

## Chapter 34

### ### Riverside — Closing the Experiment

The rain had nearly stopped.

Only a faint, silky mist remained, drifting through the warm glow of the streetlights along the river like silver breath. It clung to coats and skin in tiny, cool beads, making everything shimmer — the wet wooden railing, the dark water sliding silently beneath the bridge, the long streaks of reflected city lights that painted the river's surface in liquid gold and violet. The promenade felt even more private now, nearly empty, the distant hum of traffic softened to a whisper. The air was cool, damp, intimate — carrying the clean metallic scent of the river mixed with wet stone and the faint warmth of two bodies standing close.

Shammy and Jonas still stood by the railing.

Close.

Neither pretending otherwise now.

Jonas finally broke the quiet, voice low and husky as he turned toward her, his body angled so their hips brushed in the mist.

“You’re thinking again.”

Shammy tilted her head slightly, silver-white hair falling in a soft wave that caught the lamplight, electric blue eyes warm, heavy-lidded, and unmistakably charged as she met his gaze.

“Yes.”

Jonas smiled faintly, stepping half a pace closer until the heat of his body pressed against hers, one hand resting lightly on the railing beside her hip — fingers brushing the edge of her coat in a slow, deliberate tease.

“That usually means the next step.”

Shammy considered the water below for a moment, then turned back toward him, her tall frame shifting so her chest brushed his, the contact deliberate and lingering. Her voice remained calm, but there was a velvet edge to it now, a quiet heat that made the air between them feel thicker.

“You said earlier this stopped being an experiment.”

Jonas nodded, his free hand sliding to rest at her waist — palm flat, thumb stroking one slow, possessive circle through the damp fabric.

“Yes.”

Shammy studied him carefully, her own hand rising to rest on his chest, fingers curling lightly into his coat as she leaned in until their breaths mingled in the cool mist.

“That was incorrect.”

Jonas raised an eyebrow, his grip on her waist tightening just enough to pull her flush against him, bodies aligned in the charged space.

“Oh?”

Shammy folded her arms loosely over his, but kept her body pressed warmly to his, electric blue eyes dark with quiet intensity and unmistakable desire.

“It remained an experiment.”

Jonas chuckled, the sound low and rough as he slid his other hand up her back, fingers tracing the line of her spine through her coat.

“Well that’s humbling.”

Shammy continued calmly, but her voice had dropped, husky now as she leaned even closer, lips hovering near his ear, her tall frame molding against his.

“But the objective changed.”

Jonas leaned against the railing again, pulling her with him so she was half-pinned between him and the wet wood, his hands firm at her waist.

“And what’s the objective now.”

Shammy answered simply, her fingers sliding up to the side of his neck, nails grazing lightly as she held his gaze.

“Conclusion.”

Jonas blinked once, breath catching as he felt the heat of her body against his, the deliberate press of her hips.

“Well.”

He smiled, slow and dark, one hand sliding lower to rest at the small of her back, pulling her impossibly closer.

“That sounds ominous.”

Shammy shook her head slightly, silver-white hair brushing his lips as she stayed pressed against him, voice a quiet murmur against his skin.

“No.”

Jonas studied her expression, eyes dark with heat as his thumb traced the curve of her hip.

“You’re still observing.”

Shammy nodded once, her thigh pressing deliberately against his, the contact charged and unapologetic.

“Yes.”

Jonas laughed quietly, the sound rough and intimate as he tilted his head, lips brushing the shell of her ear.

"You never really stopped, did you."

Shammy did not answer.

Instead she let the silence stretch, her body warm and pliant against his, fingers tracing slow, teasing lines along his neck while the mist curled around them like smoke.

Jonas looked at the river for a moment, then back at her, voice low and rough.

"So."

Shammy waited, electric blue eyes locked on his, heavy with promise.

"What did you learn."

Shammy considered the question carefully, her hand sliding down to rest possessively on his chest, feeling the rapid beat beneath.

"You are comfortable with uncertainty."

Jonas nodded, his hands gripping her hips firmly now, pulling her tight against him.

"That's fair."

"You adapt quickly."

Jonas smiled, dark and hungry, pressing his forehead to hers.

"I try."

"You did not attempt to control the conversation."

Jonas shrugged slightly, but his grip stayed possessive, bodies locked together in the mist.

"Didn't seem necessary."

Shammy nodded once, her lips brushing his jaw as she spoke.

"Correct."

Jonas leaned slightly closer, breath hot against her skin, voice dropping to a rough whisper.

"So what's the verdict."

Shammy tilted her head, silver-white hair falling across his face as she held his gaze, electric blue eyes burning with quiet intensity.

"Verdict."

Jonas gestured lightly between them, hips pressed firmly to hers.

"Successful experiment?"

Shammy paused for a moment, her body flush against his, tension crackling like static in the small space.

Then she answered, voice low and velvet.

“Yes.”

Jonas laughed softly, the sound vibrating through both of them as his hands tightened on her hips.

“Well that’s good news.”

Shammy studied him for another few seconds, electric blue eyes dark with heat.

Then she stepped closer.

Jonas didn’t move.

Her voice remained calm but thick with promise as she pressed fully against him, lips barely an inch from his.

“But experiments require confirmation.”

Jonas raised an eyebrow, breath catching as he felt every line of her body molded to his.

“Oh?”

Shammy met his eyes, the tension between them electric and undeniable.

“Yes.”

Jonas smiled slowly, dark and hungry, one hand sliding up to cup the back of her neck, thumb stroking along her jaw as he held her there — bodies locked, breaths mingling, the mist curling around them like a secret.

“I’m starting to like your methodology.”

Shammy said nothing.

For a moment the two of them simply stood there in the quiet mist, the river moving steadily beneath them, bodies pressed close, tension humming like a live wire.

Then Jonas spoke softly, lips brushing her cheek.

“You know something.”

Shammy waited, her hands gripping his coat tightly.

“I don’t think you picked the bookstore by accident.”

Shammy tilted her head slightly, lips grazing his jaw.

“Explain.”

Jonas smiled, pulling her impossibly closer, hips flush, voice a rough whisper against her skin.

“Bookstores attract curious people.”

Shammy allowed the faintest hint of a smile, her body melting against his.

“Yes.”

Jonas gestured toward himself, hands possessive on her hips.

“And curious people tend to make interesting variables.”

Shammy nodded once, her lips brushing his ear.

“Correct.”

Jonas laughed quietly, the sound low and heated as he held her tight.

“Well.”

He leaned in until their lips were a breath apart.

“I suppose the experiment concluded successfully then.”

Shammy looked at him for a long moment, electric blue eyes burning.

Then she said calmly, voice thick with promise:

“Yes.”

And this time, she was the one who closed the distance.

The river continued sliding through the city below.

The experiment — quiet, precise, and carefully constructed — finally reached its natural conclusion.

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### Above the City

Mephisto slowly applauded, eyes bright with delight.

“Oh that was elegant.”

Konrad watched the riverside calmly.

“Yes.”

Mephisto clasped his hands behind his back.

“She built the board.”

Konrad nodded.

“Yes.”

Mephisto smiled wider.

“She let the variable engage.”

“Yes.”

Mephisto's eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

"And then she closed the experiment."

Konrad allowed the faintest trace of a smile.

"Yes."

Mephisto looked down toward the river one last time.

"Well then."

His voice carried quiet amusement.

"That should make the debrief extremely entertaining."

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