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I

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“Ready.”

Professor McAllister.

“Aim.”

The Ace of Diamonds.

There is what I am, and what I am called. They call me murderer.

Insurgent. Revolutionary. I am all of these things. But I should be more than that. I have to be. A man is more than the sum of his parts, and beyond the sum of his actions. It is here that I have failed. My actions served my words, my existence served my actions. I am no more than what I am called by others because of this.

But I wish to be.

I wish to be a father—to grow old—my hand clasped with that of another; to watch children that bear my name grow, and maybe one day fix this terrible world. I want to pass my life into the hands of someone too innocent to understand.

I wish to be a lover. Little could please me more than having my body and soul entwined with another, sharing in a splendor that words fail to even grasp.

I wish to be a great brother, great uncle, cousin. Enjoy the trials and tribulations of family arrivals and departures.

I wish to be myself, but even more than that, I wish there was a “myself” to be.

I’m not selfish, at least I don’t think so. For a man as dominated by his belief as I, why don’t I deserve to have something I wish for? I don’t know, and I never will.

Six rifles stared me down from ten feet away. My hands shook as they clasped each other behind my back. The blindfold never offered is at my feet, mucus and spit on the white cotton cloth. My gaze lingered on it as I realized the true breadth of my punishment. It is not only my life that I have forfeited, but my memory. My bottom lip quivered. This is the price of belief, and I shall pay it forever. I’m sorry mother. I’m sorry father. I’m sorry, Olivia. I tried, I swear I did.

But the injustice was too great, and I couldn’t stand idly, no matter how hard I tried and tried.

And tried. I tried as hard as I could, but in the end it’s all I did. Never successful, always endeavoring. The attempt will be enough for them. It has to be.

“Any last words, Ace of Diamonds?”

My eyes blinked and I swallowed a lump in my throat, but not by choice. Only in my final moments have I realized my full failure, and my will was ripped away by it. Dying with dignity was beyond me. The lamentations of a half-life festered in my brain. My mouth gaped open like a fish out of water as I pieced together the statement with which I could leave this world, and perhaps be that much better because of it. Here at the end I can speak for myself—the man—alone and hated at the edge of the earth.

I tried to hard to do better.

But the words wouldn’t come out. The Sergeant at Arms locked eyes with my mute face, wild with horror, and he *smiled*.

“Fire.”

“I—”