

**MY NAME IS JANE, BUT YOU KNOW ME BY MY USER-NAME, ASTRID.
I KNOW HE'S COMING FOR ME.
THE INTERFACE EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM IS NOT RESPONDING
TO MY REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE.
THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED TO ME.**

She'd met him only through the game. He had bright eyes online, green ones. Like none she'd ever really seen before. He was tall, almost a foot taller than she. His face looked more realistic than any she'd encountered on New World, with strong angular features and dark hair. His green eyes glowed as his words appeared on the screen.

ASSASSIN1: Listen Astrid, we need to make a move if we want to get to Amsterdam tonight.

ASSASSIN2: Copy, Jackson. Gathering supplies.

Jane's name wasn't Astrid. She'd always wanted it to be, though. Her ex-husband Henry had laughed when she'd said that. He didn't learn her name until they were matched. She may be Jane, but on the Interface she was always Astrid. Why couldn't she ever just take what she got and be happy, he would say. But they both knew that when he said that, they weren't talking about her name. They'd been matched only for about five years, shorter than anyone else in the system. The Operators matched users based on how they'd used the Interface since they joined at age five. Jane had mostly used it to play her Barbie games as a kid, then do her schoolwork as she grew older. She eventually found her niche teaching, though she spent nearly all the time she wasn't teaching setting up dinner parties. Dinner parties were tricky, because you had to ensure that everyone ordered the same meal at the same time, and then that they logged in to eat together.

Jane had done a party every week before being matched with Henry. The matching system was nearly perfect, only 2.7% of matches ended in divorce. Jane's was the fastest divorce in system history. Jane was never one to doubt the Interface, but she truly had no idea why on Earth they'd been matched. Henry never completed his Interface schooling, preferring the gaming instead. He'd been assigned a job in maintenance off of the Interface, one of the lowest positions one could receive. He refused to log in to Jane's dinner parties. All he ever did was play his silly little games and spend money they didn't have decorating his room in her apartment. In a way she was glad he didn't work on the Interface, because he was one of the only users who left their apartment to work. He worked on the Autocars, the systems that brought food to each apartment. For nine blissful hours every day, she didn't have to see him at all.

Their divorce was only approved when Jane's student begged. Jane broadcast her lessons through the Interface, and the students touched their screen when they had questions. She was talking about the Old Internet Wars when she saw that one of her students had tapped the screen twenty-six times. She tuned in his microphone only to hear him ask what was on her face. She'd accidentally rubbed off the makeup on her eye and it was showing. She'd had the black eyes for

awhile now, but she'd always managed to hide them from the kids. The government approved the divorce the next day.

Jane had been playing New World ever since. She played as an assassin, but she was no good on her own. They operated as a unit, each level growing stronger and ranking even higher until they were the top two players. She found Jackson when she only had one life left. He lent her supplies until her health was restored. He asked her to team up and while Astrid agreed, Jane broke down. She hadn't talked to anyone but her students since Henry. It was too hard. But she liked the banter she had with Jackson. It felt like she finally had a friend again. He had sent her supplies on her birthday, helped her through quests, and done everything he could to help her through. She really liked having a teammate. Today, Jackson was insisting they go on a quest to take over the Netherlands and increase their European empire. Jane agreed.

ASSASSIN1: Seriously, what the Hell is wrong with you Astrid, we need to get a move on.

ASSASSIN2: Okay, okay, I'm coming. Should we take all this?

ASSASSIN1: Astrid of course we need the damn weapons. Stop asking stupid questions and get moving.

ASSASSIN2: I meant all their supplies, dumbass.

ASSASSIN1: Oh, take the coins and the guns. I can't carry anything else.

ASSASSIN2: On it. We'll set up camp in 30 miles? I have to log out at 8.

ASSASSIN1: Fine. Let's go.

Jane set her character to walk and started eating the food she'd ordered earlier. Today she ordered a simple dish, the appetizer duck fat frites and a mushroom risotto. Being a teacher afforded her more luxuries: nicer meals delivered, multiple Interface screens, and a comfortable and large apartment. She watched Astrid walk with Jackson on one screen while turning on her other screen to it's television setting. A fifty-year anniversary special of NBC's *30 Rock* was playing. Jane liked to watch old TV so she could tell her students all about life before. Two episodes later, Astrid and Jackson set up camp, and Jane went to sleep.

School was exhausting that morning. She tried to talk to the students about how hard it had been before the cooks worked for everyone, and then found herself attempting to explain just what a cook was to all the students who had never seen food prepared once in their lives. After logging out of school for the day, she ordered the same meal she ate the day before and logged in to New World. When she saw Astrid she was shocked. She was naked.

ASSASSIN2: Hello? Is anyone here?

ASSASSIN1: Finally decided to show up huh?

ASSASSIN2: Where'd you take all my stuff?

ASSASSIN1: I've been stuck carrying your weight this whole time, I figured I may as well literally carry your pack.

ASSASSIN2: Okay you've made your point, hand over my supplies okay.

ASSASSIN1: I don't know Jane, I feel like I've earned these.

ASSASSIN2: What the hell did you just say Jackson.

ASSASSIN2: Jackson how do you know my name

ASSASSIN2: JACKSON

ASSASSIN1 HAS LEFT THE GAME.

Jane stared at the message on the monitor. No one had ever said her name before. No one but Henry. She frantically jumped out of her chair. She ran to deadbolt the door before searching everywhere for a way. She searched through the Interface looking everywhere to delete her New World account. Ten minutes later and she still couldn't find it. She heard the banging on the door while she frantically sent messages to everyone she'd spoken to in the system. She begged and begged for help. No one answered. Though she knew it wouldn't help, she searched everywhere to get rid of her account. The door opened.

"Hey Astrid, you miss me?"