothing more than a passenger. She felt her lips pucker, giving one man who got to close a quick kiss of death on the cheek before using his momentary distraction to chop him across the throat.

With a swift movement, The Agent knocked out the first attacker, sending him crashing to the ground. The others circled her, trying to find a way to attack her. But she was already moving, taking down another one with a quick punch and a wink. The attackers were getting desperate now, their eyes widening in fear. Ines and The Agent didn't give them a chance to catch their breath though. She moved with lightning speed, disarming them one by one. The fight was over as quickly as it had begun. Ines stood in the middle of the hall, breathing heavily, her heart racing as The Agent melted back into her subconscious. The attackers lay on the ground, groaning in pain before they slipped into unconsciousness.

Without a hitch Ines took over once more, flicking her long dark hair over her shoulder with a small smile and readjusting her strapless dress. She raised a wrist to her mouth and hit the hidden button on her bracelet.

“Clean up needed, third floor west hallway. Three of them.” She whispered smoothly.

“All alive I hope.” Red’s voice replied, he sounded like he was bracing for bad news.

“All alive, you know me.” Ines smiled, “Even if I was the sort to kill nowadays, I couldn’t risk getting blood on this dress, it’s a masterpiece.”

It really was tight and form fitting around the bodice with a long flowing skirt. The black dress was hemmed with sequins so tiny they looked like glittering stars and despite its exorbitant cost Ines knew she had to have it the moment she saw it in that boutique window. She attended so many black tie events these days she could almost consider it a business expense. Idly, she wondered what Red would say if she tried to make him pay for it out of her mission budget.

“Alright, I have agents on their way but keep everybody out of that hallway for at least thirty minutes.”

“No problem, mon cher.”

Ines clicked the button again and quickly set about moving the unconscious bodies of her would-be captors around the corner. She had just finished up when the sound of a door opening made her turn. A young man, one of the aides to the mayor of Paris, if she was not mistaken. He looked the part in his stylish suit with his white blonde hair slicked back. His green eyes sparkled in a way that instantly told her he’d had at least a few glasses of champagne. Not enough to be drunk, or even heavily tipsy but just enough to be susceptible in the right hands. Hands such as hers.

“Hello.” He smiled, letting her eyes go heavy lidded, “Not enjoying the party?”

“Looking for the bathroom.” He stated matter-of-factly, though Ines noticed his eyes darted down to her ample cleavage.

Easy mode.

“Oh, the one in this hall is broken.” She lied smoothly, “I know I just checked.”

“Men’s and women’s?” He raised an eyebrow in disbelief.

“Oh yes, really a shame. You’d think that would be a priority considering how important tonight’s event is.” She said, slowly walking down the hall, making sure her leg slipped out of the slit in the side of her dress as she did so.

The man was a professional, his eyes only dropped once, for a split second, but she saw. Ines always saw that sort of thing. She had to keep this man busy for at least thirty minutes; what could two adults do in a dark hallway for thirty minutes? She could think of only one thing and it made her body shiver in anticipation; she truly did love her job.

“You’re the mayor’s aide.” She noted, making sure to sound deeply impressed. “That must be quite a job.”

“Yes, it is.” the man puffed up his chest a bit.

“I’m a journalist, how about an interview?”

“With me?” The man’s cheeks dusted pink, “Well...what do you want to know?”

She could see him getting more flustered, she was right in front of him now. She made sure to stand just that tiny bit too close, not intimate yet but certainly close enough to put the thought in his mind. He was struggling to maintain eye contact now as she batted her dark lashes at him, parting her lips slightly and letting the tip of her tongue wet them.

“How about we start with your clothes, do you always dress so handsomely or is it just for special occasions?” She asked, rubbing the fabric of his lapel between her fingers.

There was a small sound, a door opening at the other end of the hall around the corner and her wrist buzzed; the cleaning crew was here. She just had to keep this man from going any further. Before the man could notice either she stepped a little closer.

“Could you...take this off? So I can take a closer look?” She asked, voice heavy with innuendo.

“And me or the jacket?” He teased.

“What do you think?” Ines whispered, slipping both her hands into the open suit jacket and pressing them against the man’s warm chest.

She could feel toned muscle there, he clearly had some training as a bodyguard. Unfortunately for him it seemed this sort of assault was one he was never trained for. Their bodies were pressed together now, Ines could feel herself getting wet as she pressed her mound against the bulge in his pants.

“The party...” He whispered, their lips only a breath away from each other.

Ines slipped a hand behind the man and flicked the lock closed.

“This area must be out of bounds, why else would they lock the door?” She replied in a husky voice before closing the gap and pressing her lips to his.

His mouth was warm and surprisingly soft, she moaned a little, pressing him back into the locked door as her sharp ears listened to the sounds of the clean up crew slowly picking up the unconscious men around the corner. Most people would attribute the sounds to the old building but Ines was a trained agent, she could tell.

Her newest lover though remained oblivious. His hand came to rest at the back of her neck and tilted her head back. Ines let him, opening her mouth and letting his tongue explore; let him think he was in control. She loved this, knowing that her new lover thought she was just some tipsy, horny journalist when she was so much more. He thought he was the one seducing when really, Ines never did anything she didn't want to.

His free hand gripped her arm, turning them both so that now she was pinned between the man and the wall. For a moment, The Agent flared, trying to take control but she easily held them back. The only thing in danger here was her dress as her slickness began to grow, threatening to soak right through her silk panties and onto the fabric.

The man’s hands were roaming over her body now, squeezing her hips and sliding behind her to cup at her ass as he pulled her away from the door.

“Come on, I am sure there is a bed or table around here we can use.”

“I have a better idea.” Ines replied, thinking quickly and pulling the man toward the large glass windows.

She placed his hands on her hips before gently positioning herself on the sill, the open back of her dress letting her bare skin press against the cool glass.

“People outside might see.” He frowned but Ines put his mind to rest.

Delicately tracing her fingers over his chin.

“It’s too dark,” She insisted, “Besides, there is nobody out there.”

It wasn’t strictly a lie; there would be very few people wandering the gardens at this time and they were up quite high on the fifth floor. But, there was always the chance somebody would see her body pressed against the glass, fogging it slightly. The idea sent a thrill through her. She wasn't really an exhibitionist but the idea of being caught, just a little, made her quiver.

“It’s risky.” He grinned.

Out of the corner of her eye Ines saw one of the clean up crew stupidly stick his head around the corner.

“I like to live dangerously.” Ines whispered, cupping his chin and pulling him back in for another kiss, holding back the smile as his eyes fluttered closed without noticing the man as he disappeared back around the corner.

The man’s hand came to rest on her clavicle for a moment before stroking down across the curve of her cleavage. His fingers left trails of warmth and tiny sparks shooting through her system and Ines let out a soft moan. He slipped a finger between the tight fabric of the bodice, running it over her breast and nipples till they were sharp. She heard him groan, clearly happy she had decided to forgo the bra tonight.

She gripped his hips tight and pulled them close, grinding gently against his mound until she could feel it turn hard enough to be painful. His hands grew more insistent, his touch harder as he got more and more turned on. She had him in the palm of her hand, just where she liked him.

He reached down to her hips to hike the dress up, bunching it around her middle and slowly reaching beneath. She raised her hips, letting her panties slide down her long legs to



the floor and allowing his fingers to brush her folds. It made her whole body shudder; it had been far too long since somebody else had touched her down there. At least for her liking.

“You’re so wet...” He hissed as Ines unzipped his fly and pressed her fingers against his bulge.

“Who’s fault is that, mon cher?” She teased, slipping his underwear down low enough to reveal his length.

It wasn't the biggest she'd seen, but it was still impressive and thick. The sight made her stomach filled with butterflies as the anticipation built. She gave it a few slow strokes to start, enjoying the way the man bit down on her shoulder to keep quiet.

“Don’t go leaving any marks.” She giggled, “Or I won't be able to go back into that ball room.”

“R-right...”

Ines pulled him close, positioning his tip at her waiting hole and wrapping her long legs around his back. For a moment she held him there, on the edge of pleasure and let her hands wander over his back, feeling the tension in his muscles.

Then, finally, she squeezed her legs around his hips, drawing him into her with a breathy moan. Her inner walls stretched and she couldn't help but let out a whimper. This was her favourite part, the first thrust always filled her with such an intense ecstasy, nothing else quite came close. That first penetration felt stronger than any that came after and she liked making it last as long as possible.

Finally, they were flush together and Ines could feel him pressing against her G spot. She tightened her muscles, squeezing her pussy tight around his cock and savouring the deep groan that her new lover made as she teased him from the inside. He braced both hands against the window either side of her head and began to roll his hips. Shallow, but wonderful thrusts meant that she was stimulated without ever feeling empty. It was heavenly.

She could tell he was doing his best to hold back, his thrusts were jerky as his hips began to slam with more and more force back into her. Drawing out a little further each time before smashing back against her G spot. Ines saw white, swearing in French and then Japanese, mixing her two native languages together as her mind grew clouded by pleasure.

“Fuck, you sound so h-hot...mmmmmm.”

His tongue swiped across the hollow of her shoulder and Ines leaned back to grant him access to her neck. The back of her skull pressed against the cool glass as he nibbled and kissed the sensitive skin there. Soon though, his kisses started to stop, interrupted by grunts and gasps as he started to speed up.

Ines felt her insides tightening again this time of their own accord. She let her eyes close and focused on the sensations growing between her legs as she was stretched and plunged into. Her mouth opened but no sound escaped as she came, her whole body simply froze in place as she revelled in the pleasure that washed over her like a wave. A choked, moan finally escaping as she came down from the high.

That was all her partner needed, he grunted one final time and Ines felt a splash inside her. They laid against the window for a moment, catching their breath. Ines listened carefully, hearing a quiet click of a door closing. The cleaning crew were done, those enemy agents would be on their way for interrogation by now.

The man pulled back gently, using his handkerchief to clean both himself and Ines off as she slipped her underwear back on.

“That was...amazing. Thank you.” He said somewhat sheepishly.

“Don’t mention it. Really.” Ines gave him a wink, walking down the hall and turning the corner, happy to see that there were no signs of the men or the fight left.

“Where are you going?”

“I’ve finished here for the night.” She said mysteriously, “It’s time I went home, thank you for the lovely...engagement.”

She turned and continued down the hall without another word, stepping to the elevator and heading down to the ground floor and out into the night air. The wind stirred and swept her hair back; she could sense she was not alone. She opened her compact and expertly reapplied her lipstick in two smooth swipes. Pressing her lips together and smiling at her reflection before snapping it closed.

“You can come out, Red.”

The man appeared from behind a tree with an almost sheepish smile.

“It never ceases to amaze me how you do that.”

“Cut to the chase, mon cher.” Ines smiled at him warmly, “It’s not like you to be on the ground for my missions personally. What do you need.”

“Just checking in.” Red replied with an earnestness. “It’s the one year anniversary of...Watcher.”

Was it? She hadn't even realised, if she was honest, her life had been so hectic the last few months she had totally forgotten it happened at all.

“I didn't realise,” Red said apologetically, “If I had, I would have asked somebody else to cover this.”

“Don't worry about it.” Ines assured him, “We both know I am the best woman for this job anyway.”

“You're the best woman for most jobs.”

“Oh Red, flattery will get you everywhere.” Ines giggled.

He looked at her with a strange expression and Ines raised her eyebrow.

“What?”

“Sorry, it just hits me sometimes, that you are or were, Roanoke, you couldn't be more different.”

Ines shrugged, she didn't think about her past identity much these days. It had faded away like a strange childhood memory.

“You know, I secretly think Watcher recommended you for the procedure because he wanted Roanoke retired. He was a bit of a creep really, if he ever snapped we'd all be in trouble.”

Ines hummed in agreement.

“Anyway, enough heavy stuff, I have another job for you next week, in Berlin.”

“No can do, I have agreed to help mom with her garden all weekend and I can't flake again.”

Red gave her another strange look, perhaps he still struggled to see Ines and her family as they now were. In his mind, they would probably always be retired agents. A problem she and her new parents had long gotten over. She said farewell to Red and walked off down the misty streets of Paris. She probably looked odd, a woman in a fancy gown walking alone in the dead of night but she didn't care. Even if somebody tried to jump her she knew she was safe, she had The Agent after all.

Between their combat abilities and her quick wit and tongue Ines Yoshida was a force to be reckoned with, far more than Roanoke ever had been.