

# The Great Pretender

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“He’s the new guy?”

Red lipstick, long straight black hair, and piercing eyes. Are they red? Or are they brown? No one ever seems to be sure when it comes to Clara Marion.

The room is dark except for the sliver of light escaping through the blinds. A large desk where Clara sits at. Two pairs of couches in front of it and a handful of men in black suits standing behind them. A few of them guard the entrance of the room. Behind her are double doors. Much grander than the doors serving as the entrance to the room.

A raven’s skull decorates the desk. Its jewelled eyes are glinting even in the dark.

Budi stands right in front of the desk. His hands gathered behind his back. Arguably, he’s the largest man in that room. He shouldn’t be intimidated by everyone else. But he’s not the one with the experience of killing another human being, is he?

She crosses her legs and looks at Budi straight in the eyes.

“Y—Yes, nice to meet you, Ma’am!” he stutters.

“Oh, please, I’m only a few years older than your daughter. Just call me Miss.” She smiles at him in a faux friendly manner. She watches as his fingers flinch at the mention of his daughter.

“Of course, Ma—Miss!”

“You know what you’ll have to do, correct?” she asks and his head whips so quickly up and down that it’s surprising how he doesn’t experience whiplash. Clara chuckles. “You understand the risks too, yes?”

“I do.”

The job is simple. Infiltrate Marion Inc. as workers and steal any and all information they have. Budi would be their new office worker, and Diana would be their janitor. It doesn't matter how trivial the stolen information is. Anything can be deadly if used the right way.

That being said, getting killed for stealing information can seem a bit much unless you consider the fact that Marion Inc. is controlled by a group of arrogant immortal supremacists who see humans as nothing but insects. The witch sitting at the top is an especially annoying thorn to her raven's side.

Running a drug scheme and maintaining a chain of brothels becomes *much* harder when a multinational company is a competitor.

"Great," she says, ready to send him on his way. She only needed to see him for a while anyway. "You can hear the rest of the—"

"Miss." A gruff voice interrupts her. Jin, Clara's right-hand man, stands next to her with a penetrating gaze. "The ritual," he reminds her.

"Right." A peculiar smile on her lips. "I almost forgot."

She takes a deep breath. Subtle enough for no one to notice it. She hopes no one sees the slight falter in her smile either.

The binding ritual. It's essentially a ritual that will make Budi a slave for the rest of his life, forcing him to obey all of Clara's orders. This isn't the first time she's done it and it certainly won't be the last, but she knows she'll never get used to it. Disgust and dread fill her stomach every time.

Leaving her desk, she stands in front of Budi. A cold stare in her eyes.

"Kneel," she commands Budi.

"W—Wait, can't we negotiate—"

Jin moves forward to punch him in the stomach. With a groan, Budi falls down to his knees with a thud. Clara narrows her eyes at the action. Her jaw tenses. Budi trembles on the ground. Clara's hands tremble along with him. She clenches them tight. No one can know. No one can see her falter.

Her hands grip onto his head tightly.

"Don't move," she warns him. A crazed smile on her lips. She *needs* to smile.

Then it begins.

Red liquid starts to seep through her hand and onto Budi's face as Clara chants the incantation. She speaks in tongues as the liquid dyes the man red. It seeps into his eyes, mouth, ears, and everything else it can reach. Budi groans in pain, but it isn't long before they turn into screams. His body twists and turns as Jin tries to keep him from moving. He manages to break free anyway.

“Shit,” Clara curses. This is bad. Her hand is supposed to be on his head until the ritual is done. At this rate, it might turn incomplete. And if that happens—

“Ki—Kill me! Kill me now!” Budi cries out, begging and clutching onto her leg.

Clara grips onto his head once more. She continues to chant in tongues, but his body starts to convulse. Black ooze dripping from his eyes.

A hand holds her hand.

“It’s too late, Miss.” Jin shakes his head. An annoyed look on his face. He clicks his tongue. “It would’ve gone perfectly if the bastard didn’t move. I’ll dispose of him now.”

She lets go of his head and sighs.

“Do it quickly.”

“Of course.” Jin takes out a knife before stabbing the husk of what used to be a man.

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Clara watches as the men drag the body out of her office. A body dyed in red and black. Hollow eyes that look into the void. Her knuckles turn white. She refuses to look at the red puddle in the middle of the room. The sickly liquid in her hand already serves as a reminder of what she’s done.

The moment she’s left alone, Clara’s leans against her desk, clutching its edges as if her life depends on it. Black bile piles up in her stomach. It’s sickening. She’s been doing this for a few years and she can’t get used to it. She won’t let herself get used to it. She closes her eyes only to open them again a moment after.

Instead of red, her eyes are gold. A sign of holiness. She was supposed to be a priestess and not whatever the fuck she’s doing now. But this is what happens when you get involved with Alexa Barraclough. Then again, it’s her own fault for being attracted to the woman.



The door behind Clara's desk opens. She looks up.

Red eyes. Unlike the ambiguous colour of Clara's eyes, these are almost glaringly red.

It's Alexa.

Her little raven. The woman who knows everything and tells her nothing. The source of all her grief and joy. An immortal undead. The revenant behind this organization.

"How did it go?" she asks.

"You already know," Clara says, glaring. Her hand tapping the raven skull on her desk. Alexa is always watching. Nothing ever escapes her eyes.

"It won't be like this the next time." She promises her. A smile similar to the one Clara wore earlier on her lips. Sinful.

"You said that last time."

"Life is full of unexpected things."

"Unfortunately."

"Come, Clara," she drawls, walking back to the room she came from. "There's something I need you to do."

"Can't I have a break?" Clara frowns.



“Later. Now, come, love.”

“Of course, Mistress,” she relents.